

## **Keeping Our Elections Secure, With Help from the Feds**

*by Senator Jon Erpenbach, Representative Chris Taylor, and Senator Lena Taylor.*

Wisconsin's elections are unique when compared to other states. Local clerks are in charge in communities all over the state, combined with a central list verified by the Wisconsin Elections Commission. This decentralization makes us not only different but also protected in many ways from an election data attack. Still, we know that attempts were made to sabotage our election systems in the 2016 Presidential Election by foreign attackers.

Nothing is more pressing than ensuring that our elections are accurate, secure and valid. Yet Governor Walker vetoed three staff that the Joint Committee on Finance added to the Election Commission even when he knew that there was a threat to the security of our elections. The Elections Commission, clearly dedicated to elections more than political favor, subsequently filed a request to the Legislature to add back three positions. That request languished in the Joint Committee on Finance even though the committee voted to allocate millions of dollars elsewhere.

We now know that the withdrawal of the Elections Commission request for staff from the state budget committee is because of the new \$7 million Federal grant that will be allocated to Wisconsin. In March 2018, Congress appropriated \$380 million under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to be distributed to the states to improve election administration, including technology enhancements and election security. What a boon for us that the Federal government has stepped up when Republicans in this state did not. While we are thankful, it is not missed that IF we had not gotten the grant from the Federal government THEN we would have entered another statewide November election without the staff needed to support our election security. Ironically, the Federal government sees the threat to democracy in Wisconsin as more important than Republican policymakers in our own state.

Wisconsin's election system has always worked to do everything right. Our decentralized system protects and double checks verified voters. We have a paper trail. We have been conservative in our machine purchase. We have had (recently made harder) a simple option for campaigns to request a recount so that every single ballot is touched one more time by the hands of our local leaders who dedicate themselves to the integrity of elections. But still we know attempts were made to attack our election databases.

Supporting our local clerks to make sure our election officials are well trained, know how to detect deceit, and to maintain secure and fair elections should be our highest priority as a democracy. We are lucky someone stepped in to support our election integrity. It is just a shame it was not the Governor or the Republican legislative majority elected to govern this state.

*Representative Chris Taylor, Senator Lena Taylor and Senator Jon Erpenbach are Democratic members of the Joint Committee on Finance, the state budget committee.*