Wis. Senate panel passes GOP redistricting plan

MADISON, Wis. — A Wisconsin state Senate committee passed Republican-written plans for redrawing political boundaries on Friday, setting the stage for approval by the full Legislature next week.

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The Republicans have already spent $300,000 on attorneys' fees.

Committee Chairman Sen. Rich Zipperer, R-Pewaukee, defended the process, saying Republicans were moving quickly because of a federal lawsuit filed in Milwaukee by former Democratic Senate leader Judy Robson and others claiming that current legislative boundaries were unconstitutional given the results of the 2010 Census.
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Redistricting plan makes many voters wait 6 years | State Senate boundaries would affect 300,000

PATRICK MARLEY, pmarley@journalsentinel.com
Staff

Madison - Nearly 300,000 Wisconsinites would have to wait six years - two years longer than usual - before they had a chance to vote for a state senator in a regular election under a Republican plan rocketing through the Legislature.

The plan took another big step toward passage Friday.

GOP leaders have drawn new maps of legislative districts that shift many voters from one Senate district to another. Among those voters are 299,533 who last had a chance to vote for a state senator in 2008, but couldn't do so again in a regular election until 2014, rather than 2012.

Every 10 years, states must redraw the lines for congressional and legislative districts to account for population shifts detected by the U.S. Census. For decades, Wisconsin's maps have largely been drawn by courts because of legislative gridlock, but this time Republicans control the process because they hold both houses of the Legislature and the governor's office.

Democrats have decried the proposed maps as overly partisan. A group of citizens that includes two Democratic former lawmakers sued over redistricting in federal court last month, even before Republicans unveiled their maps.

Jim Troupis, the attorney hired by Republican leaders to help draft the plan, said redrawing maps leads inevitably to moving some people into districts that will require them to wait longer to vote for a state senator. He said the current plan moves a number
of voters similar to a plan written by federal judges in the early 1990s.

The situation occurs when a voter is moved from an even-numbered district to an odd-numbered one. Elections will be held in 2012 in even-numbered districts and 2014 in odd-numbered districts.

"It's directly in line with past maps," Troupis said in a panel discussion this week on the WisconsinEye Public Affairs Network.

The map from the 1990s similarly shifted just under 300,000 voters. The one from the early 2000s moved a smaller group - about 172,000, according to Senate Democrats. "It's hard not to have that happen, and the consequence is simply because of the even/odd split of Senate districts," Troupis said. "People try to avoid it as best they can, but it's inevitable that you will have that happen." But Rebecca Mason, the attorney for the people who have sued over redistricting, expressed concern about that possibility.

"If and when a map is passed, if the final numbers are the disenfranchisement of 300,000 Wisconsin citizens, that will be something we will examine quite closely," she said during the panel discussion.

Justin Levitt, an associate professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles who specializes in redistricting, said courts were not likely to strike down a map because some voters would have to wait longer to vote in state Senate races.

Legislators have a great deal of discretion on how to draw the lines, he said, though he added that lawsuits could advance based on other arguments.

"The one assurance in redistricting is somebody will sue about something," Levitt said.

David Canon, a University of Wisconsin-Madison political scientist who has written about redistricting, said displacing voters into districts where they must wait longer to vote for a Senate candidate happens every time new maps are drawn.

"It is an unavoidable consequence of having district lines move around," Canon wrote in an email.

He noted an equal number of people would be moved into districts that would allow them to vote in Senate races in 2010 and 2012, rather than having to wait the standard four years. "The net effect of this problem... is essentially a zero-sum process," he wrote.

The Senate Judiciary Committee approved the maps on party lines Friday, clearing the way for the Senate to take them up as early as Tuesday. The Assembly is expected to act on them soon after that.

1/9/2012
In the 28th Senate District represented by Republican Mary Lazich, more than 44,000 voters - many of them in Lazich's hometown of New Berlin - would be scattered into four new districts. Those voters re-elected Lazich in 2008 and would normally return to the polls for a Senate election next year. Under the plan, they wouldn't have a say in who their state senator should be until 2014.

