Vos could pick next elections commission chair

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos could be picking the next Elections Commission chair in the wake of the abrupt resignation of Dean Knudson.

And that could be a crucial decision given the high-stakes elections this fall for governor and U.S. Senate.

Vos recently told WisPolitics.com he’s leaning toward someone with a legal background to replace Knudson, a former state representative first appointed by Vos.

Meanwhile, the office of U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson said the Oshkosh Republican told Vos he believed that Knudson “had lost the confidence of the grassroots Republicans in representing their interests on the Wisconsin Elections Commission,” but never suggested he resign.

Knudson abruptly resigned his position on the commission in late May saying he no longer believed he could be an effective GOP appointee on the body because he had refuted the notion that there was widespread fraud in the 2020 election and has stated unequivocally that Donald Trump lost the state.

In announcing his resignation, Knudson said it had been made “clear to me from the highest level of the Republican Party of Wisconsin that there’s a deep desire that I not be the chair.”

Johnson spokeswoman Alex Henning said the lawmaker never suggested Knudson resign.

“As the senator has traveled around the state, election integrity continues to be a primary concern of the grassroots,” she said.

Vos, R-Rochester, said it was “some time ago” that Johnson last expressed concerns about Knudson’s service on the commission.

Vos said he didn’t learn of Knudson’s plans until “relatively recently.”

“I don’t think people issue press releases or put out some kind of a public statement. But if you look at where a segment of where the grassroots is, that isn’t a surprise,” Vos said about concerns over Knudson’s service on the commission.

Asked if he would consider someone for the post who believes the last presidential election was fraudulent, Vos said he wants his new appointee to concentrate on a “fair election in 2022” who’s not going to “focus on 2020 and backward.”

Vos was booed at the GOP state convention in mid-May when he told activists the 2020 results can’t be decertified, a contention backed up by various legal experts. Vos noted delegates also rejected a resolution calling for the results to be decertified. He said that vote shows it is “mainstream conservative thought” that such a move isn’t possible.

“I’d like somebody who is strong and passionate, but also at the same time does what we want, which is find consensus where possible and never allow us to break the law,” Vos said.

The commission next meets June 10, when it will select a new chair. Vos said he expects to have an appointment in place before then.

Bob Spindell, appointed to the commission by the Senate leader is openly campaigning to become the next chair. Under commission rules, the next chair must be a GOP appointee because Democrat Ann Jacobs has been in the post for the past two years.

The clerks appointed to the commission aren’t eligible for the leadership job. That leaves Spindell and Vos’ next appointment as the only members eligible for the post.

Selecting a chair requires four votes from the six-member commission that’s split evenly between Democrat and GOP appointees. Spindell has often clashed with Democrat members and signed documents as a false elector seeking to cast the state’s votes for Trump rather than Joe Biden. Both likely would make it difficult for him to secure the support of at least one Democrat to become chair.

Vos said he’s not approaching his appointment with the idea in mind that the person is likely to become the chair. He wants someone who is “dedicated and passionate who’s going to stand up for conservative principles, but also realize that we have to run elections.”

Outgoing GOP state Sen. Kathy Bernier, R-Chippewa Falls, said she reached out to Vos about being appointed to replace Knudson.

But she considers it a “longshot” that the speaker would consider her.

Bernier, a former Chippewa County clerk, has been vocal in her criticism of Republicans who have falsely claimed the 2020 election was stolen. She’s also been critical of Democrats who have alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election tilted the results for Trump.

Bernier said Vos’ appointee is destined to become the chair because Democrats won’t support Spindell. She said “everything is extraordinarily political with him on every level.”

“Dean Knudson can watch out for the Republican position on things, of course. But he’s gleaned the respect of the Democrats that they would elect him chair. Bob has not,” Bernier said.

During the commission meeting, Spindell argued he could restore faith in the commission if elected chair.

Meanwhile, GOP state Rep. Janel Brandtjen, chair of the Assembly Campaigns and Elections Commission, ripped Knudson following his announcement. Among other things, Brandtjen criticized Knudson for allowing the lawsuit Elections Commission Meagan Wolfe has filed. It challenges former Justice Michael Gableman’s attempt to compel her to provide a deposition at his private office rather than in public before a legislative committee.

“Stripping our elections of the safety measures the legislature has put into statute is not what we expect from the Elections Commission; in fact, we expect the exact opposite,” Brandtjen said.

For more go to www.wispolitics.com.