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Lame Duck Legislation Will Be Costly to Taxpayers and our Democracy

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Here in Wisconsin, we value decency and fairness. That's why it was astounding to see Republicans convene a lame duck legislative session, overriding the will of the voters. This isn't just mean-spirited or unfair – it's undemocratic. In record turnout, the people of Wisconsin spoke loud and clear this November: they want change. They didn't expect the legislature to limit the ability for the newly-elected governor and attorney general to do their jobs, but that's just what Republican legislators did. Over 72 hours, mostly in the dead of night, they fast-tracked bills for their own political gain, even as 1400 people registered against their bills.

Assembly Speaker Vos said, "The situation that we are sitting in right now if we do not pass these proposals is that we are going to have a very liberal governor who is going to enact policies that are in direct contrast to what many of us believe in." Senate Majority Leader Fitzgerald said, "Listen, I'm concerned. I think that Governor-elect Evers is going to bring a liberal agenda to Wisconsin." They clearly broadcast their intent: to halt the change Wisconsin voted for.

In one fell swoop, Senate Republicans approved 82 appointees, including two members of the Board of Regents. They cut early voting hours in half, directly defying the orders of a judge who already struck down their law limiting early voting as unconstitutional. They passed legislation requiring the attorney general to ask the legislature for permission to withdraw from lawsuits, like the challenge to end the Affordable Care Act, which would end protections for people with pre-existing conditions if successful. They required the governor to get permission from the legislature to change benefit programs run by the state and federal governments. From allowing legislators to hire private attorneys using taxpayer money, to giving legislators the power to intervene in lawsuits, these bills are loaded with ways to bloat the authority of power-hungry politicians while forcing taxpayers to foot the bill. These bills aren't just costly to taxpayers, but also to our democracy.

You'll notice they didn't advertise any of these changes on the campaign trail. In fact, drafting notes reveal these bills were drafted two weeks after the election, when Republicans lost every statewide race. This isn't just about being sore losers — this is about consolidating their power. If this were an important part of their agenda, why didn't they pass these bills over the last eight years? One thing changed: they no longer hold every lever of power in state government. Just as they have with partisan gerrymandering, flooding more money into campaigns, and limiting voting access, Republican legislators are abusing their power to help themselves over their own constituents. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should — and the courts will decide if they even could. After all, the separation of powers in our Constitution isn't a suggestion.

It's dangerous for democracy to wield your power by undermining the very checks and balances meant to make our government work. We are in a new era of politics where craven politicians feel insulated enough from the public that they'll do anything to cling to power. However, I have faith that the people of Wisconsin will see this lame duck legislation for what it is and urge Governor Walker to veto these bills. I hope he listens, or he'll leave office in disgrace. Instead of overriding the will of the voters, it's time to put the people of Wisconsin first and work together to improve your lives. After all, that's what you asked us to do in November.