

Bill Kaplan: Change is in the air, Medicaid and more

Posted on Monday, Jun 4, 2018

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Wisconsin Democratic Senator Gaylord Nelson believed that Democrats must run across the nation, at all levels. There are no easy, magical solutions for change, e.g., impeachment, 25th Amendment (presidential disabilities) or a perfect candidate. Change requires winning elections. Trump and Wisconsin GOP Governor Scott Walker have provided the impetus for Democrats to win in 2018.

Since Trump took office in 2017: Democrats have flipped about 40 state legislative seats from the GOP; won gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia by landslides, a shocking upset for an open Alabama GOP U.S. Senate seat and flipped an open Pennsylvania GOP U.S. House seat. Moreover, Wisconsin Democrats elected Patty Schachtner and Rebecca Dallet, flipping a state Senate seat from the GOP and choosing a liberal for an open state Supreme Court seat, previously held by a conservative. Two more open Wisconsin GOP state legislative seats will be decided by special elections on Tuesday, June 12 (Walker fought tooth and nail not to hold).

Democrats are running to flip the GOP-led Congress. At a time when most members of Congress are millionaires, disproportionately male, only about 20 percent veterans and minorities are underrepresented – change is in the air. Democratic regular folks, including women, teachers, veterans and minority group members, are running for Congress as well as state legislative seats and governorships. In Wisconsin, Democrat Randy Bryce – ironworker, union member and U.S. Army veteran — is running for the open First Congressional District seat held by departing GOP House Speaker Paul Ryan (retiring on an \$85,000 per year pension, and health care coverage – CNBC).

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Elections have consequences. Last Wednesday, the GOP-led Virginia state legislature did the math – loss of 15 GOP House seats and the economic stimulus from federal funding covering 90 percent of the cost of Medicaid expansion. Virginia became the 33rd state to expand Medicaid, covering some 400,000 Virginians. Virginia GOP state Senator Ben Chafin from a rural district said: “I came to the conclusion that ‘no’ just wasn’t the answer anymore, (or) doing nothing about the medical conditions, the state of health care in my district ...”.

The same in Maine and Utah. Last November, 59 percent of Maine voters in a referendum approved Medicaid expansion, making Maine the 32nd state to expand Medicaid. However, Maine GOP Governor Paul LePage, having previously vetoed 5 bipartisan expansion bills, still refuses to expand Medicaid. A lawsuit is pending in state Superior Court. Meanwhile, Utah has agreed to hold a Medicaid expansion referendum in November. Idaho and Nebraska may follow. All GOP-led states. Time for Walker and the Wisconsin GOP-led state legislature to expand Medicaid.

The November elections will also help determine other issues, such as pension reform. The underfunded Central States Pension Fund and other plans covering 1.5 million retirees, including 25,000 Wisconsinites – need a legislative solution. Milwaukee retiree Bob Amsden said: “Dreamers, they’re the millions of retirees (many veterans) ... All they asked for was a dignified pension to retire ...”. What will Ryan do? Change is in the air.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the *Wisconsin State Journal* from 1995 – 2009.