

## **Op Ed: Political Theater Won't Solve Wisconsin's Real Problems**

*By: Senator Melissa Ratcliff and Senator Jodi Habush Sinykin*

Oversight is one of the Legislature's most important responsibilities. When government agencies exercise their authority, lawmakers have a duty to ensure transparency, accountability, and compliance with the law. Done properly, oversight strengthens public trust and improves how the government works. It is a responsibility that should be taken seriously, and not for political theater.

Unfortunately, what we've seen from the Senate's Special Committee on Oversight of the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) falls short of that standard.

Republican leadership created this committee to serve their own special interest under the guise of "transparency" and "accountability." But, as Wisconsinites know, actions speak louder than words and the actions of the committee share a different story.

Republicans used this committee to subvert public trust in Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul, who is running for reelection this year, by focusing on legal fellows who assisted the department on environmental regulatory enforcement cases. The legal fellows were part of a fellowship program funded by NYU Law's State Impact Center, which supports the work of state attorney generals in defending and enforcing environmental laws. It is key to note that the fellows worked on "bread and butter" enforcement cases, not bold climate change initiatives.

On the first day of hearings, the committee heard from special interests, including a representative from Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce and the President of Minnesota's Freedom Foundation—two right-leaning organizations that are regular opponents of Attorney General Josh Kaul's work to enforce environmental laws here in Wisconsin.

On the second day of hearings, lawmakers had the opportunity to hear from the Attorney General himself. The Attorney General explained that these attorneys were helping the state enforce Wisconsin laws and protect our natural resources. And, when Republican members veered off-topic to score political points, Mr. Kaul respectfully answered their questions and concerns.



Despite all that time and taxpayer expense, the committee has failed to produce credible evidence that wrongdoing occurred or that the integrity of the Department of Justice was compromised.

Clean water, healthy ecosystems, and responsible stewardship of our natural resources are not partisan priorities. They are fundamental to Wisconsin's identity and our economy. From agriculture to tourism to outdoor recreation, our environment supports jobs, communities, and quality of life across the state.

The Wisconsin Department of Justice plays an important role in protecting clean air, land, and water—a nonpartisan responsibility in our view. In addition to enforcement of our state laws to protect residents, the DOJ supports state agencies working to protect consumers and our environment to keep communities safe. These are essential responsibilities that deserve serious attention from lawmakers, but oversight should never be used to manufacture controversy or score political points.

At a time when families across Wisconsin are worried about rising costs, workforce shortages, and public safety, the Legislature should be focused on solutions that make a real difference in people's lives. Schools are seeking support to address student mental health and literacy, communities are working to strengthen local economies, and residents want clean water, safe neighborhoods, and an affordable place to live.

Those are the priorities that deserve our time and energy.

Wisconsinites expect their elected officials to approach oversight with fairness, seriousness, and a commitment to facts not political theater. The people of our state deserve leaders who focus on solving problems and delivering results.

Our focus, along with our Democratic colleagues' focus, will remain on improving lives and lowering costs for Wisconsin families.