

Wisconsin Dems tout 1M recall signatures

By: MJ Lee, Politico
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Organizers behind the recall of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker collected 1 million signatures to be submitted to the state's Government Accountability Board on Tuesday, dwarfing the required number of names and virtually ensuring that a recall election will take place later this year.

A total of 540,208 valid signatures, or 25 percent of all of the votes cast in the election that put Walker in office last January, were needed to force a recall election, but organizers had aimed for hundreds of thousands more than the minimum requirement to ensure that they met the threshold even if some signatures are disqualified.

The Wisconsin Democratic Party was quick to dub the recall effort — which also targeted Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch and a handful of Republican state legislators — the “biggest” in American history, and boasted that organizers had gathered a whopping 460,000 extra signatures for the recall of Walker, who infuriated many in his state last year by pushing through a law that ended most collective bargaining rights for many public workers.

Meagan Mahaffey, executive director of United Wisconsin — the group behind the recall efforts — told POLITICO that Tuesday's results sent a “crystal clear message to Scott Walker that voters are done with his extreme policies and his destruction that he's doing to our state.”

Unions were poised to emerge as some of the biggest winners from Tuesday's news, but Mahaffey insisted that the movement did not simply represent a battle between Walker and organized labor.

“This is a message to people of all backgrounds and all different types of people that have worked so hard on this recall. The best outcome for all of us is the same: Recall Scott Walker,” she said.

As the months-long recall campaign had neared its end, State Democratic Party Chairman Mike Tate had predicted Tuesday's outcome earlier this week, telling POLITICO he was confident that the final tally would “hit or exceed” their goal of 720,000 signatures and saying the message he hoped would resonate with Wisconsin voters was that “help is on the way.”

“An incredible number of Wisconsinites have stood up to be counted and say, ‘We can't wait for the next election. We absolutely must get Scott Walker out of office right now,’” said Tate.

Walker himself signaled that he expected his opponents would be able to achieve their goal.

Speaking at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., earlier this month, the embattled governor predicted that a recall election will indeed occur sometime in June.

But Walker stood by his controversial reforms, maintaining that they were all made “for the right reasons.”

“You either get elected to be somebody great or do something great, and I always tell kids to do the latter,” he said.

As for his potential Democratic challenger, the governor predicted that the candidate will be “hand-picked” by the unions, declaring that his yet-to-be-named “opponent” is not a single person, but “big union bosses.”

But even as they were gearing up to celebrate a historic victory this week, Wisconsin Democrats still have not answered one important question: Who will they back to defeat Walker?

The Wisconsin Democratic Party has attempted to downplay the issue, saying it would be counterproductive to discuss names before a recall election was even secured, guaranteeing that the question will loom even larger after Tuesday for a party that has so far given no indication that they are fired up and ready to unify behind any one individual.

Tate dismissed the criticism to POLITICO, saying the fact that Democrats have “more than one candidate” in mind is actually indicative of Walker's weakness.

“There are a couple of good Democrats that I know are taking a look at this race, and this is indicative of how weak Scott Walker is that we may have more than one strong candidate,” he said. “This is tremendously significant — it’s something that’s never happened before in Wisconsin history. It is a very high bar to hold a recall election.”

Whether the challenger ends up being former Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk or state Sen. Tim Cullen, Tate noted that he expects the winner of the Democratic primary to beat Walker and become “a phenomenal governor.”

A new poll released Tuesday indicated that both Falk and Cullen would be a weak match against Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, the Democratic nominee who lost to Walker in the 2010 gubernatorial race.

Barrett received 26 percent support in a hypothetical four-way contest for the Democratic nomination, compared with 22 percent for Falk, 21 percent for former Rep. David Obey and 11 percent for Cullen, according to a Public Policy Polling survey conducted on Jan. 16 of 522 likely Democratic voters.

Barrett’s favorability rating, at 53 percent, was also the highest among the party’s likely primary voters, compared to 43 percent for Obey, 36 percent for Falk and 25 percent for Cullen. The PPP poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.3 percent.

Walker’s press secretary Cullen Werwie declined to comment on the governor’s schedule for Tuesday because it was “campaign-related,” but it was reported that he spent the day fundraising in New York City.

According to the New York Daily News, Walker was scheduled to attend a 4 p.m. fundraiser in Manhattan hosted by Maurice “Hank” Greenberg, the former chief executive of the American International Group. According to a copy of the event’s invitation obtained by the Daily News, tickets to the fundraiser cost \$2,500 per person.

United Wisconsin and the Democratic Party of Wisconsin planned to host numerous “petition turn-in” parties across the state Tuesday evening to celebrate the symbolic deadline.