

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

January 6, 2012

RECALL SEASON WILL OVERLAY FINAL SESSIONS OF THE LEGISLATURE

By John Huebscher, Executive Director

A year ago, the first thing the newly elected Legislature did was to adopt its scheduling resolution for the 2011-12 legislative session. This resolution defined the floor periods during which the Legislature would meet to debate and pass legislation. In so doing, the legislators determined that they would convene for three “general business” floor periods between January 17 and March 15 in 2012, the last day of regular business for the year.

When they adopted that resolution, our lawmakers had no way of knowing that their session schedule would mesh with Wisconsin’s first ever recall of a Governor and recalls of several State Senators. But that is what appears will happen and it will affect what lawmaking takes place in these final floor periods.

The timetable for the recall process is defined in the State Constitution and the only real variable is the date when a recall petition is filed. Once that happens, the timetable plays out with no regard for legislative schedules or anything else.

Those who seek to recall Governor Walker filed intent to do so on November 15. Those seeking the recall of four Republican State Senators also did so on that same date. Those filings set in motion a 60 day time period for gathering the necessary signatures. The deadline for that filing is January 17. As noted above, January 17 happens to be the same day as when the first of the three 2012 floor periods will convene.

After the signatures are submitted, the Government Accountability Board (GAB) has 30 days to certify their validity and that deadline can (and has) been extended for 30 additional days. This takes us to March 17.

It is possible some recall efforts will fail to file the necessary number of signatures. It is also possible that the GAB and the political parties who scrutinize such petitions will find enough invalid signatures to stop the recall process. However, presuming neither of these occur, most observers expect that sometime after January 17 candidates are likely to emerge to challenge the Governor and the affected State Senators.

It is no secret that politicians are generally cautious in election years. This year, with the legislative floor periods coinciding with the recall elections process, is likely to be no exception. The State Senate, where the Republicans hold a paper thin 17-16 majority, is expected to be especially careful in what it takes up. Few truly contentious bills will be debated.

Nor is a special session after March 15 likely.

The Constitution provides that once the GAB completes the work of certifying signatures, the recall election must occur 6 weeks later. This takes us to early May. However, it is possible that more than one Democrat will file to run against the Governor or one of the Senators. Should that be the case, the election in early May becomes a primary election, and the general election will occur four weeks after that, or early June.

If that is not enough campaigning for you, don't worry. April 15, 2012 marks the time when candidates for county, state and national offices filled in the November election may begin to circulate their nomination papers.

-30-