The biggest shift would happen in Kenosha County, where nearly 75,000 people would be pushed from the 22nd Senate District represented by Bob Wirch (DPleasant Prairie) to the 21st Senate District represented by Van Wanggaard (R-Racine).

That is about 40% of the people in the district.

Now, the 21st Senate District consists primarily of Racine County and the 22nd Senate District consists primarily of Kenosha County. Republicans are dramatically reshaping the districts so that the 21st would be made up of the rural and suburban western portions of both counties, while the 22nd would include the City of Kenosha and the bulk of the City of Racine.

The result: One heavily Republican district (the 21st) and one heavily Democratic district (the 22nd), rather than two competitive districts.

The last time voters in the 22nd chose a senator was in 2008, when they re-elected Wirch. If the maps stayed the same, they would next vote in 2012, but the voters moved to the new district wouldn't have a regular election until 2014.

However, they will vote for Senate candidates next month, because Wirch is one of nine senators facing a recall election. Unprecedented recall efforts against six Republicans and three Democrats were prompted earlier this year because of senators' stances on legislation to curb collective bargaining for public workers.

Thus, because of the recall election, the voters would not have to wait a full six years between elections, as some voters in other parts of the state would.

Next week legislators also plan to change the law to require the state Supreme Court to set up a panel of three circuit judges to hear any challenges to the maps. Appeals would be heard directly by the Supreme Court, rather than going through an appeals court.

Mason indicated in the panel discussion that such changes would not affect the federal lawsuit.

"Whether the state Legislature can dictate to the state Supreme Court the procedures they have to follow is definitely in doubt," Mason said. "But what's not in doubt and what's absolutely crystal clear is that the state Legislature cannot tell the federal courts what they can and can't do." But Troupis suggested the state Supreme Court, and not a federal
court, would be the one to resolve any dispute. The state Supreme Court has a conservative majority that sided with Republicans last month in the legal battle over collective bargaining.

"The state courts are the courts of first preference in redistricting," Troupis said. "The U.S. Supreme Court has said that. It will be a state court matter ultimately - the court of first preference." Mason's lawsuit was filed by 15 citizens. Two of them are prominent Democrats - Judy Robson, the former state Senate majority leader, and Alvin Baldus, who served in the U.S. House and state Assembly.

Many of the others are teachers. Mason has declined to say who is funding the suit.

Republicans have paid Troupis and Michael Best & Friedrich $350,000 in taxpayer money so far to consult on the maps. Those fees could rise significantly, depending on what happens with the litigation.

The Legislature's lone independent, Rep. Bob Ziegelbauer of Manitowoc, said he was leaning toward voting against the legislative maps.

"I think it's a hair too partisan," he said.

He said his district was made a little less convenient for campaigning, but he didn't have major problems with it. But he said he was concerned about the decision to carve up the seats in Kenosha and Racine counties into safe districts.

Ziegelbauer is a former Democrat who generally votes with Republicans. He said he was glad to be an independent.

"I think you can expect one party to scream like crazy (over redistricting)," he said, "because the other party is doing what they wish they could do."

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County **redistricting** committee schedules hearing for Tuesday The Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors' Redistricting Committee will hold its fourth public hearing at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday at the courthouse on plans to redraw county supervisory district lines. The hearing will be the panel's second in two weeks. Earlier hearings were held in April.

The board's preliminary **redistricting** plan has come under criticism for failing to more
aggressively seek public input; for not adding a second predominantly Hispanic district; for eliminating the North Shore district of Joseph Rice; and for not downsizing enough. The board plan would cut the number of supervisors by one to 18.

Swimmers, pet owners warned about blue-green algae State health officials are reminding families and pet owners to keep an eye out for blue-green algae in swimming and wading spots.

They warn that the algae can produce toxins that can make people sick and have killed animals.

The algae can form a thick, stinky scum on the water's surface that can look like paint or pea soup. The algae's color can vary from green to fluorescent blue to brown.

