

# Senate rejects nominations of Elections, Ethics administrators

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The GOP-controlled state Senate today rejected along the party lines 18-13 the nominations of Brian Bell and Mike Haas as administrators of the Ethics and Elections commissions.

Dems knocked the move as an attempt by Republicans to enact a vendetta against Bell and Haas over past John Doe probes that included one that targeted coordination between Gov. Scott Walker and conservative groups during the recalls. They argued those investigations, and decisions on the tactics, were made by prosecutors, not staffers like Bell and Haas.

But Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald accused employees of the old GAB of “scheming” against Republicans as retribution for Act 10 and said he cannot trust agencies that continue to employ some of the same people involved in those decisions.

He pointed to a Department of Justice report on the mishandling of records from a John Doe probe that were leaked to The Guardian. The report concluded leaking the documents was a crime, but the record keeping was so sloppy that it could not be proven who leaked. The report also took Bell and Ethics Commission Legal Counsel David Buerger to task for their cooperation with the probe, and Republicans have seized on the report to question Haas’ role in oversight of the records.

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Fitzgerald said the report “picked at that scab” over what happened with the Doe probe, and he did not understand why the confirmation votes on Bell and Haas were difficult for some considering their ties to what he said was inappropriate action at GAB.

Fitzgerald also said he warned Bell and Haas 14 months ago they would not be confirmed because of concerns over their past associations with the GAB. He believed they would resign after being told they would not be confirmed.

“I said, ‘Listen, you guys, this isn’t going to work,’” Fitzgerald said.

Sen. Jon Erpenbach, D-Middleton, slammed the push to oust Bell and Haas, saying it fits a pattern for Republicans.

Unhappy losing elections, Republicans implemented voter ID and an unconstitutional map. Unhappy with John Doe probes that found people were committing crimes, they revamped rules for the secret probes.

Now, unhappy with the old GAB, Senate Republicans are looking to force out Bell and Haas without a public hearing, he added. Erpenbach said that goes against Senate decorum and has left the two defending themselves in other forums.

“I believe that these nominees have to answer those questions in a public setting, not in a backroom, not through a press release, not through Twitter, not on ‘UpFront with Mike Gousha,’” Erpenbach said.