



Chris Danou's Capitol Report
Assembly Bill 373 Brings Cronyism to State Civil Service

Last week, the Wisconsin State Assembly was again in session to debate a controversial bill being rushed through the legislative process by Assembly Republicans. Assembly Bill 373 (AB 373) is a troubling bill that will open the door for partisan cronyism in our state civil service program.

In just 20 days, Assembly Republicans drastically changed our civil service system that has been in place since 1905. When our current civil service program was put into place by Governor Bob La Follette, it was done in a way that would make sure, "the best shall serve the state." After all, wouldn't we want the best to serve taxpayers throughout Wisconsin? This was a practice that we proudly followed and upheld for the last 110 years until last week.

This seems like another display of partisan politics that neglect common sense. AB 373 takes a great program and makes it worse by lowering fair and high standards. Now, instead of making hires based on merit, people hired to serve the state will be based on who knows who. We've already seen this type of activity taking place in the Walker administration, and unfortunately, now it's open for all areas of state government and civil service.

Under AB 373, the required civil service exam will be eliminated and hiring decisions will be based on the strength of a person's resume. Hiring decisions will be centralized within the Department of Administration (DOA), the executive arm of the Governor's administration, and therefore take away the specific state agencies' sole discretion. The measure also eliminates bumping rights that protect more experienced workers from losing their jobs, creates merit bonuses and puts new hires on probation for one year, versus the current six months.

Why would the DOA want to oversee all civil services hires? I can't help but think it's a power grab and an attempt to politicize who gets hired. Since my election to the State Assembly in 2008, I've never had a constituent tell me that we need to make changes to the civil service program, let alone make civil service hires based on cronyism. It's also interesting to note that the only two organizations to register in support of AB 373 are Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC) and Americans for Prosperity. WMC is the state chamber of commerce and has nothing to do with civil service, and Americans for Prosperity is a conservative group funded by the Kansas-based billionaire Koch Brothers.

AB 373 is yet another example of legislative Republicans trying to consolidate power and find ways to reward their friends. When the state civil service program was started by Gov. LaFollette, he said, "the best shall serve the state," not the best connected shall serve the state. AB 373 takes us in the wrong direction and I'm disappointed in my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for supporting such a bad bill. Wisconsin deserves better than blatant power grabs and cronyism in state service.