People exposed to blue-green algae typically experience eye, throat, nose or skin irritation as well as stomach problems and diarrhea. Symptoms usually appear a few hours after contact but can come on days later, too. People should wash off with clean water whenever they swim or play in any lake or river.

Man accused of shooting, killing friend at north side drug house A 22-year-old Milwaukee man was charged Friday with fatally shooting his friend in the neck in a drug house, according to a criminal complaint.

Trenton J. Dawson was charged with first-degree reckless homicide, keeping a drug house and possession with intent to sell cocaine. If convicted, he faces up to 75 years in prison.

According to the complaint, Dawson was bagging crack cocaine in a house in the 3500 block of N. 10th St. when, he said, he shot Kenneth Cunning, 26, in the neck about 10 p.m. Monday.

Cunning was playing with a .44-caliber handgun in the living room when Dawson picked up another gun and shot Cunning in the neck, according to the complaint. Dawson said he tried to stop the bleeding and hid the guns after police arrived. The complaint did not say why Dawson shot Cunning.

Madison mother charged in death of 3-year-old son Madison - A 22-year-old Madison mother has been charged with causing head injuries that killed her 3-year-old son.

Maria Castillo-Dominguez was charged Thursday with first-degree reckless homicide. The charge carries a maximum penalty of 40 years in prison.

The criminal complaint quotes her as telling police she slapped Luis Vasquez with an open hand when she was trying to get him to take a bath. Prosecutors said she later also
acknowledged throwing Luis against a wall because he ate gum after being told not to.

Guilty verdict returned in 2009 Beloit homicide A 28-year-old man was found guilty Friday of fatally shooting one man and wounding another in Beloit in 2009.

Antonio Lavel Mance was convicted of one count of first-degree intentional homicide and one count of attempted first-degree intentional homicide.

Mance fired 22 times into a vehicle, killing the driver, Derrick Kimber, and wounding Martell Rodgers, who was a passenger in the front seat, according to the Rock County district attorney's office. The shootings occurred Nov. 24, 2009.

Authorities identify motorcyclist killed in crash A 33-year-old Greenfield man who died Thursday morning from injuries he suffered in a motorcycle crash has been identified by the Milwaukee County medical examiner's office as Nicholas L. Amezquita. The crash was reported about 10 p.m. Wednesday in the 2300 block of E. North Ave.

Woman's body found in Lake Michigan near Racine Racine - Firefighters recovered a woman's body Friday afternoon from Lake Michigan, near the Samuel Meyers Park boat launch. The woman is believed to be between 25 and 35 years old. Investigators from the Racine County sheriff's office and the medical examiner's office are asking for the public's help in identifying her.

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---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

COMPANY: RADIO REGIONAL DE LISBOA EMISSOES DE RADIODIFUSAO SA; GREENFIELD; REGIONAL; JOURNAL SENTINEL INC; MADISON INVESTMENT ADVISORS INC

NEWS SUBJECT: (Social Issues (1SO05); Violent Crime (1VI27); Crime (1CR87))

REGION: (Wisconsin (1WI54); U.S. Midwest Region (1MI19); North America (1NO39); Americas (1AM92); USA (1US73); Michigan (1MI45))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: [GREENFIELD; HISPANIC; JOSEPH RICE; JOURNAL SENTINEL INC; MADISON; N 10TH ST; REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE; REGIONAL; SAMUEL MEYERS PARK] (Antonio Lavel Mance; County; Cunning; Dawson; Derrick Kimber; Kenneth Cunning; Madison; Mance; Maria Castillo; Martell Rodgers; Nicholas L. Amezquita; Note; Prosecutors; Swimmers; Symptoms; Trenton J. Dawson)

1/9/2012
Under redistricting plan, nearly 300,000 would have 6-year wait for Senate vote

Patrick Marley
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

July 16--MADISON -- Nearly 300,000 Wisconsinites would have to wait six years -- two years longer than usual -- before they had a chance to vote for a state senator in a regular election under a Republican plan rocketing through the Legislature.

The plan took another big step toward passage Friday.

