State recall movement stands alone in U.S. history - JSOnline

The Wisconsin Voter
The Journal Sentinel's Craig Gilbert explores political trends in a purple state.

State recall movement stands alone in U.S. history

By Craig Gilbert of the Journal Sentinel

March 12, 2011 | (295) COMMENTS

Number of state lawmakers removed from office by recall in all of American history: 13.

Number of state lawmakers currently facing recall campaigns in Wisconsin: 16.

Those figures hint at the oddity and immensity of what’s going on in the Badger State. But it's not just their breadth that makes the recall drives in Wisconsin unprecedented in American politics. It’s the national dimension they’ve taken on.

State lawmakers in America have been recalled from office over tax hikes, legislative pay raises, lying, corruption, sexual impropriety and collaborating with the other party. They've been recalled in California, Oregon, Idaho, Michigan and Wisconsin.

But none of those previous campaigns transcended personal, local or state politics. None was viewed by important interests on both sides as a defining battle in a big national struggle. None invited the kind of outside fundraising and advertising we have begun to see here.

"This is much greater than the politics over the Wisconsin budget," says Dan Smith, a University of Florida political scientist who did his doctoral work at Madison.

"No other recalls -- including the failed ones that have been launched and rejected as unconstitutional by the courts against US Senators and Congressmen-- have ever had the broad national overtones of the proposed Wisconsin one," says Joshua Spivak, a senior fellow at the Hugh Carey Institute for Government Reform in New York, who has written extensively on the history of recalls.

Here's a list of all the state legislators in the U.S. who have ever lost recall elections, based on data gathered from Spivak and numerous other sources and cross-checked with the National Conference of State Legislatures:

The Walker recall fight: marching off into the political unknown

Craig Gilbert is the Journal Sentinel's Washington, D.C. Bureau Chief and national political reporter.

Read more about this blog

MORE ABOUT THIS BLOG

The Wisconsin Voter is a blog about elections, political trends and public opinion in Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest. It is less about politicians than the people who elect them. It’s aimed at political junkies and general readers alike. Its subjects include:

The role this state and region play as electoral battlegrounds.

Voting patterns and trends at the local, state and regional level.

What makes voters here different from voters in other places.

Public opinion and the election climate.

Craig Gilbert is the Journal Sentinel's Washington, D.C. Bureau Chief and national political reporter.

Read more about this blog

WISCONSIN TREND TRACKER

Charting how each...