

Gary Hebl: Wisconsin must ensure strong election safeguards

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Earlier this year, the Republican-held State Senate voted not to confirm the appointment of Mike Haas as Administrator of the Wisconsin Elections Commission, almost two years after he had been unanimously selected to serve as Administrator by the Commission. They did this not because of lack of experience, qualifications, or leadership. Instead, they voted no on his confirmation because he used to work at the Government Accountability Board and were not happy that the GAB was assisting an investigation into possible Republican corruption.

Now, more than ever, we need to make sure that we have secure elections. A recent report stated that Wisconsin is one of seven states that had their state websites and/or voter registration systems compromised during the 2016 election season by Russian-linked operatives- and was never informed of this by federal intelligence communities.

Confusion and uncertainty in the state's Election division will not help us to ward off future attempts to compromise our systems. In their eagerness to punish Mike Haas for perceived bias at the GAB they have left Wisconsin's election system weaker. In its next Elections Board Commissioner, Wisconsin needs someone experienced who is ready to face the challenges that we have already seen and are still learning about. It seems obvious that the President has no interest in fighting off foreign influence into American campaigns; Wisconsin must not have the same complacency about and complicity in interference in our elections.

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An experienced new Administrator is not all Wisconsin needs. We also need action in the legislature. In an effort to safeguard against potential threats to our election system, I introduced Assembly Bill 743, which would require risk-limiting audits after elections. A risk-limiting audit uses statistical criteria to ensure confidence in an election outcome. Because these audits use statistical criteria, a smaller sample size is required and thus they are an inexpensive way for Wisconsin citizens to have confidence in our election results. Unfortunately, Republicans in the Assembly are sitting on the bill, not allowing a public hearing or vote on it.

We need to ensure strong leadership in Wisconsin's elections and safeguards against outside interference. I hope that both the Republicans in the legislature and the Elections board share this belief and that we take steps to secure Wisconsin's elections.

— Hebl, D-Sun Prairie, represents the 46th Assembly District.