

## The Shell Game of Politics

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***The legislative process should involve deliberation and public hearings on proposals before the body, but it's easy to manipulate. Sen. Smith writes about the "shell game" Republicans play to divert attention from their true agenda.***

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MADISON - If you're not familiar with the phrase "shell game," it's a trick as old as the hills. A fast-talking swindler places three shells (or cups) on a table and places a ball underneath one of them.

While they distract you with a lot of talk, they quickly move the shells around, too fast to track. Then they ask you to choose under which shell the ball is hidden. If you pick the correct one, you win the prize.

But often your eye has lost track of the moving shells, the fraudster has already pocketed the ball and there is no longer any chance of winning this rigged game. In many ways, politics can be a shell game. It's certainly full of a lot of fast talking and a lot of misdirection.

For example, take the recent proposal offered by Republicans to fund refurbishing the publically-owned stadium leased to the Milwaukee Brewers. Keep in mind that the owner of the Brewers is a billionaire and the team itself is worth \$1.6 billion.



Despite this, Republicans released a proposal offering nearly \$700 million to upgrade the stadium. It sure sounds good that \$400 million on that is projected to come from the income tax paid by ballplayers.

But remove the \$400 million in revenue from players' income taxes and Wisconsinites are left on the hook to make up the difference. That means \$400 million not going to pay the state's financial obligations –revenue for local governments, police, fire protection and more.

The Legislature passed historic changes to our shared revenue formula this year, and authorized cash-strapped Milwaukee County and City of Milwaukee the ability to raise sales taxes.

This deal eats into that progress by forcing taxpayers to ante up for the Brewers beautification project. Despite complaining about “government handouts,” they sure do seem eager to support one.

(Oh – and while you're distracted by that, the plan also removes the local members from the stadium district board. But don't pay attention to that.)

Another shell game involves gerrymandering. As I described in last week's column, the Republicans who have maintained their majority by drawing themselves into safe districts have suddenly discovered the "Iowa Model" of redistricting.

Never mind that there have been considerable innovations since that 2013 model was introduced. Or that nonpartisan groups have spent years gathering public input about our legislative maps and they do not support this proposal.

Using language like "nonpartisan" to distract, Republicans don't want you to notice that they conveniently and surreptitiously omitted safeguards against politicians manipulating legislative district boundaries to stay in power.

But when a swindler sees that you may be catching onto their act, they get even more desperate.



For several years now, Republicans have rammed through legislation without genuine debate or public input. Their redistricting proposal is the latest and best example. They introduced it on a Tuesday, voted it through the Assembly on Thursday without holding a public hearing or asking for any public feedback.

