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**GOP tries for legislative supermajority**

GOP and Democrat insiders agree Republicans pining for a supermajority have a mostly clear path in the Senate, but winning 66 Assembly seats is a much bigger lift.

Panelists at a WisPolitics.com luncheon at the Madison Club Tuesday said picking up the five Assembly seats to reach a two-thirds majority — even with new maps that improve the GOP’s chances — will be a much harder task than netting one seat in the Senate.

Republicans began the session with a 61-38 advantage. The new maps that GOP lawmakers drew and the state Supreme Court approved reworked the district of freshman Democrat Rep. Sara Rodriguez to a strongly GOP seat. She decided to run for lieutenant governor, and Republicans are expected to pick up her seat. That would require Republicans to hold every seat they now have and win four now held by Democrats to reach a veto-proof majority.

Former Democrat Senate Majority Leader Chuck Chvala argued Assembly Republicans will have the toughest time winning the Oshkosh-area seat that Rep. Gordon Hintz is leaving and the district held by Rep. Katrina Shankland, D-Stevens Point. He also noted Republicans will face a challenge holding the 33rd Assembly District. Democrat Rep. Don Vruwink was drawn out of the 43rd Assembly District, which he has represented since 2017, and into this swingy southern Wisconsin district. Chvala also singled out an open suburban Milwaukee seat, where former Whitnall School Board member LuAnn Bird, a Democrat, faces former Milwaukee Ald. Bob Donovan.

Vruwink faces Republican nominee Scott Johnson in the seat of GOP Rep. Cody Horlacher, who decided against seeking reelection as he plans to run for the Waukesha County Circuit Court next year.

“And I’m not saying there aren’t others. Like if the abortion wave hits, it could be different,” Chvala said. “But LuAnn Bird, and Don Vruwink, and Katrina Shankland; you’re going to win all three of those? I don’t think so.”

GOP redistricting consultant and former Assembly member Joe Handrick said Republicans have a strong chance of winning the two open Democratic seats in the northwestern corner of the state, adding Donovan has a good shot in the 13th Assembly District. If Republicans can do that, beat Vruwink and keep all their existing seats, that would put them at 64 seats.

Beating Rep. Steve Doyle, D-Onalaska, to win a western Wisconsin seat is a toss-up, Handrick said. But if Republicans can do that too, they’ll only have to deal with one of the two more difficult lifts on the path to a supermajority — taking the seats now held by Hintz or Shankland.

Former GOP Assembly Speaker Scott Jensen said the Assembly supermajority is a tough reach, but possible. And Republicans will surely gain some ground this cycle, he added. He also said it would be very difficult for Republicans to take the Hintz or Shankland seats.

“I mean, I think on a regular night the Republicans do pick up like three seats in the state Assembly,” he said. “Can they pick up the five is a difficult thing.”

In the Senate, Republicans need to net just one seat to reach a supermajority.

Jensen argued the 19th Senate District will be an interesting race with Sen. Roger Roth, R-Appleton, leaving his post. Rep. Rachael Cabral-Guevara, of Appleton, is the GOP pick against Dem Appleton Ald. Kristin Alfheim.

“I think that, again, we have an assemblyperson running for the state Senate seat,” the senior strategist for the American Federation for Children said. “Those people have only lost like once or twice in 50 years, so the odds are overwhelming there. So the Republicans will take a supermajority in the state Senate.”

Jensen predicted state western Wisconsin Sen. Jeff Smith, D-Brunswick, will also likely lose his seat. Despite all former police officer Dave Estenson’s problems, Jensen said margins in the 31st “will be razor thin.” Estenson was investigated by the Department of Justice more than 15 years ago over allegations he had inappropriate relationships with women while on duty as a police officer.

Chvala agreed Republicans have a strong chance of taking 22 Senate seats, but he argued Smith’s spot in Brunswick won’t be one of them.

“This guy apparently has a lot of allegations about having been trying to coerce women to have sex with him while he’s in his police officer uniform,” Chvala said. “That’s not a winning strategy up in the Eau Claire area. That’s not a winning strategy anywhere in Wisconsin.”

Chvala also argued Democrats have a good chance of keeping retiring Senate Minority Leader Janet Bewley’s northern Wisconsin seat because the area already has two Democrat Assembly representatives, and he believes Ashland City Ald. Kelly Westlund is a good candidate.

Handrick argued Republicans will surely take the 25th Senate District because former GOP Rep. Romaine Quinn is running and Assembly members always have a strong chance of winning open Senate seats.

Democrats All on the Line state Director Elizabeth Treviño agreed Republicans will likely take the Senate, but not the Assembly. But the abortion issue could still peel voters off the Republican scorecard, which could shake things up, she noted.

“I just don’t think we should underestimate women in this environment right now,” she said. “But yeah, I think supermajorities in both chambers seem very unlikely to me.”

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