

How “Doing Nothing” Works for Politicians

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 23 September 2020 15:49

<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/robin-vos-is-safe-to-vote-s5.jpg>



We see politicians use a “Do Nothing” strategy to avoid responsibility or point fingers, says Sen. Smith in his weekly column.

MADISON - While scrolling through social media recently, I saw someone ask, “Why hasn’t Governor Evers distributed funds from the Heroes Act?” Others jumped all over this comment, claiming the Governor failed because the Heroes Act wasn’t being implemented when it could be.

The truth of the matter is the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Heroes Act several months ago to provide more COVID-19 relief to states; but the U.S. Senate hasn’t taken any action on the bill. Governor Evers cannot take action on federal funding that hasn’t actually passed Congress and signed by the President.

This anecdote provides a good lesson for many of us who may be confused about how our government works. This story also represents the “Do Nothing” political strategy we’re seeing used these days. The theory seems to be if politicians do nothing, you’ll forget and they won’t have to justify their inaction or provide an answer on a politically-risky vote.

In this hyper-polarized political climate, especially in the weeks ahead before an historic election, it’s critical we understand how our government works to serve the People’s best

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interests.

You see, most people consider the Governor as the top political leader, responsible for making all of the difficult decisions that affect our day-to-day lives. In reality, the Governor oversees the executive branch and there is a Wisconsin Supreme Court and a Wisconsin State Legislature. These three branches of government place checks and balances on each other. This system effectively works to prevent abuse within every branch of government and saves us from falling into a totalitarian state.



It's important to know the Governor can't act without the Legislature first passing bills. Republicans have now used this process to their advantage, as a political tool. The Majority Party realizes if they do nothing, then Governor Evers can't enact legislation to help Wisconsin families. Republicans also understand citizens will then place all the blame on the Governor while they hide and stay silent.

In Wisconsin, the Majority Party has taken the “Do Nothing” strategy to new heights (or lows depending on your view). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, their plan was to stop working by early March and get paid for the last 9 months of the year. At the time the pandemic hit, the Senate didn't even get through the final session calendar, so even less got done.

Amidst a global pandemic, an unemployment crisis and our country's awakening to the realities of systemic racism, the Majority Party has sat idly by. Wisconsinites have called their leaders to act. The Legislature could act, but this would throw their “Do Nothing” political strategy off.

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Disappointingly, the Majority Party developed another practice to carry out this strategy. They’ve learned they can delay and even avoid any action if they hide behind a task force. Task forces are designed to study new policy ideas and prepare legislation to be passed, but a task force only works if those involved are actually committed to seeing something get done.



This session, Governor Evers declared 2019 as the Year of Clean Drinking Water and offered solutions in his budget, which were ultimately rejected by the Republican-controlled Joint Finance Committee. Rather than acting on these policy proposals, the Assembly Speaker created a Water Quality Task Force, adding another hurdle to delay any progress from actually happening.

Most recently, Governor Evers declared a special session on police reform in response to the Jacob Blake shooting. Despite the fact that bills had been drafted and introduced from both parties, the Assembly Speaker established a Task Force on Racial Disparities, hoping it will delay action long enough for his members to get past the election and have you forget why it was necessary in the first place.

In the last session alone, there were thirty bills introduced from the various task forces established. [Only three of these bills were actually passed and signed into law](#), exposing the “Do Nothing” strategy and the consequence it has on our state.

The “Do Nothing” strategy only works if voters let it work. Demand more from your elected officials and hold them accountable. Make us the Working Legislature we should be.