GAB requests $250,000 from Joint Finance Committee To Educate Voters.

MADISON - During the Government Accountability Board (GAB) meeting this week, members voted 4-2 to seek $250,000 from the Joint Committee on Finance to educate voters about Republicans' unnecessary photo ID law.

Gov. Walker and Republicans approved the law in 2011 to require certain forms of photo identification to be shown at the polls to vote, even though in-person voter fraud has proven to be virtually non-existent in Wisconsin. [1] It officially became the law this year for the February 16 spring primary and the April 5 presidential primary election.

Wisconsin failed to appropriate adequate funds to educate the public ahead of the April 5 elections, and in turn, voters in some areas waited up to three hours to cast a ballot, were confused about the necessary requirements to cast a ballot and were even turned away due to misinformation on the part of poll workers. On election night, Congressman Glenn Grothman revealed he believed that photo ID requirements gave Republicans an edge heading into the fall election. [2]

"Democrats in Wisconsin, and across the nation, believe the right to vote is sacred, and the public shouldn't have to jump hurdles just to have their voices heard," Democratic Party of Wisconsin Executive Director Kory Kozloski said on Thursday. "If photo ID is going to be the law of the land during the current election cycle, then the state has an obligation to do all it can to educate the public and ensure that everyone who is eligible to cast a ballot will be able to do so."

In October of 2015, the GAB informed Sen. Mary Lazich it would need $300,000 to $500,000 from the state to broadcast advertisements and decided against making a formal funding request to the legislature after being attacked by Republicans who introduced, and successfully passed, a bill to dismantle the non-partisan elections watchdog agency. [3] [4]

In light of the GAB's vote, Joint Finance Committee Co-Chair, Rep. John Nygren, signaled he didn't think it was a problem to grant the $250,000 request. [5] However, yesterday, Rep. Nygren did a rhetorical moonwalk in a formal statement, saying he would consider the request.

Even more troubling is the sentiment of Gov. Scott Walker and Rep. Robin Vos, who blamed the legal challenges for the Walker Administration's complete incompetence in educating the public on Wisconsin's extreme and incredibly strict voter ID laws.

"This is not a partisan issue. Voting rights should extend to all people, regardless of their political inclination," concluded Kozloski. "The Joint Finance Committee and Gov. Walker's Administration need to step up and do what's right by American Democracy, and of course, the people of Wisconsin."

BACKGROUND:

[1] Despite A 0.0002 Percent Rate Of Voter Fraud, Reince Priebus Claims Wisconsin Is 'Riddled With Voter Fraud' Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus made a curious claim on MSNBC today, alleging that Wisconsin is a state "that was absolutely riddled with voter fraud." The problem? A recent study by the nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice found just seven cases of voter fraud out of three million votes cast in Wisconsin during the 2004 election, a fraud rate of 0.0002 percent. [ThinkProgress, 12/2/11]

[2] Grothman: Voter ID law will help eventual GOP nominee win Wisconsin After explaining that he thought Hillary Clinton is a weak nominee for the Democrats, Grothman said "now we have photo ID, and I think photo ID is gonna make a little bit of a difference as well." [WTMJ-TV, 4/5/16]

[3] Wisconsin's Voter ID Law Requires an Education Campaign, Which the State Hasn't Funded In October, the agency met with Republican State Senator Mary Lazich, who was a primary sponsor of the voter ID bill in 2011, to inquire after funding and received a tepid response. The board told Lazich that it would need $300,000 to $500,000 from the state legislature to broadcast advertisements. The legislature had twice appropriated money for public information campaigns during the 2012 and 2014 election cycles, but the ads barely hit the airwaves before court injunctions delayed the law from going into effect. [ProPublica, 3/24/16]

[4] Wisconsin's Voter ID Law Requires an Education Campaign, Which the State Hasn't Funded After the meeting, the Government Accountability Board decided against making a formal funding request to the legislature, which had already introduced a bill to dismantle the agency .
[ProPublica, 3/24/16]

[5] .@rep89 on @Wisconsin_GAB request for $ for voter ID education: "$250K, to assure every vote is counted, I don't think is a problem." [Twitter, 4/26/16]