

EXCLUSIVE: Republican Assemblyman John Jagler Behind Attempt To Throw Conservative State Senate Candidate Don Pridemore Off Ballot

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

The Wisconsin Election Commission, which has a history of throwing conservative candidates off election ballots, will meet tomorrow afternoon to decide on a complaint aimed at ending the state senate candidacy of Don Pridemore in next month's special election to fill the seat of former Senate President and new Congressman Scott Fitzgerald.

He hasn't admitted to it, but the person behind the effort to eliminate Pridemore, a well known conservative who is a former member of the state assembly, is Pridemore's main opponent for the position, moderate Republican Assemblyman John Jagler.

The person filing the complaint against Pridemore, Steven Hepp, is a donor to Jagler's political campaign and used to own a tavern in Watertown, in the heart of Jagler's district. Jagler has not responded to my questions about this role.

Pridemore is selling his family home to a trust controlled by his son and he and his wife have been renting in Hartford from that community's mayor. The complaint alleges that Pridemore isn't actually "living" at the address on his campaign statement. Pridemore contends with his home being sold and he and his wife looking for a new one, they are splitting time between the two residences.

Clearly, Jagler wants Pridemore off the ballot because Pridemore is Jagler's biggest obstacle to winning the senate seat. The Election Commission and its predecessors have a long history of allowing legislators to live outside their districts. Longtime former Wisconsin Rapids Assemblyman Marlin Schneider lived full time in Madison and Milwaukee Assemblyman Leon Young has spent virtually full time in Madison as well. But in the past year the staff of the Election Commission has thrown off the ballot a number of people opposed by Democrats and moderates. The commission staff tossed the Green Party presidential ticket and the name of Kanye West, moves some believe gave Joe Biden his narrow win in the state presidential election. Also last year, the leading candidate for mayor of Oconomowoc was tossed off the ballot after a complaint by Democrats. The Republican was tossed and the Democrat won the Oconomowoc mayoral race.

The six member commission will vote tomorrow afternoon. If they deadlock 3-3, the staff recommendation holds. Pridemore, a fierce critic of the teachers union and education establishment, is not the choice of the Madison crowd to replace Fitzgerald. If the Election Commission deck is stacked as usual, he would be thrown off the ballot and Jagler's behind the scenes maneuver will have worked.

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