

Restrictive Republican Voting Bills Give Lobbyists and Corporations 2, Voters 0

Posted on Mar 19, Posted by [Kathleen Vinehout, State Senator 31st District](#) Category [Wisconsin](#)



This week Senator Kathleen Vinehout writes about restrictive Republican voting bills recently passed by the state Senate that impact our elections. The bills would limit early voting hours, make it easier for lobbyists to make campaign contributions, and for corporations to shakedown employees for campaign contributions.

The early voting limitations will have a negative effect on both rural and urban voters. They make it easier for lobbyists to contribute to campaigns and for corporations to push their employees to contribute to candidates and take power from the people.

MADISON - Should it be easier for lobbyists to contribute to campaigns? Should corporations spend more money to ask their employees to make campaign contributions? Should Wisconsin limit early voting?

Is there any lawmaker who has citizens clamoring for any of the above?

Recently the Senate spent two days debating bills that open the window for lobbyists to contribute to campaigns and closes the window for voters to cast early ballots.

If the bills become law, lobbyists can contribute as early as April 15th [in the year preceding an election] and voters will be limited to just 10 weekdays of early voting.

This is the second attempt in recent years to limit early voting. In 2011, majority party members voted to limit early voting from three weeks with three weekends to two weeks with just one weekend.

In the new bill, early voting would be limited to the hours between 8:00 am and 7:00 pm. But clerks would be limited to only 45 weekday hours during this time period. Many cities, like Eau Claire, would be required by state law to cut back on the hours they now offer to voters.

Proponents of the bill blamed rural areas for the cut back in city hours. Senator Fitzgerald told the Senate his constituents complained because they saw Milwaukee citizens voting during a time “not available to people in rural areas.”

What he failed to mention, and I pointed out to all Senators, is the bill he touted as making things more equivalent for rural and urban voters now bans the often-used rural practice of voting by appointment on a weekend.

Some of my neighbors work in Winona, Minnesota. Some drive a truck for a living. Some work two jobs in Eau Claire – an hour away. Others work in Minneapolis – a full two hours away. I work in Madison far from my home in beautiful Buffalo County. Many of my neighbors and I vote on the weekend or in the evening at our town clerk’s kitchen table.

To say voters cannot make weekend arrangements with rural clerks – who also may work many miles from home – is to make voting very difficult for rural folks who work away from home.

And working long hours away from home isn’t limited to rural voters.

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel editorialized about the argument that this bill just leveled the playing field between urban and rural voters:

[T]hat's a thin veneer covering the real intent: what this bill really is all about is suppressing the Democratic vote in Milwaukee and Madison, where many of the state's people of color live. It's a highly partisan bill that harkens back to an earlier era when voting for certain groups of people was made much harder by strict poll laws. On that basis alone, Gov. Scott Walker should veto the bill.

While a majority of Senators were voting to limit both rural and urban voters, they were also making it easier for corporations to shake down their employees for campaign contributions.

In a bill now headed to the Assembly, a majority of senators voted to increase by 40 times the legal amount a corporation can spend to entice employees to contribute to a candidate. Candidate contributions by corporations are banned in Wisconsin. But chief executives get around the ban by asking spouses and employees to contribute. Under the bill, corporations will be able to spend up to \$20,000 to encourage employees to contribute to campaigns.

The basic problem with this practice is the power imbalance between an employee and the employer. Just like it's hard to say 'stop it' to a sexually aggressive boss, it's hard to say 'no' when the boss says, "Where's your contribution? Everyone else has given." Laws protect employees from sexual harassment by a boss. But asking employees to contribute to candidates is perfectly legal. Spending \$20,000 to do the asking may soon also be legal.

Limiting early voting, expanding corporations' power in soliciting campaign donations and, making it easier for lobbyists to contribute have nothing to do with the Governor's "focus like a laser on jobs".

And finally on the topic of elections, remember to vote – early while you still can - in the spring election on April 1st.

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