WISPOLITICS: Republicans still control new Legislature but with narrower margins as 37 new legislators take their seats

By WisPolitics.com

Another two-year session of the Wisconsin Legislature has begun -- this time with 37 new legislators.

Not a recent record -- 38 newbies started the 2011-12 legislative session.

But it's a lot of turnover due to the new legislative maps resulting from a redistricting forced by a liberal state Supreme Court.

In all there are six new state senators in the 33-member chamber, thanks to a Dem sweep in November of top seats. The six new Democratic members narrow the GOP advantage to 18-15.

And in the 99-member Assembly, 31 new members -- 23 of them Dems, as the minority party narrows the GOP margin to 54-45.

But some of those new Assembly members have been state representatives before:

• Dan Knodl, R-Germantown, served in the chamber from 2009-23 and is now going back after less than two years in the Senate after he was drawn into a district with fellow GOP state Sen. Duey Stroebel, who lost on Nov. 5.

• Former GOP Rep. Dean Kaufert served 14 years in the Assembly before leaving in 2015 following his election as Neenah mayor only to be wooed back for a run in a Dem-leaning seat.

• Rob Kreibich, R-New Richmond, who served 1993-2007, is back after leading the new Richmond Chamber of Commerce as executive director.

Back in 2011, the freshman class played a role in a big political drama -- remember Act 10?

Since then, because of GOP-dominated redistricting, Republicans have held the power in the Legislature. The new maps are changing that.

Legislative experience is greater now in the Assembly than it was a decade ago.

In all, just 15 members of the Assembly walked in the doors in early January 2015 with at least a decade of experience in the chamber. This time around, it's about a quarter of the members.

Over in the Senate, meanwhile, the story is different.

There will be seven members who first won a Senate race by 2014, compared to 14 who’d been there at least a decade when the 2015-16 session started.

That includes former state Sen. Fred Risser, D-Madison, who first started serving in the chamber after a 1962 election and would go on to be the longest-serving state legislator in U.S. history.

Former state Sen. Rob Cowles, of Green Bay, who was the longest-serving member of the Senate, decided to retire after fellow Republican Eric Wimberger opted to run in the new 2nd Senate District that the veteran lawmaker had held since a 1987 special election. His departure means Sen. Bob Wirch, D-Pleasant Prairie, is now the longest-serving senator, marking his 28th year in the chamber.

*For more go to: [www.wispolitics.com/2024/wisconsin-legislature-new-members-departures/](http://www.wispolitics.com/2024/wisconsin-legislature-new-members-departures/)*