



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
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**Ethics Commission Already Showing Signs of Disarray**

*By Rep. Gary Hebl*

This past year, the nonpartisan Wisconsin Government Accountability Board (GAB) ceased operations, making way for the Wisconsin Elections Commission and the Wisconsin Ethics Commission. Democrats in the Legislature balked at turning the GAB- a model for effective ethics and elections agencies across the country- into two separate, partisan groups. Nonetheless, the Republican majority in the Legislature pushed it through in 2015 and it went into effect June 30, 2016.

Republicans felt that the GAB overstepped its role in the investigation into potential illegal coordination between Governor Walker's recall campaign and outside groups. However, as the state's regulatory agency on campaign finance, ethics, and elections, the nonpartisan judges on the GAB were simply carrying out the job they were hired to do.

The bill that split the board into two separate agencies also got rid of the ban on corporate political contributions and doubled the limit of allowable individual contributions to candidates. Indeed, instead of restoring confidence in the oversight of elected officials and elections, it allows for the possibility of greater corruption.

Then on Monday, December 11, Robert Kinney- a reserve judge appointed to the ethics commission- resigned his post. In his resignation, he noted that the secrecy surrounding the proceedings of the commission almost entirely preclude the public.

In a telling event, Kinney also noted that at a meeting in October, the six members of the Commission- four of which were appointed by Republicans- came one vote shy of removing the phrase "furthering Wisconsin's tradition of clean and open government" from the mission statement of the Commission. Not only that, Kinney stated that some on the Commission show an "observable lack of commitment" in administering Wisconsin's campaign finance ethics laws.

It seems clear that the move to dismantle the GAB was not done to strengthen anti-corruption efforts in Wisconsin but rather appears to be blatant punishment for daring to investigate Republicans. It is unfortunate that Legislative Republicans are more focused on retribution than ensuring trust in our government. Weeding out corruption and fighting for fair and open government remains a high priority of mine in the upcoming legislative session.

*Rep. Gary Hebl represents the 46<sup>th</sup> Assembly District, which includes the cities of Sun Prairie and Stoughton, the village of Cottage Grove, and the townships of Cottage Grove, Dunkirk, Pleasant Springs, and Sun Prairie.*

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