

Don Vruwink: Govern for the people, not for power

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Remember the Boston Tea Party and the motto “No taxation without representation?”

How would you like it if you did not have an elected representative for nearly a year?

What if you called your state senator or state representative with a question, comment, or request for assistance ... and you found out he or she left with no notice and no replacement?

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In late December last year, after appointing a state representative and a state senator to high-level positions in his administration, Governor Walker refused to call special elections, opting to leave the seats vacant until November 2018.

Wisconsin law clearly states that after vacancies occur, legislative seats “shall be filled as promptly as possible by special election”.

Democrats and Republicans alike objected to leaving more than 200,000 people unrepresented. The Walker Administration decision wound up in court. Both the circuit court and appeals court said it was illegal not to call special elections. The Walker Administration ultimately backed down, knowing the law was not on their side. Thus, special elections will be held June 12th.

Special elections in the two empty seats could have been held on April 3rd,

coinciding with all the other spring primary elections. It would have cost the taxpayers no extra money.

Instead, the party in power in Wisconsin chose to defy state law, deprive citizens of representation, attempt to change state law, and spend taxpayer dollars on unnecessary litigation.

Here is another historical parallel: In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president with almost 58 percent of the vote, indicating broad popularity. With this mandate in hand, Roosevelt implemented two of the signature programs of The New Deal – the National Recovery Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled both bills unconstitutional, at least in part.

Undeterred, after his re-election in 1936 – this time with over 60 percent of the vote – Roosevelt devised a plan to ensure his agenda would not be blocked by the judicial branch. The “Judicial Procedures Reform Bill” proposed adding four justices to the Supreme Court. Roosevelt argued this would bring new energy to the Court.

What was the reaction? Even Democrats disagreed with what came to be known as the “court-packing plan.” People simply did not want the Constitution undermined to promote the President’s agenda.

History repeats itself. Roosevelt’s proposal parallels Governor Walker’s proposal to delay the special elections.

In the 1938 midterm elections, President Roosevelt’s Democratic Party lost a large number of seats. The public used its voice at the ballot box to tell the President they did not like his attempt to consolidate power.

The Republican Party may be in for a similar wake-up call. Too often the majority party is more interested in holding onto power than acting in the best interests of our state.

This isn’t the way it should be. Wisconsinites work hard and play by the rules. They expect the same from their elected officials. The lesson to be learned from both the President and the Governor is that people do not want important decisions made solely to benefit those in power.

— *Vruwink, D-Milton, represents the 43rd Assembly District.*