GOP leaders have drawn new maps of legislative districts that shift many voters from one Senate district to another. Among those voters are 299,533 who last had a chance to vote for a state senator in 2008, but couldn't do so again in a regular election until 2014, rather than 2012.

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---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

COMPANY: UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN; UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN*; UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MADISON; SUPREME COURT OF NSW; US SUPREME COURT

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But Erpenbach said the real motivation for the swift legislative action was to pass the maps before recall elections that could give Democrats majority control of the Senate in August. Six Republican incumbents, along with three Democrats, could lose their seats after the elections. Democrats need to pick up three seats to win control.

In a rare moment of bipartisanship, the two Democrats on the committee did vote for a Republican amendment that would allow counties and municipalities that have already gone about redrawing local political boundary lines from having to redo their work to comport with state maps.

The committee made no changes to the map redrawing congressional boundary lines, even though Democrats argue it divides communities of interest by moving Portage County and eastern Wood County from the 7th District, along with Democratic-leaning cities of Stevens Point, Wisconsin Rapids and Chippewa Falls, and puts them into the 3rd District. It also moves Republican-leaning areas including Vilas and St. Croix counties into the 7th District.

The committee made one change to the legislative map. Boundaries of two Milwaukee state Assembly seats were changed to slightly alter the percentage of Hispanic residents. Instead of districts 8 and 9 each having 57 percent Hispanic population, the 8th District would be 60.5 percent Hispanic and the 9th District would be 54 percent Hispanic.

Zipperer said that change was made in response to concerns raised by leaders in the Hispanic community at Wednesday’s hearing. Zipperer said he was unaware of any opposition to the move.

The Legislature is required to redraw political boundaries every decade following the
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---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

NEWS SUBJECT: (Social Issues (ISO05); Government (1GO80); Public Affairs (1PU31); Political Parties (1PO73); Local Government (1LO75); Minority & Ethnic Groups (1MI43))

REGION: (Wisconsin (1WI54); U.S. Midwest Region (1MI19); North America (1NO39); Americas (1AM92); USA (1US73))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (COMMITTEE; DEMOCRATIC; DEMOCRATIC SENATE; GOP; HISPANIC; LEGISLATURE; SENATE; STEVENS POINT WISCONSIN RAPIDS; WISCONSIN STATE SENATE) (Chippewa Falls; Democrats; Erpenbach; Jon Erpenbach; Judy Robson; Republicans; Rich Zipperer; Sen; Vilas; Zipperer) (StateDistribution) (United States; USA; North America)

KEYWORDS: (n); (Legislative); (Hispanic); (Political)

Word Count: 484
7/15/11 APALERTPOLITICS 22:36:19
END OF DOCUMENT
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NEWS SUBJECT: (Government (1GO80); Legislation (1LE97))

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KEYWORDS: (n); (Legislative); (Political)

Word Count: 132
7/15/11 APALERTPOLITICS 17:52:22
END OF DOCUMENT

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SCOTT BAUER
Associated Press

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7/15/11 AP ALERT WI 22:36:19
END OF DOCUMENT

MADISON, Wis. A Wisconsin state Senate committee has passed Republican-written plans for redrawing political boundaries.

The committee voted 3-2 on Friday to pass both a map redrawing all 132 state legislative districts as well as one redoing the eight congressional districts.

The full Senate plans to vote on passing the maps Tuesday with the Assembly to follow on Wednesday.

Democrats spoke out against the maps, saying they are an unconstitutional power grab by Republicans.

No changes were made to the congressional map. Boundaries of two Milwaukee state Assembly seats were changed to slightly alter the percentage of Hispanic residents.

Changes were also made to a third bill to ensure that cities and counties that have already drawn new political boundaries won't have to redo them to comport with the state lines.

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Word Count: 132
7/15/11 APALERTWI 17:52:22

1/9/2012
July 15--JANESVILLE -- About half of Janesville's residents will report to different polling places because of the 2010 census and subsequent redistricting.

The city also renumbered its wards to return No. 4 to what historically was the Fourth Ward.

After a census, the county creates county board supervisory districts. The city in turn redraws its wards.

