Redistricted Dems: Republicans aren't exactly boasting about their redistricting plan, using a cautious legal strategy. But it's clear to insiders that they pulled off protecting their incumbents while putting a series of Dems in a difficult spot. Though Dems have been complaining loudly about what they say is a power grab, some say privately the maps wouldn't necessarily banish them to a decade of insignificance. But they also won't make it easy to hold the majority in either house over the next decade. Seats held by GOP Sens. Van Wanggaard of Racine, Leah Vukmir of Wauwatosa and Alberta Darling of River Hills are effectively taken off the table because they would become so much more Republican. That leaves Dems with fewer pickup opportunities to flip the chamber over the next two election cycles if they can't pull it off this summer. What's more, Dem recall candidates like Fred Clark of Baraboo and Nancy Nusbaum of Green Bay live outside the new lines for the districts they're now seeking. In the Assembly, there could be some shuffling of Madison-area Dem lawmakers, for example, because some would not live inside the proposed districts, while some see at least four Milwaukee-area Dems who could lose in their reconfigured districts. One Dem says it's the perfect map for a 54-45 GOP Assembly majority in the near term.

**2nd District - Edge to Cowles**

Rob Cowles hasn't had a competitive race in years, and fundraising is not his strong point. He has pulled in just $100,522 for the year, well behind the $177,300 raised by Dem opponent Nancy Nusbaum.

Still, this is the most Republican district held by any of the GOP incumbents targeted for recall, and insiders generally view Cowles as a good bet for re-election.

Nusbaum’s time as Brown County exec gave her good name ID for the race. But insiders say that’s a mixed bag for Nusbaum with some having negative memories of her time in office. She also switched from a Republican to an independent and then to a Dem, and insiders point out she finished third in the 8th CD Dem primary five years ago.

Dems have been touting a poll that had Nusbaum down four or five points. But some question how committed Dems will be to the district, which David Prosser won with almost 58 percent of the vote, considering more attractive targets elsewhere.

The edge goes to Cowles at this point.

See background on the 2nd District race:
http://www.wispolitics.com/index.lml?Article=240311

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**8th District - Leaning to Darling**

The conventional wisdom has been the GOP bent of the district will be too much for Sandy Pasch to overcome. Though Pasch’s Assembly district is Dem-heavy, the other two districts that comprise the Senate seat are just as Republican and will be heavily targeted by conservative media and the GOP to turn out in big numbers.

Still, there are signs this race could be very close. Dems put out a polling memo today that showed Pasch up 1 percentage point, and some Republicans say their polling shows Pasch has been making inroads, especially with female voters. In an attempt to hurt her standing with seniors, Dems have also been slamming Darling for comments she made seeming to back Paul Ryan’s proposed changes to Medicare.

But there is still a feeling among some insiders that the district is just too Republican for Pasch to win so long as Darling works hard and conservatives can define Pasch.

Both sides are engaged in this district, which David Prosser won with more than 57 percent of the vote in April, and the two candidates have proven to be no slouches when it comes to fundraising. For the year, Darling has raised $958,412 and had $401,382 in the bank on her last report, while Pasch raised $431,302 and had $216,439 cash on hand. Still, outside groups are expected to outspend the candidates, and Club for Growth and We Are Wisconsin have been busy running attack ads there.

There’s also a new wrinkle in the race: With the way Republicans have redrawn the district for the 2012 elections, it would be nearly impossible for Pasch to hold it if she knocks off Darling this summer.

Considering the nature of the district, the race appears to be leaning toward Darling at this point. The key will be to watch if Pasch can continue the momentum some believe she has.

See background on the 8th District race:
http://www.wispolitics.com/index.lml?Article=240314

**10th District - Leaning to Harsdorf**

After teacher Shelly Moore won her primary Tuesday against a “protest” Dem with just 55 percent of the vote, some Republicans were quick to declare that race essentially over. After all, they say, if she can’t do better than that in a Dem primary, how’s she going to beat Sen. Sheila Harsdorf in a general election?

Some insiders, though, say it’s not quite that clear cut.

