

Gov. Evers is right to call for binding referendums, and how this call echoes one from another progressive Wisconsin governor 111 years ago! - Matt Rothschild

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MADISON - On Sept. 21, Gov. Tony Evers made a bold move: He came out in favor of binding referendums, and he called the Legislature back to vote on beginning the process of amending our Wisconsin Constitution to provide for such popular sovereignty.

Noting the motto inscribed in the Capitol that proclaims, " The will of the people is the law of the land," Evers pointed out that this is no longer true in Wisconsin – especially on abortion rights.



"Well, right now, today, when it comes to reproductive freedom, the will of the people isn't the law of the land. And it damn well should be, folks. It really should," Evers said.

Evers is right about reproductive freedom. In the latest Marquette Law School poll, 63 percent opposed the overturning of Roe v. Wade, and 83 percent of Wisconsinites favored allowing a woman to get an abortion in cases of rape and incest. And that included 70 percent of Republicans. Only 10 percent of Wisconsinites oppose such a provision. Yet with the overturning of Roe, Wisconsin, under the abortion ban passed back in 1849, doesn't allow exceptions for rape and incest. (Tim Michels, by the way, opposes abortion even in cases of rape and incest.)

And it's not just the issue of reproductive freedom where the will of the people of Wisconsin is being denied. The Marquette Law School poll in August found that 78 percent of Wisconsinites

favor paid medical leave for parents of new babies. And 69 percent favor legalizing marijuana (a whopping 83% favored legalizing medical marijuana in a previous Marquette poll).

The vast majority of Wisconsinites also favor banning gerrymandering, with 72 percent approval, according to a 2019 Marquette poll, and 87 percent approval, according to a 2021 poll by YouGov.

When We, the People, aren't getting what we overwhelmingly want, there's something seriously wrong with our democracy.

And one way to fix it is by giving us the right of binding referendums, as Evers is proposing.

After all, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio have it. Why can't we, here in Wisconsin?

In two cases over the past decade, Michigan and Ohio used it to great effect.

After Scott Walker rammed through Act 10, dealing a crushing blow to public sector unions, Republicans in Ohio passed a copy-cat bill, which was signed into law. But the people of Ohio wouldn't stand for it, and they overturned it by referendum.

In Michigan, a grassroots activist named Katie Fahey was so appalled by the gerrymandering in her home state that she started a movement on Facebook to ban it, and she and other activists got hundreds of thousands of signatures to place the referendum on the ballot. And in 2018, it passed, and gerrymandering is no longer legal in Michigan.



Evers is not the first governor of Wisconsin to propose giving the people of Wisconsin such power. Back in 1911, Governor Francis McGovern asked the Legislature to amend the Wisconsin Constitution to allow binding referendums. "The great task of the time," he said, "is how to make and keep government really representative of the people." Binding referendums "embody but one idea: that of placing the people in actual control of public affairs."

So here we are, 111 years later, and that remains the great task of our time, because the people of Wisconsin still don't have actual control of our public affairs, and our government is still not really representative of the people.

We've got to change that, and Tony Evers has the right idea to do so.

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