

Melissa Agard: Robin Vos' last stand

Posted on Thursday, Sep 7, 2023

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

From 2010 to 2018, Republicans held the trifecta in the State of Wisconsin – Scott Walker reigned as Governor, conservatives ruled the Supreme Court, and the State Senate and State Assembly consisted of gerrymandered GOP majorities.

Until the election of Governor Evers, Republicans held unchecked power in our state. But the tides are changing, Governor Evers was re-elected to a second term in 2022 by double the margin than in 2018; and the progressive candidate, Judge Janet Protasiewicz, defeated conservative Dan Kelly in a 10 point landslide in the April Supreme Court election, changing the balance of Wisconsin's highest court for the first time in 15 years.

Wisconsin is a purple state that is becoming increasingly blue. Politicians and elected officials must reflect the values of the people they represent – unfortunately, following the same authoritarian playbook he has for over a decade, Speaker Vos is setting out to once again undermine the will of the majority. It's important for people across Wisconsin to understand just how methodical and systematic Republican efforts have been to keep their hold on the levers of power despite a wildly unpopular policy agenda.

>> 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.](#)

Below I outline Speaker Vos' blueprint to undemocratically stifle the voice of Wisconsinites and retain this unearned power.

1. Wisconsin 2018 Lame Duck Laws. After the November 2018 election but before Tony Evers took office, the State Legislature passed a series of controversial "lame duck" laws that limited the powers of the newly-elected Democratic Governor and Attorney General. The GOP seized the opportunity to hijack the

powers of a duly-elected Democratic Governor and strengthen the Republican Legislature's authority.

2. **Gerrymander on Top of a Gerrymander.** Every 10 years, legislative lines are redrawn to account for population changes. Sadly, Republicans have turned this administrative process into a political exercise aimed at maximizing partisan advantage. How do we know this? Well, Speaker Vos admitted as much during an October 2021 public hearing stating that partisanship was a consideration when drawing the new legislative maps - the same maps that have been proven to be among the most gerrymandered in the country. Despite Democrats winning 14 out of the last 17 statewide elections, Republicans retain a near supermajority in the State Legislature. Folks, that is not what democracy looks like.
3. **Undermine Public Trust in Elections.** Following the 2020 Presidential Election, Speaker Vos promoted Donald Trump's Big Lie and even hired conspiracy theorist Michael Gableman as an "election investigator" to identify fraud. After billing taxpayers over \$1 million and not finding a shred of evidence of fraud, Speaker Vos fired Gableman. Unfortunately, Legislative Republicans continue to push debunked misinformation and outright lies to sow doubt in our electoral process that has proven to be fair, free, and secure.
4. **Impeach Justice Janet Protasiewicz.** Recently, a number of Legislative Republicans have threatened to impeach Justice Protasiewicz. The threats come after Justice Protasiewicz overwhelmingly defeated conservative Dan Kelly in the April election and before the new Justice has even heard one case from the bench. In the face of accountability and fair maps, the GOP is doing everything they can to cling to power after their policies have proven to be politically toxic to voters. Make no mistake, if Republicans move to impeach and remove Justice Protasiewicz, this would be the most direct, severe threat to democracy in our state history. This would not just be an impeachment process, it would overturn an election and the will of the people.
5. **Pass Constitutional Amendments to Require 2/3 Votes of the Legislature.** Speaker Vos and Legislative Republicans are preparing to lose at least one chamber once fair maps are in play. They see the writing on the wall and recently put forth a constitutional amendment to require a two-thirds vote of the State Legislature to change certain tax law. Republicans have been in power for 12+ years. If they were serious about this constitutional amendment, they could have easily passed it anytime in the last decade. Like the 2018 lame duck laws, Republicans are again preparing to prevent Democrats from governing while increasing their own power.

Speaker Vos and Legislative Republicans will jump over any hurdle to usurp the will of the majority. They have a shameless track record of changing the rules when the rules no longer serve them. We saw this in 2018 with the lame duck laws and history is repeating itself as Republicans flail to protect the most gerrymandered maps in the nation to keep themselves in power. Voters are tired of Republican officials' draconian antics. My Democratic colleagues and I will continue to speak truth to power. We honor the voices of Wisconsinites and will work tirelessly to ensure their choices and values are reflected by the people who represent them.

-Agard, D-Madison, is Senate minority leader and represents the 16th Senate District.