The Janesville City Council on Monday approved creating 25 city wards, down from 32 wards now, City Clerk Jean Wulf said.

The city will keep the same number of polling places but move three with the goal of improving voter access, Wulf said.

Marshall Middle School and Jefferson and Wilson elementary schools will be eliminated as polling places and Rotary Gardens, Harmony Elementary School and City Hall will be added.

Those changes account for about 30 percent of the residents who will change polling places, Wulf said.

The city also renumbered the wards so the Fourth Ward neighborhood--the downtown area that goes by its old-time ward number--is once again Ward 4.

The ward was renumbered 16 in 2000 after a county request, Wulf said.
The community requested that we change it back, and so we accommodated those requests," Wulf told council members Monday.

Burdette Erickson, a Fourth Ward resident, said the name is part of the neighborhood’s identity and has historic significance.

"Our neighbors would like to thank Jean Wulf for listening to the public input in giving us the Fourth Ward back," Erickson said. "We appreciate that."

The city expects to spend about $5,000 to notify voters of their new polling places and to print new ward maps. It will also put signs at former polling places on voting day to direct any wayward resident to new polling places.

The county is redrawing its 29 county board supervisory districts to equally divide the county’s 160,331 residents. District populations would vary by about 3 percent, meaning each county board supervisor would represent 5,337 to 5,710 residents.

Under the new plan, 13 county board supervisors would represent Janesville, down from 14 now.

Seven of the redrawn county board districts are completely within Janesville. Six are a mix of city and adjoining townships. In shared districts, the city represents the majority of the population except for District 9, Wulf wrote in a memo.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (FOURTH WARD; HARMONY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; MARSHALL MIDDLE SCHOOL) (Burdette Erickson; District; Erickson; Jean Wulf; Rotary Gardens; Wulf)

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Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, The
July 15, 2011

Under **redistricting** plan, nearly 300,000 would have 6-year wait for Senate vote

Patrick Marley
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

July 15--MADISON -- Nearly 300,000 Wisconsinites would have to wait six years, rather than four, before they had a chance to vote for a state senator in a regular election under a Republican plan rocketing through the Legislature.

GOP leaders have drawn new maps of legislative districts that shift many voters from one Senate district to another. Among them are 299,533 who last had a chance to vote for a state senator in 2008, but wouldn't be able to vote again in a regular election for the state Senate until 2014, rather than 2012.

Every 10 years, states must redraw the lines for congressional and legislative districts to account for population shifts detected by the U.S. Census. For decades, Wisconsin's maps have largely been drawn by courts because of legislative gridlock, but this time Republicans control the process because they hold both houses of the Legislature and the governor's office.

Democrats have decried the proposed map as overly partisan. A group of citizens that includes two Democratic former lawmakers sued over **redistricting** in federal court last month, even before Republicans unveiled their maps.

Jim Troupis, the attorney hired by Republican leaders to help draft the plan, said redrawing maps leads inevitably to moving some people into districts that will require them to wait longer to vote for a state senator. He said the current plan moves a similar number of voters as one written by federal judges in the early 1990s.

The situation occurs when a voter moves from an even-numbered district to an odd-numbered one. Elections will be held in 2012 in even-numbered districts and 2014 in odd-numbered districts.

"It's directly in line with past maps," Troupis this week said in a panel discussion on the WisconsinEye Public Affairs Network.

"It's hard not to have that happen and the consequence is simply because of the even/odd split of Senate districts. People try to avoid it as best they can, but it's inevitable that you will have that happen."

But Rebecca Mason, the attorney for the people who have sued over **redistricting**, said she
will closely review how many people are being displaced.

"The issue of disenfranchising 300,000 Wisconsin citizens is definitely something that we've been looking at and something that's a cause for concern," she said during the panel discussion. "If and when a map is passed, if the final numbers are the disenfranchisement of 300,000 Wisconsin citizens, that will be something we will examine quite closely."

The Senate Judiciary Committee approved the maps Friday, clearing the way for the Senate to take them up as early as Tuesday. The Assembly is expected to act on them soon after that.

