



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on August 17, 2011

Both Sides Claim Win After Final Wis. Senate Recall Vote

Both incumbent Democrats facing recall elections on August 16 managed to hold their Wisconsin state Senate seats, leaving Republicans with a narrow 17-to-16 majority following the largest string of recall campaigns in American history.

Democratic state Sen. Jim Holperin survived the election with about 55 percent of the vote against first-time Republican candidate Kim Simac, a Tea Party activist and mother of nine. GOP contender Jonathan Steitz, an attorney, garnered about 42 percent against incumbent Democrat Bob Wirsch.



Last week, six Republican state Senators were also [forced to defend their seats](#). Democrats needed to win at least three of those races to gain control of the state Senate, but succeeded in taking only two from vulnerable incumbents one of whom was facing a scandal. In July, another Democrat held on to his office as well.

While both houses of the legislature and the Governors office are still controlled by the GOP, Democrats and union bosses are hoping the two seats they gained could give them more influence. One possibility raised by analysts involves prodding a moderate Republican or two into voting against some conservative legislation expected in the coming months.

The nine recall races, stemming from a [battle earlier this year over limiting the collective-bargaining privileges of government employees](#), attracted intense attention around the country. Wisconsin became a national battleground as unions and state officials across America watched to see what would happen.

Analysts and commentators frequently [referred](#) to the recalls as a referendum on Gov. Scott Walker and the GOP. Some even said the historic political battle would serve as an early indicator for the 2012 presidential election.

If Democrats and the tax-funded unions which fill their campaign coffers had performed better, there would have been repercussions for other states working to tackle budget deficits by curbing plush public-sector benefits. However, if the GOP had done better, state officials across America might have been further emboldened to take on Big Labor.

Because of the [perceived high stakes involved](#), an estimated \$40 million was spent much of it coming from out of state. Labor unions were among the biggest spenders, but a wide range of advocacy groups on both sides ran non-stop ads trying to influence voters.

And while Democrats and their union allies spent far more than the GOP and conservative groups, the effort to seize control of the state Senate from Republicans ultimately failed. Still, both sides attempted to portray the recall results as a victory for their causes.

Wisconsin now emerges from this recall election season with a united Republican majority who has beaten off an attack from national unions and special interests and emerged steadfastly committed to carrying forward a bold job creation agenda, Republican Party of Wisconsin Chairman Brad Courtney



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[declared](#) in a statement, praising the GOP candidates while blasting Democrats and their tactics. The amount of support received by these political newcomers [who did not win on Tuesday] should send a message to all current and future elected officials in this state: if you abandon your constituents and refuse to represent their interests in Madison, there will be significant backlash.

Courtney also touted the success of recent Republican policy reforms so far. With almost 40,000 new jobs, a balanced budget, and school districts across the state saving millions, Wisconsin is in a great position for continued growth with a Republican majority willing to put the needs of middle-class families ahead of the demands of union bosses, he concluded.

Republican politicians in Wisconsin had varied reactions. Gov. Scott Walker, whose budget-repair bill sparked weeks of mass protests by government employees and ultimately the recall elections, emphasized getting back to work.

"With the uncertainty of the recalls over, the governor is looking forward to working together with the Legislature and job creators to get more Wisconsinites back to work," his spokesman, Cullen Werwie, [said](#) after the elections.

But Republican Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald took a more aggressive approach. "The problems facing our state are too serious for these political games, and the Democrats' permanent campaign cycle," he said in a statement. "The Democrats need to start working with the other side of the aisle, not just moving on to their next recall target."

Democrats, meanwhile, celebrated the results painting the outcome as a resounding success. Democrats won more races, recalled two Republican senators, protected every Democratic incumbent, shifted the balance of power in the state Senate away from conservatives, and forced Walker and the GOP to pay public lip service to moderation and bipartisanship for the first time since they took power in January, [said](#) Democratic Party of Wisconsin Chair Mike Tate in a statement.

Union bosses, outraged after the state made membership and union dues optional for most government employees, were particularly ecstatic about the results. And though they were hoping for another outcome Democratic control of the state Senate labor leaders still tried to portray the recall outcomes as something of a backlash against Gov. Walker and his policies.

Tonights election wins continues [sic] to show that the people of Wisconsin are looking for a check on Scott Walkers reckless and radical agenda, [claimed](#) Wisconsin AFL-CIO boss Phil Neuenfeldt in a press release. This turning tide shows that voters in Wisconsin are sending a clear message: The rubber-stamping of Walkers extreme agenda by the Wisconsin Senate is not the way forward.

Various union front groups and national leftist organizations, which poured millions into the recall races on behalf of Democrats, also applauded the results. But analysts disagreed about whether the outcome of the historic recall effort was a victory for Republicans, Democrats, or neither.

The battle in Wisconsin really began after Republicans swept to power in 2010. [Facing multi-billion-dollar budget deficits and out-of-control spending, Gov. Walker offered a plan to trim government spending and rein in tax-funded unions.](#)

The legislation essentially forced most government employees to contribute slightly more to their extraordinarily generous pension and health benefits, while limiting future demands that public servants could impose on taxpayers. Union bosses and government-sector workers across America [erupted in fury, staging weeks of demonstrations and vowing to punish](#) anyone businesses, politicians,



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and even judges who supported the plan.

Democratic state Senators, whose political campaigns rely heavily on union funds, fled the state in an effort to stop the bill. The measures passed in March anyway, but the conflict led to the unprecedented series of recall elections that ended on Tuesday; conservatives targeted Democrats for leaving the state, while unions and leftist activists took aim at Republicans for backing the reforms.

Before the recent recalls, a union-backed campaign to replace a conservative state Supreme Court Justice failed humiliating activists who had vowed revenge against those supporting Gov. Walker and his reforms. Then came the recall elections. Unions had hoped to flip control of the state Senate, but failed again.

Democratic Party leaders and labor leaders said there would still likely be a campaign to recall Gov. Walker as soon as he is eligible one year after he took office. Strategists [questioned](#) the wisdom of such a move, however, in light of recent polls showing that most people would be opposed to it.

The total cost of the recalls to taxpayers remains unclear so far, but it is estimated in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. What happens next remains to be seen. However, the battle for Wisconsin is likely not over yet.



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