**New maps forcing many incumbents to make tough decisions about reelection plans**

By WisPolitics.com

Lots of incumbent state legislators are having to make some tough decisions these days. Those decisions will help determine who controls the Assembly after the November elections.

Since Democratic Gov. Tony Evers signed new maps, lawmakers — especially those who are paired with other incumbents — have started to make decisions on staying put in the seat they were drawn into or looking for another option.

Some examples of how state lawmakers are reacting, according to WisPolitics research through March 22:

--Freshman GOP Rep. Angie Sapik is opting out. The Lake Nebagamon
lawmaker voted for the maps that turned the swing seat she won in 2022
by 490 votes into a 61% Democratic seat. She doesn’t see a path to victory.
So she’s not running this fall for the northern Wisconsin seat unless
a “miracle happens and nobody signs up in the end and I change my mind
at the very last second.” Even then, she wouldn’t like her chances. “I
could run, but I’m going to lose,” she told WisPolitics.

--Freshman lawmakers such as Rep. Alex Joers, D-Middleton, decided to
move. Joers moved into a different — but still very Dem-friendly
district — after he was paired with Rep. Mike Bare, D-Verona.

--Rep. Pat Snyder, R-Schofield, told WisPolitics he’s going to run for
the 85th that he’s represented since his 2016 election after being
drawn into the 87th AD. He made that decision though he’s the only
incumbent in the new district, which is more Republican than his old
seat. Snyder said he’s “going to get an apartment or something” to
establish residency in the redrawn 85th that’s now a 52.6% GOP seat.
The new 87th is a 64% GOP seat.

--Freshman GOP Rep. Bob Donovan, who won a suburban Milwaukee Assembly
seat in 2022 after he ran unsuccessfully for Milwaukee mayor that
spring, may be on the move again. He told WisPolitics he hasn’t made a
final decision yet on his plans for this fall and will have an
announcement April 9. He was drawn into a 60% Democratic district with Rep.
Daniel Riemer, D-Milwaukee, while there’s an open swing seat next door
that includes communities such as Greendale, Greenfield and Hales
Corners.

--Rep. Warren Petryk, a seven-term incumbent, has a tough choice ahead
of him. The 60% GOP seat he won in 2022 is now a 56.3% Democratic district
that includes the UW-Eau Claire campus. As he weighs his decision on a
run, at least he won’t have to deal with a former Democratic lawmaker as his
possible challenger. Former state Rep. Dana Wachs, an attorney who
left the Assembly in 2018 to mount a bid for the governor's office,
floated the idea of running for the new 93rd Assembly District
immediately after the GOP-controlled state Senate rejected his
nomination for the UW Board of Regents. But less than a week later, he
thought better of the idea, writing in a Facebook post he is scheduled
to try eight jury trials over the next several months and running
would do “harm to the rights of my clients.” Wachs would’ve been a top
recruit for Democrats. Not only is he a former lawmaker who represented the
area, but he also has personal wealth, putting $219,091 into his 2018
gubernatorial campaign, according to a check of campaign finance
reports. Democrats still have time to find a good recruit for the district,
insiders note, it just would’ve been an easier lift with Wachs in the
race. Petryk, meanwhile, hasn’t publicly announced his plan for the
fall. The 69-year-old won reelection in 2022 with 59.7% of the vote,
and he’s had a six-figure warchest since the end of 2015 even though
he was unopposed for reelection in 2016 and none of his other races
since have been particularly close. If he’s been preparing for a rainy
day, insiders joke, the storm may have arrived with the new seat he
was drawn into.

Petryk is one of nearly a dozen Assembly Republicans who were drawn into solidly Democratic districts under the new maps — and Democrats need to win every one of them to have a plausible path back to the majority, insiders say.

Hurdles abound. For one, it’s tough to recruit enough quality candidates to pick up the 16 you need to flip the chamber, insiders note. Typically, the focus is on a half-dozen contested seats and incumbent protection. Then there’s the power of incumbency, which means Democrats will have to put up a candidate prepared to hustle and raise money to win against an incumbent like Petryk. It won’t be enough to just have someone on the ballot with a “D”next to their name. Republicans, meanwhile, may already have the candidates in some challenging seats. They just have the numbers working against them.

Numbers be damned, incumbents such as GOP Reps. Tom Michalski, of Elm Grove, Todd Novak, of Dodgeville, and Loren Oldenburg, of Viroqua, are staying put and running in 55%-plus Democratic seats. Others went looking for other options, such as Reps. Karen Hurd, R-Fall Creek, William Penterman, R-Columbus, and Robert Wittke, R-Racine — all have announced plans to move so they can run in more GOP-friendly districts.

And insiders are waiting to see what lawmakers such as Rep. Jessie Rodriguez, R-Oak Creek, do after the Joint Finance Committee member was drawn into a 54% Democratic seat.

While the numbers aren’t great for Republicans in those seats, they’re still incumbents running in some of them. If President Joe Biden continues to have muddling poll numbers, it could hamper Democrats’ efforts to flip seats this fall unless U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, can
outrun him and pull some across the finish line.

Insiders were somewhat surprised by the speed at which nearly a dozen Assembly Democrats announced plans to either run for another office or retire, especially with maps that at least gave them a shot at the majority. Now, they’re waiting — not quite patiently — for GOP incumbents to make their final decisions on what they’re going to do. To some, the few retirements as of March 22 — just Sapik and Rep. Gae Magnafici, the Dresser Republican who represents a safe GOP seat — are a sign of the pressure they believe Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, is putting on members to seek reelection this fall, even if they face a tough seat, to help boost the caucus’ chances of holding onto the majority.

During a March 19 WisPolitics luncheon, Vos predicted Democrats will come back in January with 45 seats, saying Republicans start with 46 that are 55% or better for the GOP. Add another three seats that Vos says are between 51% and 55%, and the GOP would only need to win one competitive race to keep the majority, striking a confident tone about those odds.

For more go to [www.wispolitics.com](http://www.wispolitics.com)

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics and is distributed for
publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

Copyright © WisPolitics.com