In the 28th Senate District represented by Republican Mary Lazich, more than 44,000 voters -- many of them in Lazich's hometown of New Berlin -- would be scattered into four new districts. Those voters re-elected Lazich in 2008 and would normally return to the polls for a Senate election next year. Under the plan, they wouldn't have a say in who their state senator should be until 2014.

The biggest shift would happen in Kenosha County, where nearly 75,000 people would be pushed from the 22nd Senate District represented by Bob Wirch (D-Pleasant Prairie) to the 21st Senate District represented by Van Wanggaard (R-Racine). That is about 42% of the people in the district.

Now, the 21st Senate District consists primarily of Racine County and the 22nd Senate District consists primarily of Kenosha County. Republicans are dramatically reshaping the districts so that the 21st would be made up of the rural and suburban western portions of both counties, while the 22nd would include the City of Kenosha and the bulk of the City of Racine.

The result: One heavily Republican district (the 21st) and one heavily Democratic district (the 22nd), rather than two competitive districts.

The last time voters in the 22nd chose a senator was in 2008, when they re-elected Wirch. If the maps stayed the same, they would next vote in 2012, but the voters moved to the new district wouldn't have a regular election until 2014.

However, residents of the 22nd Senate District will vote for Senate candidates next month because Wirch is one of nine senators facing a recall election. Recall efforts against six Republicans and three Democrats were prompted earlier this year because of senators' stances on legislation to curb collective bargaining for public workers.

Thus, because of the recall election they would not have to wait a full six years between elections.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

1/9/2012
July 15, 2011 The Reporter

WAUPUN -- Waupun officials expect little to change in city voting wards when redistricting plans are finalized this fall.

The Reporter

Waupun Common Council members approved a resolution Wednesday night to establish aldermanic wards on both the Fond du Lac and Dodge County sides of the city. City Clerk Angie Hull said the city will enact an ordinance to finalize the new boundaries once Fond
du Lac and Dodge County supervisors establish supervisory districts.

The move is another step in aligning city voting wards with redrawn county maps as part of the redistricting process following the 10-year census.

Once every decade, election districts must be realigned based on population counts so that each is roughly the same size and citizens are represented equally in the process. The new Dodge County redistricting plan reflects the decrease in county supervisory districts, said County Board Chairman Russ Kottke. The County Board voted last year to trim its membership from 37 to 33 supervisors. One supervisory district near the city of Waupun will be eliminated.

"The municipalities had until this month to develop their own ward boundaries so that the populations are equal," Kottke said.

Hull said that the city worked with Dodge County to equalize the voting districts in the northern part of the county that house correctional institutions. To achieve that goal, prison inmate populations at Fox Lake Correctional Institution, Dodge Correctional Institution, Waupun Correctional Institution and the John Burke Corrections Center were spread out over several supervisory districts in the county and three aldermanic districts in the city of Waupun.

"This year the state allowed us to divide up the prison populations across the aldermanic wards so we didn't have to move a lot of the residential population," Hull said. "Except for about 15 residents, Waupun citizens will be listed in the same aldermanic district."

Hull noted that each aldermanic district is divided into two county supervisory districts. Residents living in the Fifth Aldermanic District will have two separate ballots during Fond du Lac County Board races.

Fond du Lac County Clerk Lisa Freiberg said county officials are still working on establishing new boundaries, adding that the redistricting committee would be meeting the first week of August. After county officials give supervisory districts their stamp of approval, municipalities will be asked to finalize their aligned voting districts.

"The council should be ready to create an ordinance by September approving the final boundaries for the aldermanic districts," Hull said.

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (FOND; JOHN BURKE CORRECTIONS CENTER; LAC COUNTY CLERK LISA FREIBERG; WAUPUN; WAUPUN COMMON COUNCIL) (City; Clerk Angie Hull; Hull; Institution; Kottke; Lac; 1/9/2012
YOUR VIEWS

Redistricting process shouldn't be rushed

If the Fitzgeralds' redistricting maps are legislated into reality, I would be shifted out of the 48th Assembly District - as would, apparently, the winning candidate in this week's special election.

