

Bill Kaplan: Wisconsin Republicans are in trouble

Posted on Monday, Aug 29, 2022

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

Wisconsin Republicans are in trouble, politically divided and behind in gubernatorial and U.S. Senate election polls. Despite Trump's demagoguery, assault on the Constitution and deception of middle-working class voters about economic issues, GOP leaders remain obsequious to their detriment. These politicians do not grasp that a narcissistic Trump does not care about them. He fancies himself as French monarch Louis XIV: "I am the state."

In his 1961 Inaugural Address, JFK warned: "those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside." Case in point. Wisconsin GOP Assembly Speaker Robin Vos: "Over the past 15 months, (Vos) has sought to placate Donald Trump as the former president bombarded him with phone calls about the 2020 (presidential) election, accused him of covering up corruption, labeled him a Republican in name only and endorsed his little-known primary opponent" (Washington Post). Vos barely survived his primary despite having given in to Trump's demands to investigate the 2020 election.

But there was not one scintilla of evidence of election fraud in Wisconsin. Nonetheless, Vos anointed Michael Gableman, hapless and ignorant, to lead a partisan look-see. After spending more than \$ 1 million, he turned up zip. Then Gableman betrayed Vos, joining Trump in endorsing Vos' primary opponent. Foolishly, Vos still bows down before Trump, whose appetite is insatiable. Vos is not alone in misjudging Trump.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Tommy Thompson, after demonstrating bipartisan leadership during the pandemic while serving as UW System president, flirted with running for governor. But there would be no fifth campaign. He inexplicably went to Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence to get Trump's benediction and/or to scheme with him. The upshot was Thompson decided not to run. He issued a statement: "Wisconsin needs strong leadership to bridge political divides, care for our most vulnerable, set our economy on a path to succeed in the 21st-century, and again make us the shining star of the nation." Turned out to be empty words. He appears to have traded former Wisconsin GOP Governor Scott Walker for Trump, flushing his legacy down the toilet.

Thompson wanted to be a kingmaker and apparently end the Walker era. Rejecting Walker's choice for governor, former Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch, Thompson endorsed out-of-state millionaire Tim Michels (has residences in Connecticut and NYC). Trump soon followed. Michels pretends he's a political outsider, but has lost several elections in Wisconsin. His main qualification is his wealth, spending over \$12 million of his own money to win the primary.

After the election, Michels' campaign website removed Trump's endorsement. After NYT reporter Reid Epstein tweeted about it, Trump's endorsement reappeared. Michels claimed it was all a "mistake." Who is pulling the puppet strings? Michels calls for eliminating the bipartisan state elections commission, leaves open the possibility of decertifying the 2020 election (not legally permissible) and dangles not certifying the 2024 presidential election. Trump's anti-constitutional agenda. In September, Michels will join Gableman at a GOP fundraiser.

Meanwhile, Kleefisch is AWOL, no unity rally. And, the Wisconsin GOP has "ended up inside" the tiger (Trump).

- Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.