

# WisDems: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel “Sen. Ron Johnson says he only recently decided to run again...”

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Madison, Wis. – A new report details how Senator Ron Johnson was clearly gearing up to run for a third term as early as 2018, despite previously pledging not to do so and signing on to constitutional amendments that would limit senators to two terms in office.

See full story below:

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: [Bice: Sen. Ron Johnson says he only recently decided to run again. His actions say he’s been keeping his options open for a while.](#)

U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson says he decided just recently to break his pledge and run for a third term because liberals have unexpectedly begun running amok in Washington, D.C.

[...]

That’s the story.

But when you look at his actions — and those of his campaign — it certainly looks like Johnson has been keeping his options open for some years now.

Consider this:

Since his first run in 2010, Johnson had voiced support for term limits for federal lawmakers. The Oshkosh Republican signed onto a proposed constitutional amendment to restrict U.S. senators to two terms in 2011, 2013, 2015 and again in

2017.

But Johnson decided not to co-sponsor the term-limits measure in 2019 or last year.

Very convenient.

Or look at this:

When Johnson said six years ago that he was not going to run again, his campaign fund had only a little more than \$44,000 in it. Since then, the bottom line has increased fifty-fold to \$2.4 million by the end of 2021.

By contrast, U.S. Sen. Richard Burr (R-North Carolina) also announced in 2016 that he would not be running again. Burr had more than \$235,000 in his campaign account back then. Today, he has wound down his fund to just over \$13,000.

Burr, incidentally, kept his pledge not to run again.

Joe Zepecki, a Democratic campaign strategist not working for any of Johnson's opponents, noted that this isn't the first time that Wisconsin's senior senator has flip-flopped on an issue.

Johnson was for COVID-19 vaccines before he began spreading misleading information about them. He said he cared about the national debt before voting for a huge tax break. And he claimed to be for term limits until he ran up against them.

"Standing on principle in theory before flip-flopping out of self-interest is, sadly, something Sen. Johnson has made a habit of," Zepecki said.

But Johnson said in his interview with the Journal Sentinel that he fully intended to abide by his pledge to serve only two terms.

"My intention was to not do it," Johnson said of running for a third term. "And it's really the Democrat takeover of government and their disastrous policies that changed that.... It was late in 2021 that we decided to do it again."

Ron Johnson's history of supporting term limits

From the beginning, Johnson was tied to the issue of term limits.

Back in November 2010, Politico wrote:

“Term limits fever isn’t limited to the House. Newly elected GOP Sens. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Mike Lee of Utah and Rand Paul of Kentucky have also voiced their support for legislation limiting congressional terms.”

Johnson reiterated his plan to serve only two terms after beating former U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold, a Wisconsin Democrat, for the second time.

“I think 12 years in the U.S. Senate — two terms from somebody like myself, who’s put himself in a position to accomplish something — I think that’s more than enough,” Johnson told McKenna in a 2016 radio interview.”

But he began backing away from the pledge publicly three years later in a conversation with reporters at the Wisconsin Republican Convention in 2019. He said if it were up to his wife, he’d retire after two terms, but he said he wasn’t ruling anything out in 2022.

Last month, the 66-year-old announced his plans to run for a third term in an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal and two television commercials that ran statewide in a six-figure buy.

“That’s not how it felt when I ran in 2016,” Johnson says in one TV spot. “Back then, I intended to serve a second term and go home. But now with Democrats in total control, our nation is on a very dangerous path.”

Talking to the Journal Sentinel last week, Johnson dismissed the suggestion that he has been keeping his options open — as his remarks at the 2019 convention would suggest.

“Keeping my options open?” Johnson said, repeating the question. “Again, my intention in 2016 was to serve a second term. That was my intention. That was my strong preference.”

Johnson fundraising continued

But his campaign fund shows he continued to raise a significant amount of money in recent years.

Since January 2017, Johnson has pulled in more than \$5 million, and his cash

balance grew from \$44,000 in late 2016 to \$559,00 four years later and \$2.4 million by the end of 2021.

During that time, his campaign spent \$3 million. That sum included about \$325,000 for fundraising and strategy consulting to Tony Blando, his former chief of staff; GOP adviser Gula Graham; and Kirstin Hopkins, his finance director.

In addition, Johnson's campaign spent \$14,000 on digital consulting and paid his former campaign manager, Betsy Ankney, \$46,500.

Johnson said this wasn't out of the ordinary.

"Just being a U.S. senator, you have to comply with a bunch of things," he said. "So you need to continue to fund the campaign, even if you're not going to run. I mean, it was at a very low level. I didn't make any fundraising calls."

As for the fundraising consultants, he said they were just "part of the fundraising processes."

Johnson dismissed the comparison to Burr's fundraising numbers, even though the two announced in 2016 that they would not be running again. Over the past five years, Burr raised only about \$726,000, seven times less than Johnson's \$5 million-plus.

"Most comparisons aren't fair," Johnson said. "I reject the comparison."

What about his decision to quit cosponsoring a proposed constitutional amendment to restrict U.S. senators to two terms?

"In general — and I've said this repeatedly — I think four is the best term limit," Johnson said.

Four terms? But didn't he on four occasions between 2011 and 2017 sign his name to a measure that would have limited senators to two terms?

"I understand, and there's a certain rationale for it in some situations," Johnson responded. "But, again, we are where we are right now."

Which is this: The guy pledged to serve no more than two terms, has decided to vie for his third term and says he now believes senators should serve up to four terms.

Only a former accountant could keep up with all those changing numbers.