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Bipartisanship is Possible- When It's Taken Seriously

Despite deep divides between political parties both in Wisconsin and across the country, the last two weeks have shown what is possible when we take bipartisanship seriously. However, it has also shown what happens when an entire political party abandons reason for petty political pandering.

After Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd in May 2020, there was a flurry of protests and demands for police accountability. Fortunately, Wisconsin- which has itself seen its fair share of police brutality and overreach protests- decided to do something about it. The bipartisan Task Force on Racial Disparities was created to examine what Wisconsin could do to strengthen Wisconsinites civil liberties and police accountability.

On June 16, a group of bills passed the Wisconsin Assembly and were sent to the Governor's desk for his signature. Among the provisions include a ban on police use of choke holds, requirements for public disclosure of a police department's use of force policy, and requirements for publishing annual reports on use of force incidents.

To be clear, there is more that could be done. While some of my colleagues in the Democratic Party were upset that the steps taken did not go far enough, it is important to remember to not let perfect be the enemy of good. We have taken some preliminary steps, and I hope in the future the bipartisan effort that we came together to undertake will once again allow us to improve the lives of the people of Wisconsin.

However, the majority party's willingness to show bipartisanship faded quickly. On June 22, a slew of anti-democratic, anti-voting laws were passed by the Assembly in a blatant disregard for the United States Constitution and Americans' voting rights.

The legislation would have limited counties to one absentee ballot drop box. It is obvious to an objective observer that the ~950,000 people in Milwaukee County are going to need more drop boxes than the ~4,200 person Menominee County. We want our elections to run smoothly and restricting the number of drop boxes is an obvious voter suppression tactic to punish liberal-leaning populous areas.

Other provisions include changes to absentee envelopes and applications- changes opposed by the Municipal Clerks Association- and changing rules for voting in long term care facilities- changes opposed by the Long Term Care association. The people affected by these bills did not ask for them, do not want them, and actively oppose them. Yet the majority party pushed them through to continue to push the Big Lie- that the 2020 election was riddled with election fraud and abuse- all in an effort to placate their base, delegitimize President Biden's administration, and cast doubt on the election process.

Should these bills ever be signed into law- and make no mistake, they will not under Governor Evers' administration- Republicans would get what they are truly seeking: a state sanctioned limitation on who is allowed to vote, to ensure that Republicans win more elections. They can feel their grip on power loosening with increasing changes in demographics. Their response *should* be to try to appeal to a broader coalition of voters. Instead, they have decided that the voters are the ones that are wrong and "bad" (read: Democratic) voters must not be able to vote. This is partisanship at its worst, wrong, and against the democratic ideals our country stands for.

We caught a brief glimpse of the bipartisan possibilities when we tackled police reform. My Democratic colleagues and I are constantly looking for issues on which we can have bipartisan consensus. Unfortunately, we are not in control in the Legislature, and Republicans have been thus far rarely willing to work with us. I hope that they see how effective it can be to work with Democrats on important issues, such as police reform. There are numerous issues in Wisconsin that a majority of people support, and I would be glad to work with Republicans to come up with legislation that will improve the lives of the people we represent.

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