We must protest the secrecy and speed with which the Fitzgeralds are pushing through this redistricting. To pull this stunt in the middle of ongoing elections is typical of their maneuvers, and detrimental to democracy.

- Karen Bassler, Madison

Forced primaries a lose-lose for us all

I find it hypocritical for Republicans in the Legislature to claim they are for saving taxpayer dollars, then to force primary elections which cost taxpayer dollars.

Why? They admit it was to give them more time to get ready for their recall elections. Sure, that gives them more time to raise more money for TV ads - and we all know that politicians pay back those who contribute by voting for their pet projects.
It's a lose-lose for all citizens.

- Ed Durkin, Winneconne

Credit union bill slipped into budget

Our state political system is broken. The merits of an argument no longer matter. What is best for the constituents no longer matters. Decisions are made by how much money has been donated, and how can that donor be rewarded, and how can we slip something in at the last minute.

The recent credit union conversion bill was slipped into the Wisconsin budget bill at the last minute by the Wisconsin Bankers Association. To quote Brett Thompson, president of the Wisconsin Credit Union League, "It was added to the budget bill at the last minute without notice to any credit union, any credit union member, or any credit union trade association, and without a public hearing."

Please re-read that quote. How could a bill that affects credit union members be passed without any input from the credit union industry or the public?

Why would the governor refuse to veto this amendment, which is clearly not a budgetary issue? I suspect it is money. There is no other reason to include this type of amendment in a budget bill.

This is shameful for the governor and all Wisconsin banks. This action is indefensible.

- Tom Pinnow, Jefferson

Insurance companies need regulation

Thursday's editorial, "Students protected from cuts," asked two questions. First, why didn't WEA Trust offer a deal earlier. That one is easy - the insurers are in the business of making money.

The second question was why didn't the board ask earlier for a reduction. This is more complicated and applies to both private and public entities.

A small private company would have a hard time gaining leverage when their rates go up by double digits, but this is not the case for public entities. When health insurance rates were increasing by double-digit percentages against inflation of around 3 percent, did the state Legislature ask the companies bidding for state business why their rates were many times the rate of inflation? Did they say they had tens of thousands of customers, so couldn't the state get a better rate?

1/9/2012
I'm glad to see the State Journal is beginning to see the system is broken and overpriced. Not only should WEA Trust have given a lower rate, they should have either had no increase or given a reduction from the previous year.

The people paying the bills are seeing no raises or salary cuts against that low inflation number. And insurance companies wonder why many people want to see them regulated.

- Derek Popp, Mount Horeb

Walker no hero in insurance savings

Thursday's editorial, "Students protected from cuts," implies that we should punish the teachers union because it also happens to be the owner of a for-profit business enterprise - WEA Trust.

Wisconsin Physicians Service is such an organization, but no one sees a conflict with medical doctors owning a for-profit enterprise that provides a service to patrons of their profession.

The savings are a happy consequence of the controversy, but I question Gov. Scott Walker with his anti-union agenda being the hero for prompting the savings. We deserve a better explanation about the failure to ask for lower prices than we have received from both the school boards and Walker. Lack of competition is the likely culprit.

But it did not require the elimination of collective bargaining rights to provide for a competitive bidding platform. Walker and the Legislature could have changed the law to require that public employee benefits be shopped on a competitive basis, which would have solved the problem without causing the controversy.

It appears that the fight over collective bargaining is between two bullies - corporate interests vs. organized labor - and once again taxpayers take it on the chin.

If we can justify limiting the ability of labor to produce benefit for its corporate being, how then can we not, for the same reasons, be able to limit corporate profits?

- John Whitesel, Pardeeville

--- INDEX REFERENCES ---

COMPANY: FITZGERALDS; WISCONSIN CREDIT UNION LEAGUE; WISCONSIN BANKERS ASSOCIATION

NEWS SUBJECT: (Inflation (1IN09); Prices (1PR65); Public Finance (1PU60); Economic Policy

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