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Bice: Rebecca Kleefisch was a critic of recall elections when she was the target. Now she champions the Mequon school board recall

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Recalls for thee, but not for me.

Nearly a decade ago, many Republicans and even a few Democrats were adamant that recall elections should not be used to settle policy disputes.

They argued that politicians should be recalled only if they were guilty of some grave wrongdoing.

"This is becoming almost a spectacle," then-Lt. Gov. **Rebecca Kleefisch**, who beat back a recall attempt in 2012, told **Fox News** at the time. "I don't think that the writers of the original recall statute, the founding fathers of Wisconsin, when they wrote the constitution, intended for the use of the recall function in this way."

But now Kleefisch, a Republican candidate for Wisconsin governor, has jumped with both feet into the recall election of four school board members in the Mequon-Thiensville School District over — you guessed it — a series of policy disputes.

The **Recall MTSD School Board** submitted more than 18,000 signatures earlier this year to force the Nov. 2 recall election for the quartet of board members.

Leaders of the recall drive have said their effort has been driven by COVID-19 restrictions, declining test scores and critical race theory. They also contend the board has abdicated its responsibilities by deferring too often to Superintendent **Matthew Joynt**.

On Oct. 10, Kleefisch bragged on Facebook about her backers' involvement in the recall effort.

"Volunteers from Team Rebecca were out knocking on doors for the Mequon-Thiensville school board recall election yesterday," Kleefisch wrote. "These parents want a say in their kids' education, and they're doing something about it!"

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Recall candidate serves on Kleefisch team

In addition, a member of Kleefisch's campaign team, **Scarlett Johnson**, is also one of the candidates challenging the incumbent school board members, something noted in a recent Kleefisch news release.

A spokeswoman for the state Democratic Party said Kleefisch is moving to the right to avoid a challenge from an even more conservative candidate.

Kleefisch is the most prominent Republican in the governor's race, though Delafield businessman **Kevin Nicholson** is weighing a bid. Former President **Donald Trump** recently urged former Wisconsin GOP Rep. **Sean Duffy** to run, even though Duffy now lives in New Jersey.

"Kleefisch is becoming increasingly more radical as she fights to save herself from a far-right primary challenger backed by Donald Trump," said Democratic Party spokeswoman **Kayla Anderson**. "From changing her stance on recalls to refusing to rule out overturning the results of a democratic election, Kleefisch will go to any extreme to prove she's the most radical candidate in this race."

A case then of recall reversal? A political flip-flop?

Not at all, said Kleefisch campaign spokesman **Alec Zimmerman**. He said it was "shameful" that Democrats were criticizing the former lieutenant governor because she "stands behind parents who just want more say in their children's education."

"Rebecca was recalled by radical leftists for doing the job she told voters she would do," Zimmerman said, referring to Kleefisch's 2012 recall race. "When school boards are not listening to the voices and concerns of families, parents have a right to organize and make their voices heard."

In 2012, then-Gov. **Scott Walker** and Kleefisch were forced to run in recall races after they pushed through Act 10, which severely restricted collective bargaining rights for state employees. Both candidates won their recall elections by comfortable margins and were elected to a second term before losing in 2018.

Barry Burden, director of the Elections Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said it's not uncommon for political party leaders to change their views on recall elections.

In 2012, Burden said, conservatives in Wisconsin fought the recall drive by arguing that Walker and Kleefisch had not been in office long enough to be removed and that recall elections were "merely a policy debate about labor unions and not over malfeasance in office."

Now, he said, conservatives and Republicans can claim they are being consistent by arguing that school board members are violating state law with their public health mandates, such as masks, vaccines and online learning.

"So it is about wrongdoing in office and not just a dispute about local education policy," Burden said.

Thus, one person's policy dispute can be another's violation of state law?

That sounds so 2012, if only you flip sides.

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