

What To Do When Voters Want Something Else

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 17 May 2023 09:00

<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/univ-student-vote-s453.jpg>



Sen. Smith discusses the recently introduced Republican shared revenue proposal that would take this important tool out of the hands of local governments.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - Have you ever seen a child throw a fit when they are losing a game? They may argue that the rules are unfair, they may change the rules or even flip the game board over and stomp off. I've witnessed that behavior, and the best way to respond is to ignore it and continue to move forward with the rest of the game. The only person they hurt is themselves and they must learn to accept that you cannot always win and have your best day.

Some adults, it seems, never learned that lesson. Maybe that type of behavior was accepted in their childhood, and their caregivers made excuses for them when they threw fits. When they didn't make the starting lineup, instead of trying harder they blamed the coach. When a call didn't go their way, they blamed the referee.

I've heard people refer to what goes on in our legislature as "playground politics" because it can be so petty and childish.

After the election last month in which a progressive candidate won a Supreme Court seat, there was plenty of lamenting from the supporters of the runner-up and indeed, from the candidate himself, who proved to be a very bad sport in his "concession speech."

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But a few weeks later Republican strategist Cleta Mitchell spoke to donors in Nashville about the results in Wisconsin. Her answer to the poor showing of this conservative candidate was not that conservatives should adjust their message or policies. No, she suggested instead that Republicans find new ways to suppress the vote of those who disagree with them.

Because young voters are showing up in record numbers, she complained that polling places were located too close to college dormitories and we should do away with early voting and same-day registration. This is nothing new – we heard similar takes from Wisconsin Elections Commissioner Bob Spindell referring to suppressing votes in Milwaukee. If they don't win, their strategy is to make it more difficult for their opponents to vote.

In many states, voters are able to put initiatives on the ballot by petition. For instance, Michigan voters didn't need to wait for their elected legislators to accept a fair method of drawing legislative district lines. They made it happen themselves through a grassroots effort and put the measure directly on their ballot. When asked to vote directly on the issue, Michigan voters were overwhelmingly in support of nonpartisan redistricting and roundly rejected gerrymandering in what's called a binding referendum.

In Wisconsin we do not have the ability to put measures directly on the ballot through grassroots initiatives. However, many communities have passed advisory ballot referenda to gauge how voters feel about various issues. You may have recently had the opportunity to make your voice heard on subjects like abortion rights, fair maps or marijuana legalization in one of these advisory referenda.

These subjects have garnered overwhelming support from voters, which almost always come out with nearly 70% in support of redistricting reform and decriminalizing marijuana. Yet nothing changes in Wisconsin, because we have a fringe group of legislators clinging to power and ignoring your voice in the Legislature.



If you're a regular reader of this column, you've heard me talk many times about the need for more funding for our local communities, often referred to as "shared revenue." In his budget,

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Governor Evers included a robust plan to get local communities the money they need to fund essential services.

But as usual, Republicans have a different plan.

In their recent introduction of a bill to “fix” shared revenue, rather than giving local communities the reins, Republicans have attached many strings to the increased funding going to municipalities.

One of these stipulations? Communities would no longer have the opportunity to place referendum questions on the ballot. Once again, when the answer does not fit their way of thinking they just want to remove your voice from the equation. Your opinions are making them look bad. How much of our freedom to speak is going to be lost before we have no voice at all?

Senator Smith represents District 31 in the Wisconsin State Senate. The 31st Senate District includes all of Buffalo, Pepin and Trempealeau counties and portions of Pierce, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson and St. Croix counties.