

Publication: Waukesha Freeman (Conley);Date: Jul 27, 2011;Section: Opinion;Page: 8A



**MARK  
BELLING**

# Republicans might snatch defeat from jaws of victory

*Recall candidates running  
away from strong record*

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, frustrated that the editorializing it does on the editorial page is widely ignored, has created a new section to bash Republicans right in the news pages. So it wasn't surprising that the column last week alleged Republican state Sen. Randy Hopper lied about his opponent in next month's recall election when he accused her of voting for a pay raise during her time on the Oshkosh city council. But, here's the rub. Hopper was lying. Jessica King, in fact, voted against the pay raise. But all of the above is just background. The real point is, why in the world do Hopper's handlers think voters give two rips about whether King voted for some municipal pay raise?

The Hopper ad is indicative of the remarkably inept campaigns being run by the six Republicans targeted for state Senate recalls.

They are the victims of incredibly stupid strategizing by Madison-based Republican leaders who are in over their heads. It is quite possible that the GOP will lose control of the state Senate next month solely because of the bungling of the recall campaigns.

Everybody in the state knows the recall elections are a referendum on the budget passed by Governor Walker and the Republicans. This is a referendum the Republicans should win except they aren't even trying. Instead of crowing about balancing the state budget without tax hikes or service cuts, they are trying to change the subject. This is staggeringly stupid. They can win the budget argument easily.

The federal budget process has fallen apart. Neighboring state Minnesota was shut down for three weeks because of budget gridlock. Illinois is facing fiscal ruin after raising income taxes 67 percent and borrowing \$8 billion. Here, we have brought our state to fiscal health by making teachers kick in for insurance and their fat pensions. This is a story the Republicans should be dying to tell. Instead, they run away from it.

It will eventually sink in to Wisconsinites what Walker and the Republicans have accomplished. But in the short term, the GOP senators need to tell their side of an amazing story. They need to own this issue. Instead, they are disowning it.

The tired old political playbook of ripping your opponent by distorting his or her record on some minor issue may work in most elections. But it isn't going to work this time. If Republican senators refuse to talk about their budget, voters are going to conclude they must be ashamed of it. Hopper, from the Fond du Lac-Oshkosh area, and the other five GOP senators need to retake control of their campaigns. They are being advised straight into defeat.

The stakes are too high to sugar-coat this. The people strategizing for the Wisconsin Republican Party are acting like idiots. Conservatives who are rightly proud of our state budget have every right to be appalled at this incompetence.

\* \* \*

A Waukesha County judge with an ax to grind recently accused the city police department of deliberately destroying a videotape that detailed an arrest in which police are accused of using excessive force. Fellow Freeman columnist Darryl Enriquez, in an outstanding and balanced column, detailed the case. The reaction from Waukesha's police chief is disgusting.

Chief Russell Jack, sticking to the police story the tape was accidentally erased and was not deliberately discarded, is ripping Enriquez and the judge, Kathy Stilling. I've poked into the case and can't decide who's telling the truth. Stilling, a liberal about to leave the bench after being voted out in a landslide, is a career defense attorney and has a grudge against the cops. Her conclusion may well be wrong. But, even if a lieutenant erased the tape not knowing it was evidence in a pending case, Jack's reaction is indefensible.

If the tape was indeed accidentally erased, Jack ought to be explaining how such bungling could have occurred. The police admit the tape was viewed repeatedly by many members of the department. If something of that intense focus is accidentally erased, somebody is very incompetent. Why has the tape eraser not been demoted? Jack's insistence that this was all just a mistake seems to be a way of saying his department is run by clowns and not crooks. This makes the chief look like, well, something of a joke.

I've been through enough open records cases the last few months to know public officials are fully capable of illegally hiding records. The Menomonee Falls School District flat-out lied about the existence of a demand for an important document. This cavalier attitude toward public access to records seems pervasive in Waukesha County. I believe the Waukesha Police Department is fully capable of destroying evidence given the county's general apathy toward such conduct. But it is also clear, given Jack's attitude, the department is fully capable of simply mishandling the evidence. The one thing that is clear is that Waukesha has a police chief perfectly fine with a department that has just embarrassed itself.

*(Mark Belling is the host of a daily WISN radio talk show. His column runs Wednesdays in The Freeman.)*

Image Orientation:

PortraitLandscape

Page Size:

Legal  A4  A3

Letter

Scale to Page:

Yes  No

PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT THE PRINTER IS SET APPROPRIATELY

