

One Wisconsin Now: Will U.S. Senator Ron Johnson put patriotism before partisan political power play?

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MADISON, Wis. — For nearly an entire year, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson and his Washington D.C. Republican colleagues refused to do their jobs and give a hearing or a vote to President Barack Obama's nominee to fill a vacancy on the United States Supreme Court. Now with Republicans poised to change the rules of the Senate because Donald Trump's nomination of right wing jurist Neil Gorsuch is falling short of the 60 vote threshold, the question is, will Johnson fall in line with the partisan power play of his Washington D.C. leadership or stand up for the integrity of the courts?

"The question is, which side is Ron Johnson on? It's his choice whether he stands up for the independence of our courts or puts partisan politics before the integrity of our democracy," commented One Wisconsin Now Research Director Jenni Dye. "If Neil Gorsuch is not able to garner 60 votes for his confirmation, the answer is to find a nominee who can, not change the rules of the Senate."

The sixty vote threshold for nominations to the U.S. Supreme Court helps to ensure that the court is independent of the president and any one political party and can fill its role of protecting our rights and stopping government overreach. And, in fact, and 7 of the 8 sitting justices on the high court earned more than 60 votes for their confirmation by the U.S. Senate.

Donald Trump's nomination of Neil Gorsuch has raised concerns that he will not be the independent judge needed on the court and he largely refused to directly answer questions during his confirmation hearings.

Based on his record, Gorsuch is far to the right on nearly every issue. As a judge, he repeatedly sided with insurance companies that wanted to deny disability benefits and employers who wanted to cut pension benefits to employees. His ideological extremism also led to his joining a decision granting corporations a right to religious beliefs, and to put those rights before an employee's right to make personal health care decisions. Gorsuch literally put corporations in the bedroom, in an opinion saying your boss ought to be able to decide if you can have access to birth control through your insurance.

Dye also noted the unprecedented turmoil surrounding the Trump administration with F.B.I. and a Senate committee probes of Russian interference in the election and the activities of top aides and advisors to his campaign.

She concluded, "The reward for stealing a seat on our nation's high court ought not be the lifetime appointment of a right-wing judge. And blowing up the rules of the nomination process ought not be the way to provide a political victory for a scandal mired Trump administration desperate for distractions from its failures."