More than 35,000 voters turned out for primary, almost 93 percent of the turnout from this spring’s Supreme Court race. Some chalk that up to an effort by local Republicans to get their side to the polls in an attempt to knock off Moore before she gets a short at Harsdorf. If nothing else, the fact they made the race that close -- no other Dem won less than 65 percent against their sham challenger -- shows Republicans are motivated just like Dems are these days, some argue.

The GOP brand has been hurt in western Wisconsin over the collective bargaining fight, and JoAnne Kloppenburg won the 10th SD with 51.3 percent of the vote, so it’s a bit of a swing seat.

It’s also been traditionally hard to penetrate because it’s covered by the expensive Minneapolis TV
market. Dems appear ready to play in the market with We Are Wisconsin and Wisconsin Women Vote! making buys this month there. Citizens for a Strong America also has a buy listed there.

Still, the Harsdorf family has a reputation as a string of moderate Republican lawmakers. The question to some is whether Dems can take the collective bargaining issue and this year’s budget and do enough to damage that Harsdorf brand.

Some Republicans say Harsdorf has a decent margin in polls from their side and argue the line of attack on Moore has been effective in painting her as a bomb thrower.

At this point, the race leans toward Harsdorf.

See background on the 10th District race: http://www.wispolitics.com/index.lml?Article=240322

**12th District - Toss-up**

Jim Holperin is the Republicans’ best -- and likely only -- pick up opportunity. And for good reason.

His northern Wisconsin district has a GOP lean, and Prosser won 55 percent of the vote there this spring. In the Dem wave of 2008, Holperin won the seat with just more than 51 percent, and insiders on both sides say this race is likely to be a squeaker either way.

Polling is all over the map, with some saying Holperin is anywhere from down 9 points to up by more than 5. Turnout will be key in all of the recall elections, but perhaps nowhere more than this expansive and largely rural district.

Some argue that’s a strength for Tea Party activist Kim Simac, who is heavily favored to win Tuesday’s GOP primary, after she spearheaded the effort to recall Holperin.

But Simac has also proven a treasure trove for opposition researchers, especially for someone without a voting record. Insiders expect opponents to pick over every book, speech and radio show the author and talk show host has done to make her out as an extremist.

Holperin, who survived a recall attempt over spearfishing while in the Assembly more than a decade ago, could be a firewall for Republicans. If the GOP loses three seats in the Aug. 9 elections, they could pick off Holperin a week later to narrowly hold onto control of the chamber. Others argue if Dems prove to have momentum on their side and win three or more seats, that likely means Holperin survives.

But anything could happen in this race, and it’s a toss-up.

See background on the 12th District race: http://www.wispolitics.com/index.lml?Article=240323

**14th District - Leaning to Olsen**

In a normal election year, this race likely wouldn’t be on the radar. Luther Olsen wasn’t even challenged in 2008, and Prosser won almost 55 percent of the vote this spring.

Add in that some haven’t been impressed with Fred Clark as a candidate -- especially with the comment about smacking around a female constituent after a phone call -- and that wouldn't seem 1/9/2012
like the recipe for success.

But Olsen, who was first elected to the Assembly in 1994, hasn't run a tough race in years. He won the open Senate seat in 2004 easily in a three-way primary and didn't face a Dem in the general election. That's left him without much of a campaign or fundraising operation, and there have been a series of complaints from Republicans that Olsen isn't working hard enough to retain his seat. The expectation is that the party will have to pull him across the finish line if he's to win, and Senate Republicans have staffed up there.

The fundraising numbers reflect some of that frustration. Olsen has raised $107,111 for the year and had $70,656 cash on hand, while Clark pulled in $226,501 and had $163,197.

The ad traffic in the district underscores how competitive it now is. The Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee, We Are Wisconsin, Club for Growth and Wisconsin Family Action have all targeted the race in recent weeks.

Some insiders believe Olsen shouldn't lose, but he still may, and there are Republicans who were feeling better about the seat a few weeks ago than they are now with conservative polling showing the race tightening.

The race leans toward Olsen slightly just because of the district's nature. But it will be no shock if Clark -- flaws and all -- wins come August.

