

Who Wants to Serve?

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 20 March 2024 10:31 -

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Senator Smith writes about the rash of childish appointment rejections by Republicans in the state senate and how it is impacting Wisconsin's ability to attract talented people to serve.

MADISON - In the five years since taking office, Governor Evers has offered appointments ranging from cabinet secretaries to numerous boards and commissions for confirmation in the Wisconsin State Senate. The Republican-controlled senate has rejected 21 total appointments from the Governor.

The 21 appointments rejected in the last 5 years is far from normal. In fact, in the 40 years before Governor Evers, only 4 appointments were rejected. Rejecting appointments is usually reserved for the most egregious cases.

In the last five years, when the votes happened on the Senate floor, Democrats would ask for a reason why there were objections. Questions were mostly met with silence from the other side of the aisle. Occasionally, Republicans made excuses that had to do with how they didn't like the applicant's answer to a question. But it was always clear that it was either an ideological objection or punishment.

Since the start of Governor Evers' first term, Republicans refused to bring the secretaries and

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other appointees to a vote. As frustrating and childish as that was, it only meant that those appointees would go about their business anyway and wait for an eventual confirmation. Strangely, for some of the appointments, the Senate has had to appoint and reappoint in the same session day because the Senate has failed to bring the appointments forward for so long.

In November of 2019, one year after Governor Evers was elected, the Senate majority placed the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Secretary designee, Brad Pfaff, on the calendar for a vote. They chose to make an example of Brad Pfaff, who has since been elected to the State Senate. Not a single Republican voted to confirm his appointment and the Governor had to find a new secretary for DATCP. The message was clear that the Republicans had this power and were willing to abuse it when they didn't get their way.

You may recall the mess created by one member of the Natural Resources Board, Fred Prehn, who refused to step down at the end of his term in the spring of 2021. For over a year Mr. Prehn held out as a Governor Walker appointee while Governor Evers' appointee sat on the sideline unable to perform her duties. He held out to retain influence over chemical regulations in our water and decisions surrounding wolf hunting in Wisconsin. That case went to the then conservative State Supreme Court who ruled 4-3 that he didn't have to leave if the state senate didn't approve his replacement. That decision only emboldened Republicans to ignore appointments as long and as often as they want. Furthermore, citizens had to foot the legal bills. Taxpayers spent roughly \$76,000 to fund the legal fight for Prehn to remain on the board after his term expired.

During our final session day last week we voted on many appointments. But like any group of bullies there were eight people pulled out of the lineup of appointees and made examples of. Republicans needed to everyone one more time how petty they can be. What's worse is that on Equal Pay Day, Republicans rejected five women of the eight total appointments.

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