

Sen. Carpenter: Letter to Sen. LeMahieu and Rep. Vos

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December 11, 2020

Senate Majority Devin LeMahieu

Room 211 South, State Capitol

Madison, Wisconsin

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos

Room 217 West, State Capitol

Madison, Wisconsin

Dear Senate Majority Leader LeMahieu and Assembly Speaker Vos,

In light of the recent allegations surrounding our November 3rd Election Day in Wisconsin, I am respectfully asking you to create a Bipartisan Blue Ribbon Task Force made up with equal numbers of legislators from both parties to examine what changes should be made to improve Wisconsin's voting system.

Given the current partisan gridlock in the Legislature, we need to take a different approach to find areas where both parties can agree and where compromises can be reached in changes to our election laws. Governor Evers or his staff must be involved in the task force in order to get the Governor's support the legislation.

We do not have to travel down that well-worn road where the Legislature passes bills without any input from the minority party or the Governor and it then gets

vetoed. It is worthless to keep trying the same thing over and over and expect a different outcome.

After the past few elections, several issues have been raised about what needs to be discussed regarding our election laws. The record breaking number of people voting by absentee ballot will continue to rise given it is a popular option for many voters. Absentee balloting gives people the flexibility to choose how and when they want to vote. Increased voter participation in our elections is a good thing and we ought to promote it whenever we can.

I would like to lessen the burden on our election workers and clerks by examining how we might allow for immediate tabulation of early in-person votes and absentee ballots. As you both know, many states have procedures in place to deal with this topic. As we have witnessed, Wisconsin's laws are not equipped to deal with the situation we experienced and it has led to a pronounced number of conspiracy theories that have no merit. If we can address this problem, it would do a great deal of good.

Simply allowing absentee ballots to be tabulated by at least the Monday before Election Day would give our overworked poll workers more time to efficiently process absentee ballots. Wisconsin is one of the few states that doesn't allow absentee ballots to be processed before Election Day. Allowing this simple change would stop the false accusation that tens of thousands of ballots are secretly being dumped after midnight changing the outcome of the election. We all know our current process and know that is not

true. It is just a matter our laws requiring workers to wait until 7:00 AM on Election Day to begin tabulating.

More and more people have demonstrated they want to vote by absentee ballot. Clarifying the requirements on how to properly fill out an absentee ballot needs to be another issue that is addressed so thousands of voter's ballots are not invalidated because of a simple mistake. All citizens have a right to vote and that should be honored, not questioned and then disenfranchised.

People voting by absentee ballot in elections during the COVID-19 pandemic were essentially forced to have to make a choice between staying safe at home or exercising their right to vote. Addressing issues related to holding elections during extraordinary circumstances such as we are experiencing due to the COVID-19

pandemic should also be discussed.

Many people are looking for the State Legislature to work in a bipartisan manner to pass legislation to improve how our elections are run. I firmly believe creating a bipartisan task force on elections would help prevent the partisan gridlock the Legislature continues to demonstrate on so many issues. Instead, we could work to see how the election processes in Wisconsin can be improved in order to avoid the issues which have now consumed so many people's opinion of the election's results. Those opinions were only formed after this election. There was no problem with our processes when President Trump won here in 2016. It is only because of dubious accusations now that our processes are questioned.

After all the drama has subsided, we have work to do to protect the voting interests of our constituents. What do we do if there is another pandemic?

How do we deal with voters in nursing homes that have demonstrated signs of dementia: who helps them vote? Does the careworker? Does the son or daughter or spouse? Who determines whether or not that voter's intent was influenced by either caregivers or family?

What do we do if this current pandemic persists into the next election cycle?

Can we make it less of a hardship on our clerks and elections workers by altering our laws regarding the tabulation of early and absentee votes?

Can we restore trust in our elections so we do not have another situation such as this?

These are issues we really need to address and it is my hope we can form a Bipartisan Blue Ribbon Task Force to begin addressing these topics. Again, the committee should be bipartisan with an equal number of Republicans and Democrats.

We owe it to Wisconsin voters to do the best we can to ensure that elections in our state are legitimate, fool-proof and verified. We also owe it to our election officials and clerks to have a system in place upon which there is total agreement. I look forward to hearing from either of you on your thoughts and ideas.

Sincerely,

TIM CARPENTER

State Senator

3rd Senate District