



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on August 10, 2011

Wisconsin GOP Holds Senate After Recall Vote

Four of the six Republican state senators forced to defend their seats in a historic recall election on Tuesday emerged victorious, keeping the Wisconsin state Senate under GOP control despite a massive union-backed campaign sparked by reforms passed earlier this year. Democrats needed to win at least three of the races to gain a majority.



Two Democrat state Senators will also face voters next week in separate recall elections. But even if they win both races, Democrats will still be in a 17-to-16 minority. Republicans also still control the state Assembly and the Governor's mansion.

[Charges of vote fraud](#) in at least one of the August 9 recall races were initially raised by Democrats. But within hours, the party backed off.

"Voters made a clear choice to continue down the path of economic progress that Wisconsin has been on for the past seven months," Executive Director Stephan Thompson of the state GOP said in a statement, touting the success of Republican policies so far. "The assault that was unleashed on our state by national unions and special interest groups has been defeated by the will of the taxpayers to move our state forward, and put the needs of Wisconsin families above union demands."

The GOP candidates who kept their offices were Luther Olsen (pictured above), Rob Cowles, Sheila Harsdorf, and Alberta Darling. Republicans Dan Kapanke and Randy Hopper both lost and will be replaced in the coming weeks by Democrats Jennifer Shilling and Jessica King, respectively. Democrat state Sen. Dave Hansen managed to keep his seat in a recall held in July.

"It looks like the special interests were able to defeat senators Hopper and Kapanke, two exceptional senators," [said](#) Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald. "They took a bullet for the taxpayers, and the people of Wisconsin owe them a debt of gratitude for putting the interests of the state before their own."

One the Republicans who lost, state Sen. Randy Hopper, was actually under heavy fire for leaving his wife and taking a much younger mistress, who ended up getting a well-paying government job, sparking even more controversy. So, as expected, Democrat Jessica King was able to win the election by about two percent, in a contest that was more a referendum on public morality than on government spending.

But the results are being celebrated as a victory for Gov. Scott Walker, the state GOP, and its policies. A barrage of legislation passed this year including budget cuts, reining in the collective-bargaining privileges of government employees, requiring identification to vote, and less restrictive gun laws had leftist activists in an uproar across America.

The "[budget-repair bill](#)" - aimed at eliminating multi-billion dollar deficits by weakening the grip of tax-funded unions and forcing state workers to contribute slightly more to their health and pension plans



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—provoked a [firestorm of protest](#) among government employees that eventually led to nine separate recall elections. Republicans were targeted for supporting the measure, while Democrats came under fire for fleeing the state in an effort to block the vote.

The unprecedented recall efforts [attracted nationwide attention and money](#) because the stakes were seen as extraordinarily high. Public officials in other states grappling with soaring budget deficits and powerful government-employee unions paid particularly close attention. Some analysts even said the Wisconsin elections would serve as an early indicator in the 2012 presidential race.

Over \$30 million — much of it from out of state — was spent on the recall campaigns, according to election-financing watchdog groups. The figure shattered several records and highlighted the perceived significance of the races.

Unions and national leftist groups, backing union-friendly Democrats, [reportedly](#) outspent conservative organizations by a two-to-one margin. But the results were disappointing for activists and union bosses hoping to intimidate politicians nationwide.

"Last November, the voters sent a message that they wanted fiscal responsibility and a focus on jobs," Gov. Scott Walker [said](#) after the recall election. "In our first months in office we balanced a \$3.6 billion deficit and our state created 39,000 new jobs."

Striking a bi-partisan tone despite the victory, he said it was also clear that voters wanted both parties to work together to improve the state. And on that note, Gov. Walker explained that he had reached out to the leadership of Republicans and Democrats in both houses of the state legislature.

"I shared with them that I believe we can work together to grow jobs and improve our state," he said in the statement. "In the days ahead I look forward to working with legislators of all parties to grow jobs for Wisconsin and move our state forward."

Even after failing to take the state Senate, however, Democrats and unions still tried to portray the results as a victory. "We went on their turf and we won on Republican turf," state Democrat Party Chairman Mike Tate [boasted](#) to the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*. "We will not stop, we will not rest ... until we recall Scott Walker."

Senate Minority Leader Mark Miller also tried to paint the outcome as a win. "We pushed the Republicans and their special interest allies to the limit in strongly Republican districts," he said in a [statement](#). "The middle class and working families stood up to the special interests and the right-wing extremists and won."

Similarly, union bosses — who poured millions into the campaigns — celebrated the results, too. "Let's be clear, anyway you slice it, this is an unprecedented victory," Wisconsin AFL-CIO chief Phil Neuenfeldt said in a statement. Other tax-funded labor groups echoed the remarks.

Despite the results, unions and activists still plan to try to recall Gov. Scott Walker. But because state law only allows politicians to be recalled after they have served at least one year in office, the effort will not officially get underway for a few months. Strategists, however, questioned the wisdom of such a campaign in light of this week's failed attempts to wrest control of the state Senate.

Outraged activists across America also waged a massive battle earlier this year to replace a conservative justice on the Wisconsin Supreme Court with a more union-friendly judge. But that bid also failed, humiliating union bosses who had vowed to punish anyone that stood in their way.

Analysts commenting on the results of the recall elections have, in most cases, tried to downplay the



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national significance. But leftists and unions — like conservatives and Tea Party activists — promised that their movement is just getting started.

Photo: Wisconsin state Sen. Luther Olsen



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