

GOP Plan to Kill State's Non-Partisan Watchdog Bureau An Overreach of Power

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MADISON - Republican lawmakers in Wisconsin on Monday were circulating a bill that would eliminate the state's independent Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB).

GOP sponsors of the bill said the state would be better served by auditors working within state agencies.

Under the proposal being circulated among GOP lawmakers, the independent audit bureau would be replaced by inspectors general who would provide auditing services to all state agencies with more than 100 employees, according to analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau.

Since its creation in 1966, the LAB has had a long history of independent audits of the Executive Branch. Governors of both parties have wished it would go away, fearing reviews they could not control. But none before Gov. Scott Walker has seriously attempted to kill it.

The existing audit bureau is a free-standing watchdog office that operates independently of the agencies it reviews. The bureau audits the practices of state agencies in addition to their books

under the oversight of a bipartisan Legislative committee.

Having internal "inspectors" who report to individual department heads would essentially mute any effective audit function within state agencies, according to one 33 year veteran agency manager. **"Having an employee audit their boss is essentially a joke"**, said our source. *"Any one really trying to be independent would quickly find themselves looking for work. That's why the audit function must be beyond the reach of the executive."*



Assembly Democratic Leader **Peter Barca** (D-Kenosha) agrees. In a statement issued Monday, Barca said of Rep. Dave Craig's proposal to eliminate the Legislative Audit Bureau:

"In a session filled with bad ideas, this is one of the worst in terms of adversely affecting the taxpayers' long-term interest."

"One of the greatest strengths of the Wisconsin Legislature is having nonpartisan service agencies like the Audit Bureau, Fiscal Bureau and Reference Bureau. Through these agencies, citizens can be assured they are getting the pure facts and that the information released is not being clouded by partisan judgment or political spin."

"Changing the nonpartisan, award-winning Legislative Audit Bureau into partisan appointees continues the Republican efforts to reduce oversight of state government. The move would allow for more partisan and special-interest influence and further erode Wisconsin's tradition of clean, open and transparent government."

"The timing is especially curious coming on the heels of the extremely critical audit of the Walker Administration's WEDC, which has been rife with mismanagement and perceived cronyism. Taxpayers deserve more oversight and accountability, not less."

During his time in the legislature, Rep. Barca has twice co-chaired the Joint Legislative Audit Committee.

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