



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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For immediate release:
August 18, 2011

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Legislators circulate bill to ensure speedy special elections

Madison – Under current Wisconsin law, when there is a vacancy in the State Senate or Assembly, the Governor is directed to call a special election to fill the vacancy, yet state law is silent on the amount of time that can elapse between vacancy and election. Today, State Representative Mark Pocan (D-Madison) and State Senator-Elect Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse) circulated a bill amongst their colleagues that would require the Governor to call a special election within 60 days of the vacancy.

“I don’t think Wisconsin’s founders ever imagined a scenario in which Wisconsinites could go unrepresented for long periods of time, but we found a loophole and we intend to fix it,” said Pocan. “If we’ve learned anything over the past year, it is that the people have the right to have their voices heard inside the State Capitol, regardless of political affiliation.”

Under the proposed bill, which is currently circulating as LRB-2132/2 and LRB-2669/1, the Governor would be required to order an election within 60 days after the vacancy occurs. Current law, which requires the Governor to select an election date within 62 and 77 days after he orders an election, would remain in place under this bill.

“If there is one message that I heard loud and clear over the past eight months, it is that the people in this state want to have a say in their democracy,” said Shilling. “By creating a clearly defined process for filling vacancies, we can help to strengthen our state and reduce the possibility of partisan politics getting in the way of proper legislative representation.”

On January 3, 2011, Representatives Huebsch, Gottlieb and Gundersen each resigned their seats after receiving appointments from Governor Walker. Walker called for the special elections to fill these vacancies February 23, 2011 and the elections were held May 3, 2011. Representative Joe Parisi resigned his seat April 14, 2011 and Walker called for a special election May 24, 2011. Parisi’s seat was filled August 9, 2011. A fifth special election will be needed to fill Shilling’s La Crosse, Wisconsin Assembly seat after she was recently elected to the State Senate in a recall election.

The deadline for legislators to become co-sponsors of the bill is 5pm on August 30, 2011.