

# Ross slams GOP leaders during first meeting as ethics commissioner

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Ethics Commissioner Scot Ross opened his term on the panel by addressing structural racism before slamming the state's Republican leaders.

"Black people are treated unequally by the police. Black people are treated unequally in the workplace. Black people are treated unequally in the housing market. Black people are treated unequally in schools. Black people are treated unequally in health care. And most assuredly Black people are treated unequally at the voting booth, where the right to vote has been under savage assault," he said during yesterday's meeting.

Ross, the former head of liberal One Wisconsin Now, then pivoted to attack Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, and former Gov. Scott Walker.

"Let us not forget, we are all here because three white men with power, Scott Fitzgerald, Robin Vos and Scott Walker, disbanded the independent agency which preceded the body because they were angry that they were being held accountable for ignoring the campaign coordination prohibitions in this state," he said.

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But at that point, he was cut off by GOP Chair Pat Strachota, a former Republican lawmaker, who jumped in to ask Ross to limit his statement to comments about himself.

After some back and forth, Ross concluded his statement by noting "the same people who were criticizing the fact that I was appointed to this commission are the people who changed the laws so that they could avoid accountability."

In a Twitter post after the meeting, Ross released a full [transcript](#) of his statement. The transcript indicated he intended to knock Vos, Fitzgerald and Walker for changing state law “to give they and their colleagues a special get out of jail free card for political misconduct” before he was cut off.

After his initial statement, Ross was largely an observer as the commission moved to address an agenda that included guidance to lobbyists on contributions to elected officials and reissuing lobbying licenses, among other things.

The commission unanimously backed an advisory opinion that lobbyists can make personal contributions to elected officials and candidates any time the window is open for a primary, general or special election — even if the elected official is not on the ballot.

The panel also authorized commission staff to reinstate the license of a lobbyist who surrendered his or her license early this legislative session. The lobbyist wasn’t named during the meeting or within the meeting materials.

While such a move isn’t explicitly banned by state statute, the Eye on Lobbying website does not allow for re-application. Administrator Dan Carlton, the state’s top ethics official, recommended the panel reinstate the lobbyist and begin drafting an administrative rule to address the issue moving forward.

Commissioners also unanimously upheld a 2017 opinion that political parties and campaign committees can accept \$12,000 contributions to both their general and segregated funds.

But they punted on a request from Association of Wisconsin Lobbyists for clarification of a previous opinion on legislative lobby day receptions. The panel wanted to allow its new members — Ross and Republican Paul Connell — to familiarize themselves with previous discussions on the topic before coming to a decision.

Strachota and four other commissioners voted to put the question on the panel’s August agenda.