

Vos gives GOP 1-in-3 shot at veto-proof supermajority

Posted on Thursday, Sep 17, 2020

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos gave his party a one-in-three shot at taking enough seats this November to form a veto-proof supermajority.

But both Vos, R-Rochester, and Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz, D-Oshkosh, at a WisPolitics.com virtual event Wednesday told viewers they believe their parties will hold on to all vulnerable seats while possibly picking up a few more.

Vos conceded that Republicans might be on the defensive in some suburban districts this cycle because of the nationalized climate of the race around President Trump. But he praised the quality of each one of his candidates running in 92 of the chamber's 99 districts, saying a good candidate is the first step to winning an election.

"When I look at the races that we have, of course I see some of those suburban races that are much more in jeopardy than they have been in the past," he said, pointing out three GOP incumbents – Reps. Dan Knodl of Germantown, Rob Hutton of Brookfield, and Jim Ott of Mequon – who didn't even have opponents in 2016. "I think we have a really good chance to retain our incumbents and do so in a way that also allows us to expand our majority."

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But Vos said he didn't think it was likely Assembly Republicans would pick up enough seats this cycle for a veto-proof majority. Republicans currently have 63 seats and would need a net of three more to override Gov. Tony Evers without needing Dem votes.

Two seats remain open for the moment after Reps. Dave Crowley, D-Milwaukee, and

Chris Taylor, D-Madison, resigned from the chamber to accept other political positions in the state.

Vos said Republicans' best opportunity to win a seat is against state Rep. Robyn Vining, D-Wauwatosa, who claimed the traditionally GOP spot in 2018. He said residents in suburban districts like Vining's still want low taxes and support for law enforcement, "even if they don't vote for Trump."

Hintz defended Vining, saying she hasn't stopped running since she first won the 14th AD and is "as engaged as anybody else." He touted her work on hazard pay while in office and her cosponsorship of redistricting reform efforts.

"She's the one taking the lead on issues that can't be signed into law until we make some gains and change the faces," Hintz said.

Vos also blamed "out-of-state billionaires" for pumping millions of dollars into the Dem side of the race and "trying to buy the election this cycle" for why he thinks this will be a challenging year to pick up enough seats for a supermajority.

He name-dropped Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker for donating \$2.5 million to the state Dem Party and accused Dems of hypocrisy for deriding money in politics in previous cycles when they were the ones being outspent by Republicans.

In 2015, Vos spearheaded the effort to overhaul campaign finance laws that allowed political parties to take unlimited donations and make transfers of any size to candidates.

Meanwhile, Hintz said he felt the nationalized aspect of the election helps Wisconsin Dems this cycle, though he added that it varies between urban and rural areas.

"What we're seeing is the same kind of disdain for Donald Trump's politics is coming down to the local level," Hintz said. "We have districts, especially in the suburbs, that have changed dramatically."

He pointed to Dem U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin's vote tallies in Ott's seat, both in 2012 when she took 33 percent and in 2018 when she took 53 percent. He said this was clear evidence that people aren't turning out for a specific candidate, but that they're changing their minds politically.

Hintz said while the district has changed, Ott "hasn't changed at all," and that his

seat is ripe to get picked up.

Vos shot back, saying 2020 feels like the movie “Groundhog Day” where Bill Murray’s character wakes up to the same day over and over and over again. He said through his tenure as speaker Dem leadership has said “this is our year” every cycle, yet Republicans held the majority after each election.

“I think it’s going to be the exact same result in the end,” he said.

Hintz acknowledged the lack of Dem gains in the Assembly, but he placed the blame squarely on GOP-drawn legislative maps after the 2010 Census. And he said the fact that some suburban districts are competitive this cycle, even under those maps, “demonstrates the desire for change” in Wisconsinites.

He said his “sleeper race” surprise Dem victory pick in November would be the 75th AD, after tweets surfaced where GOP candidate David Armstrong expressed support for the Confederate flag and posted a video of former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke falsely claiming Black Americans were more likely to have ancestors who owned slaves than white Americans.

Vos dismissed the tweets, saying Armstrong “probably should’ve watched the entire video before deciding to share something years ago.” And he said people in the district know Armstrong as a community leader and will still vote for him “even with the smear tactics of the Democrats.”