

March 30, 2012

GAB sets historic recall elections; GOP to field fake Dems

By PATRICK MARLEY

MADISON — State elections officials ordered a set of historic recall elections Friday, making Scott Walker the third governor in the nation to face a recall and Rebecca Kleefisch the first lieutenant governor to face one.

The Government Accountability Board, voting unanimously Friday, also set recall elections for four Republican state senators. One of those senators, Pam Galloway of Wausau, resigned earlier this month, but the recall election will be held anyway. One or more Republicans can run in her place.

“This is the recourse available to the people of Wisconsin when their public officials act in such an egregious fashion,” said Mike Tate, chairman of the state Democratic Party.

Within hours, the state Republican Party said it would run fake Democrats in all the races, ensuring there will be primaries.

“The protest candidates will run as Democrats to guarantee that there is one clear date for the primary election and one clear date for the general election,” said Stephan Thomas, the party’s executive director.

He said the move was made because otherwise some or all of the general elections for state senators would happen the same day as the primary for governor — when Democrats flood to the polls to pick their candidate for governor.

Walker, speaking to reporters while on a visit to a metal fabrication factory on Milwaukee’s south side said, he was prepared for the recall.

“I think we have a very clear choice between whether or not we go back to the days of double-digit tax increases, billion-dollar budget deficits or record job losses like we saw in the past before we were in office in Wisconsin and what we see right now in Illinois,” he said at Technical Metal Specialties Inc.

“Or do we continue down the positive foundation we’ve built in Wisconsin to move our state forward? My hope is, just as we earned the trust of the majority of voters in 2010, that we’ll have a chance to earn that trust again this June. So I look forward to sharing that message.”

Four Democrats have said they will run against Walker, with Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett. Barrett, who lost to Walker in 2010, announcing in an email to supporters Friday afternoon that he is joining the race.

Primaries had been expected in the races for governor and lieutenant governor. With the GOP’s announcement about running fake Democrats, they will now be guaranteed in all cases. The primaries will be May 8 and the general elections June 5.

Running the fake Democrats mirrors the move Republicans made in last year’s recalls to buy themselves more time to campaign. Democrats criticized last year’s effort for adding to costs for local election clerks.

“This is more of the same brand of dishonesty that has marked Scott Walker’s corrupt and divisive rule,” said a statement from Graeme Zielinski, a spokesman for the state Democratic Party.

The primary and general recall election are expected to cost \$9 million each — \$18 million in all.

The recalls — which come after an unprecedented nine state senators faced recall last year — were sparked by Walker's successful effort to all but eliminate collective bargaining for most public workers. Recall organizers turned their attention to senators in the short term because Walker was not eligible for recall until he had served a year in office.

Just two other governors have faced recall elections in the country's history: North Dakota Gov. Lynn Frazier in 1921 and California Gov. Gray Davis in 2003. Both were defeated.

Kleefisch is the first lieutenant governor in the country to face a recall election, according to Joshua Spivak, a senior fellow at the Hugh L. Carey Institute for Government Reform at Wagner College in New York who publishes a blog about recalls.

The board also voted 5-0 to post on its website databases of all those who signed the petitions.

"I think it would be very, very positive for the public to see what has been done in this recall and make it transparent," board member Gerald Nichol said.

The board had earlier made available on its site copies of all the petitions, but they are not searchable. Kevin Kennedy, the board's director, said people will be able to search for names in the database. When they get a hit, they will be able to click on a link that shows them an image of the petition page where the person's signature appears.

The database, which cost about \$150,000, will be posted as soon as possible, he said.

Four names will be removed from the database because they are listed as confidential voters who can keep their names off poll lists because of domestic abuse or other safety reasons, Kennedy said.

Tea party groups have already posted their own searchable databases of the petitions against Walker and the senators, but it does not include all signers and board officials have said it includes data entry errors.

The accountability board's ordering of the elections ended the ability of recall targets to raise unlimited sums to fight the efforts to remove them from office.

Normally, candidates must follow strict limits on how much they can raise from any individual, but those restrictions are not in effect from the time recall petitions are first circulated until the accountability board decides whether a recall election must be held.

Republicans used that quirk of the law from November until Friday to their advantage, with Walker raising as much as \$500,000 from one businessman — 50 times the usual \$10,000 limit. Democrats had to adhere to the normal limits during those four and a half months, putting them at a fundraising disadvantage.

The board determined there were 900,939 valid signatures to recall Walker, 67% more than the 540,208 needed to trigger the election. They eliminated more than 30,000 signatures that recall organizers submitted in January.

The board deemed 808,900 signatures against Kleefisch were valid. The same number was needed to recall her as for Walker, which is equivalent to 25% of the total votes cast in the November 2010 election for governor.

Among those removed from the petitions were more than 4,000 each for Walker and Kleefisch. Those who signed twice had one signature counted and one eliminated.

Other signatures were removed for a range of reasons, such as providing an incomplete date or listing a post office box instead of a street address.

Among those removed from Walker's petitions were four names the board found to be fictitious — Adolf Hitler, Mick E. Mous, Donald L. Duck and I Love Scott Walker Thanks. Board staff on Thursday had recommended striking the name Funky Van Den Elzen as fictitious, but on Friday the board counted her signature after a board attorney said he had determined it was legitimate after all.

As the elections were ordered, the Republican Governors Association announced the launch of a new round of stateside ads against Barrett and former Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk, who is already in the race against Walker.

Voters "know that we need a change," Falk told reporters after the election was ordered. "People want a leader who will bring us together."

Also running against Walker are Secretary of State Doug La Follette and state Sen. Kathleen Vinehout of Alma.

Last year six Republican and three Democratic state senators faced recalls, the largest wave of state lawmakers over a single issue in the country's history. In those recalls, Democrats narrowed the GOP majority in the Senate from 19-14 to 17-16.

Earlier this month, Galloway quit, leaving the Senate equally divided, 16-16. The upcoming recall elections will determine the control of the Senate, but only in the short term. Signatures are being gathered in an attempt to recall Democratic Sen. Bob Jauch of Poplar, and half the Senate is up for election in the fall.

Those facing recall in the coming weeks are Senate Republican Leader Scott Fitzgerald of Juneau and GOP Sens. Terry Moulton of Chippewa Falls and Van Wanggaard of Racine. Recall organizer Lori Compas is running against Fitzgerald; former Rep. Kristen Dexter of Eau Claire is running against Moulton; and former Sen. John Lehman of Racine is running against Wanggaard.

For Galloway's seat, Rep. Donna Seidel (D-Wausau) is running against Jerry Petrowski (R-Stettin).

The Democrats planning to run for lieutenant governor are Madison firefighter Mahlon Mitchell, Milwaukee private investigator Ira Robins and Marinette truck driver Bruce Berman.