See background on the 14th District race:
http://www.wispolitics.com/index.lml?Article=240325

**18th District - Leaning to King**

Dan Kapanke is No. 1 on the Dem target list. Randy Hopper is No. 2.

Republicans praise Hopper as one of the best retail politicians they know and a likable lawmaker. But he has two things that have been working against him. One, though the district has traditionally leaned Republican, he has a lot of public employees living there who are none too happy about the collective bargaining stuff. Two, Hopper's personal baggage is not helping him in this environment.

Some say the polling has tightened in that race in recent weeks. Still, some have a hard time seeing how Hopper wins in the end considering he has consistently been down in polls. That's never a good sign for an incumbent.

Hopper's best chance may be to demonize Jessica King and hope voters focus on whether they want to toss him out and possibly flip the Senate to Dems more than his personal problems. A key sign, some say, will be whether groups like the Club for Growth, the RSLC or All Children Matter get heavily involved there in an attempt to save Hopper. King has a liberal record that can be prodded for attack lines, and opponents will have to make her unacceptable for Hopper to pull through.

While Republicans talk about a tightening race, some Dems believe that may just be an attempt to slow King's momentum. She is neck-and-neck with Hopper fundraising-wise with $221,932 pulled in compared to $226,708 for the incumbent. She also has a significant cash on hand advantage of $190,647 to $92,461.

Hopper still has a chance and the race could turn, but the race leans toward King at this point.
See background on the 18th District race:

**22nd District - Edge to Wirch**

Republicans would love to make Bob Wirch’s Kenosha County district a competitive race. Having lost an opportunity to play offense in Dave Hansen’s Green Bay-area seat, the GOP now only really has Jim Holperin of Conover as a target, though some Republicans have made noise about taking a closer look at Wirch.

So far, though, insiders aren’t buying into the race as one that will be competitive.

Insiders like Jonathan Steitz’s chances to make it through Tuesday’s GOP primary against Fred Ekornaaas. The perception is Steitz is working harder, particularly after he reported raising more than $33,038 compared to $4,958 for Ekornaaas, a county board supervisor who some say may be relying on his name ID after a lengthy career in Kenosha County politics.

Still, almost half of Steitz’s money came from his own pocket and Wirch has an almost 12-to-1 cash on hand advantage over him.

The district also would be overhauled completely under the map Republicans have drawn for the 2012 elections that would essentially cede the district to Dems in exchange for shoring up the 21st SD for the GOP.

Kenosha is still a decent union town, and labor has traditionally mobilized for Wirch, who has the edge here.

See background on the 22nd District race:
http://www.wispolitics.com/index.lml?Article=240327

**32nd District - Edge to Shilling**

Dan Kapanke has been viewed as the most vulnerable of the GOP targets from day one, largely because of the heavy Dem lean of the district. Gov. Scott Walker did well there last fall, but it bounced back hard this spring following the collective bargaining debate, and JoAnne Kloppenburg won it with almost 58 percent of the vote.

Kapanke has fought against the tide before and squeaked out a narrow win in 2008 even as Barack Obama pulled in more than 60 percent of the vote. But the nature of the district, the collective bargaining fallout and the strength of his opponent has most putting this race into the Dem column at this time.

Jen Shilling has some votes that Republicans can use to tee off on her. But she’s also well liked, a good candidate and will turn out the city of La Crosse, some say.

Despite the odds against him, Kapanke has been a solid fundraiser with $725,913 raised for the year and $123,824 left in the bank after spending $611,233. Shilling, meanwhile, has raised $271,385 and had $156,634 in her war chest at the end of the last reporting period.

Still, insiders note the Club for Growth was last in the district in late June, according to ad buy information available earlier this week. Meanwhile, We Are Wisconsin and Wisconsin Women Vote, which is associated with EMILY’s List, are now up in the district. Some believe conservative groups

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may take one more run at trying to breathe life into Kapanke's campaign. But with Dems saying they have polling that shows Shilling up double digits, some don't expect any additional efforts to be successful.

The edge goes to Shilling.

See background on the 32nd District race:  
http://www.wispolitics.com/index.htm?Article=240329

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