



March 30, 2012

Historic day: Wisconsin's governor, lieutenant governor recalled

By KIRSTEN ADSHEAD

MADISON — To some, it's a feat. For others, a frustration.

But historic? Unprecedented?

On that there can be no argument.

The Government Accountability Board, or GAB, which oversees state elections, on Friday certified recall elections against Gov. Scott Walker, Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch and four Republican state senators.

Walker is only the third governor in the nation to be recalled to an early election, following California's Gray Davis in 2003 and North Dakota's Lynn Frazier in 1921.

Evan Mecham, of Arizona, faced a recall election in 1988, but he was impeached before it could be held.

According to GAB, petitioners collected 900,939 valid signatures to recall Walker — shy of Gray's 1.3 million.

But, then, California's population is 6.5 times greater than Wisconsin's.

"It certainly says the state (Wisconsin) is very politically engaged, the fact that so many signatures were gathered," said national recalls expert Joshua Spivak, who writes the Recall Elections Blog. "That's really an impressive amount."

Kleefisch is the first lieutenant governor in U.S. history to be recalled, said Spivak.

And the four Senate seats solidify Wisconsin's reputation as king of the statewide recalls.

Spivak said 42 state-level recall elections have occurred in the nation's history, and 15 of those — 36 percent — have taken place in Wisconsin in the past two years, including last summer's nine state Senate recall elections.

WHAT'S NEXT?

State law requires a recall election be held the Tuesday of the sixth week after the recall is certified.

That makes May 8 the election date.

That date, however, will become the date of the primaries if any are necessary. In those cases, the general recall election between the incumbent and the winner of the primary will be held June 5.

Republican Party of Wisconsin Executive Director Stephan Thompson said Republicans would run stand-in candidates, which the party bills as "protest candidates," as Democrats, "to guarantee that there is one clear date for the primary and one clear date for the general election.

The Republican Party will not actively campaign for the protest candidates, other than collecting nomination signatures to ensure their place on the ballot."

Democrats immediately struck back at the announcement of what they called "fake candidates."

"If Republicans end up running fake Democratic candidates in the recall elections, it shows how incredibly hypocritical they are," Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca, D-

Kenosha, said in a statement. “They have no regard for taxpayer dollars when it comes to giving themselves a political advantage.”

GAB Director Kevin Kennedy on Friday stuck to an estimate that he made in January, saying a statewide recall will cost about \$9 million.

Thompson said without “protest candidates, the Democratic Party would be able to control the dates in which Republican officials face election, potentially separating the elections for State Senate and Lieutenant Governor from the Governor.”

“The Democrats and their union bosses are the ones decided to force these baseless recalls on our state ...,” Thompson said in a statement.

Under state law, the incumbent’s name automatically is on the ballot unless the incumbent resigns within 10 days of the election being ordered.

Candidates for the recalls have until 5 p.m. April 10 to circulate and finalize nomination petitions.

State Senate candidates need to collect at least 400 signatures. Candidates for governor and lieutenant governor need a minimum of 2,000 signatures.

WHO'S IN?

A Democratic gubernatorial primary is all but certain.

Former Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk and state Sen. Kathleen Vinehout, of Alma, are running, and Secretary of State Doug La Follette is interested.

Walker’s 2010 challenger, Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, announced Friday afternoon that he would run as well, ending weeks of speculation.

A Marquette Law School poll released Tuesday said Barrett would perform better than Falk in head-to-head matchups with Walker, although the governor still beats them both.

Falk is the darling of many unions, which have blasted Barrett for using the tools of Act 10, the law that curbed collective bargaining for most unionized state employees, to fill Milwaukee’s budget holes.

The race, however, has narrowed since the same questions were asked in January.

“People are ready and eager for a change. They want to get our state back with a leader who will bring us together and knows how to balance a budget,” Falk said following the GAB meeting. “And I’m eager to do that.”

A message left with a staff member at Barrett’s campaign office Friday was not immediately returned.

At least one opponent has announced plans to run against each of the state senators facing a recall election.

- Former Democratic state Sen. John Lehman, who lost to state Sen. Van Wanggaard in 2010, said he will challenge the Racine Republican again.
- Wausau Democrats Assistant Assembly Minority Leader Donna Seidel and Jeff Johnson, according to media reports, are running to replace former Sen. Pam Galloway, R-Wausau, who resigned March 17, citing family health issues. GOP Rep. Jerry Petrowski, R-Marathon, is seeking the office as well.
- Former state Rep. Kristen Dexter, D-Eau Claire, plans to challenge state Sen. Terry Moulton, R-Chippewa Falls.
- Lori Compas, of Fort Atkinson, who led the recall effort against Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, said she will run against the Senate majority leader.

Media reports indicate at least four people vying to replace Kleefisch — Ira Robins, a Milwaukee private investigator; Bruce Berman, a Marinette contract driver; Dale Paul, a Portage correctional guard; and Mahlon Mitchell, of Fitchburg, president of the Professional Firefighters of Wisconsin.

SIDE NOTES ...

- GAB added one more name to the tally of those who want to recall Walker on Friday, after learning that Funky Van Den Elzen is a real person whose name should not be struck from the recall petition. GAB flagged other names, such as Princess High and Mohammed Ali, but ultimately verified their legitimacy.
- It is correct to say Walker et al. have been “recalled,” which refers to the incumbents being recalled to an early election. They may win or lose the election, but they already have been “recalled.”
- GAB also Friday agreed to give the public access to an online, searchable database of the names on the recall petitions. Victims of domestic violence and those advocating for them have been concerned about victims’ safety. But GAB said the recall petitions are a public document.