

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
July 20, 2015

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Statement on G.A.B.'s Future

MADISON, WI – Kevin J. Kennedy, director and general counsel of the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board, today issued this statement:

There has been a great deal of misinformation about the Government Accountability Board in the past two weeks, especially following Thursday's Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling. The G.A.B. has been a Wisconsin success story, and in many important ways has achieved what the Legislature intended by combining two separate agencies. At the time, the Legislature determined that Wisconsin needed an independent watchdog to ensure that elections, ethics, campaign finance and lobbying laws are administered and enforced in a transparent nonpartisan manner. Those goals remain central to our daily work at the G.A.B.

The G.A.B. has established itself as a model to be emulated throughout the country. We have been nationally recognized as one of the top performing states in the administration of elections, lobbying and campaign finance laws. We have been consistently commended by our local election partners and customers as indispensable to the effective and fair administration of those laws. Policymakers and elected officials should be bragging about and taking credit for the structure and accomplishments of the G.A.B., and ensuring that it has the resources to continue its statutory responsibilities. Unfortunately, it has become more expedient to use the G.A.B. as a political target than to honestly assess its performance.

In establishing the requirements for our Board and staff, the Legislature determined that this agency would be accountable not only to partisans, but to our many customers. We receive strong, positive feedback every day regarding the assistance we provide to local clerks, candidates and political committees, public officials, and voters. Almost all of that work is completely separate from the political dramas that make the headlines.

Even in the midst of controversies and events outside its control, the nonpartisan and professional G.A.B. has proven its value. It has been thoughtful and thorough in responding to any concerns raised by the Legislature and others. The G.A.B.'s efforts to implement recommendations resulting from the recent legislative audit were swift and complete. And while the G.A.B. is often sued as the agency that enforces and administers election and campaign finance laws, typically any negative court decisions result from shortcomings in the laws that have been passed, not from decisions or actions of the G.A.B.

The Legislature expected and intended the Government Accountability Board to operate in a professional, unbiased, and nonpartisan manner. In doing so, we have been accountable not to

any single individual or political party, but to the will of the people of Wisconsin as expressed in its laws. The Legislature and Governor are free to change those laws of course, but I am proud of what the agency has achieved since its inception. It would be shortsighted to simply disregard that success.

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The Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) is responsible for administration and enforcement of campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying laws in Wisconsin. The G.A.B. is made up of six non-partisan, former judges and is supported by an agency of non-partisan staff members.