

Size and scope of failed Wisconsin recall unprecedented

Written by Fred Easter
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Nobody asked me but most folk missed a key lesson in Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's holding onto his job in the recall election held early in June.

Gov. Walker and other Tea Party darlings may well be reveling (for now) in the strength that money wields at the polls. But, they are missing an ominous warning. Gov. Walker was originally elected in the midterm elections in 2010. It is fairly common, in American politics, for midterm elections to swing in the opposite direction from those in a Presidential year. The Wisconsin Governor evidently saw his election as a howling mandate from the people; and, ignoring nearly a century of American labor history, set about trying to roll back public employees' collective bargaining rights as a prelude to cutting their salaries and benefits. The "howling" came from union's and their supporters everywhere.

Some Democratic state office holders went on the run, fleeing the state, to keep Wisconsin's legislature from having a quorum. Nearly a million signatures for recall were collected. That record-breaking effort forced a recall. Less than two years after taking office, the Governor was in the fight of his political life.

Progressive foot soldiers poured into Wisconsin from neighboring states and conservative dollars flooded in with every mail delivery. Recall election efforts are very rare. If the recall effort had been successful, it could possibly have signaled a grass roots repudiation of Tea Party ideology. There was a lot at stake for conservatives. A loss of this magnitude so close to the presidential election would have been devastating. No amount of money was spared in supporting Gov. Walker.

If, as an elected public official, you work for the people, it is pretty hard to be unseated. The size and scope of the recall effort was unprecedented in American political history; and it failed. Walker and his supporters were able to outspend the recall effort by an obscene margin. MSNBC, and other media, helped to focus the eyes of the nation on the fray. And it failed.

But here is the hidden lesson that I think is lost on the likes of Walker, Rep. John Boehner and

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Rep. Michelle Bachmann. The population makes a hopelessly ambivalent boss. But when the big money identifies a candidate that is smarter, dumber, cuter, younger or less expensive to keep in office, a simple conference call will arrive at the decision to spend the current darlings back into private life and they will be old news before the phone lines cool down.

The body politic has been infected by a “financially transmitted disease.” The moneyed interests will always lean to the political right, but losers will come from both parties. Both parties need to get huge money out of politics or “the bell will toll” for Democracy itself. No single issue is more important.