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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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MARCH 14-20 MARKS SUNSHINE WEEK 2021

March 14-20 2021 is National Sunshine Week. National Sunshine Week is an effort to highlight the importance of transparent, accessible, and accountable government at every level, be it local town boards, city councils, state legislatures, or even all the way up to the United States Congress.

In my Capitol office I display portraits of Robert La Follette and William Proxmire, two Wisconsin leaders who saw the value in keeping politics transparent. Unfortunately, in recent years, our state has been increasingly hostile to informing the public. We have seen the majority party in Wisconsin meeting in private to draw district lines resulting in litigation that has lasted the better part of a decade; we have seen committees eschew public hearing in favor of informational hearing in which only invited speakers are allowed to testify; and we have seen party caucuses closed to the general public. This undemocratic process must end.

When the majority party drew district boundaries in 2011, they did so in secret, without public input, and with the explicit goal of preventing competitive races in order to lock themselves into an everlasting majority. Members of their party signed legal agreements preventing them from discussing the maps while they were being drawn. Backroom deals and secret votes should be a thing of the past.

This is not the open and accountable government Wisconsinites deserve or expect. It was a shameful process, and one I hope will never be repeated. One issue that persists is the Wisconsin Legislature is exempted from the state's Open Meetings law. Wisconsin's government and its actions should be open to the public, and the Legislature ought to adhere to that principle. There should not be one rule for politicians in Wisconsin and one for everybody else.

Accountability in government starts with citizens being able to vote out legislators if they no longer represent the values of the district they represent. That can't happen when legislators secretly draw maps to choose their voters instead of the other way around. That is why I support legislation that would take the responsibility of redistricting out of the hands of partisan legislators and instead create an independent commission that would draw political lines using a nonpartisan approach. The move to an independent commission would create a sense of objectivity in the redistricting process. It would also ensure that Wisconsin voters are provided a more representative form of government.

Good government is open and transparent. Citizens deserve the opportunity to be involved and aware of its actions. We can return to the days of transparency and accountability, but it will require political leaders in Wisconsin acknowledging mistakes of the past and having the courage to recognize and admit that true power ought to belong to the people. I will continue to advocate for government transparency that would make Robert La Follette and William Proxmire proud.

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