

## **Opinion: Wisconsin should adopt innovative Final-Five Voting as one cure for political polarization**

*by Dale Kooyenga and Daniel Riemer*

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As members of different political parties, it's easy to assume there are not very many issues that the two of us agree on in this era of deep political divides. Political rancor has poisoned our national dialogue even on issues that initially seem above politics.

But when we distance ourselves from the news cycle, look at the bigger picture and think about our values and the republic's future, we have both discovered something that transcends partisan feuds: spirited agreement about the need for election innovation.

Our starting point is protecting our democracy at all costs. As members of the U.S. military reserve forces, we both stand ready to serve on the front lines should our nation call us to service. We also agree that a rule-based free market economy creates boundless opportunity and fosters the liberty that makes America exceptional. We agree that when we ask Wisconsinites to elect us, it is because we strive to deliver real results to real people. And we agree with the 75% of Americans who told a recent Gallup poll that Washington, D.C., is broken.

Like so many, however, we have seen Washington's breakdown as a distant problem. We have focused on our jobs in Wisconsin. We joined our constituents in complaining about the "swamp" in D.C. — especially during election season and moments of national crisis — but did not examine our own responsibility as state leaders to make a change. For the sake of our country and our children, now is the time for state leaders to work for change.

The dysfunction in our nation's capital will not miraculously clean itself up. We at the state level share responsibility for cleaning up the mess at the national level, because as elected state leaders, we have the power to do something about it.

The U.S. Constitution delegates to the states many of the responsibilities that determine how members of Congress are elected. Therefore, we share responsibility for what does (or doesn't) happen in Congress, because election rules influence behavior and we decide how those elections work.

History has shaped the way states hold elections. When our country was young, examples of enduring and successful democracies did not exist. So, our leaders copied Britain's system of declaring the winner of an election to be the candidate with the most votes — even if that person did not receive a majority of votes — but only gained a plurality. More than 100 years later, reformers added party primaries to take decisions out of smoke-filled backrooms and give power to the people.

Both of these historical decisions now strongly figure in today's challenges. Together, party primaries and plurality elections trigger polarization during elections and make it very hard for Congress to work collaboratively to solve our nation's growing set of problems.

It does not have to be this way.

Just as innovation is the key to progress in the private sector, electoral innovation is the key to progress in our politics. The most important innovation is to change the rules that guide elections.

To change these rules, we have come together to support a new way of voting called Final-Five Voting.

With Final-Five Voting, congressional elections will work differently in two critical ways. No longer will you vote in a Republican primary or a Democrat primary; instead voters will cast their ballots in one, nonpartisan primary — and up to five candidates can proceed from the primary to the general election. Then, in the general election, voters will be able to rank these “final five” in order of preference using ranked-choice voting.

This new approach will change the nature of our elections, and in turn, create a new era of collaboration and results in Congress. Final-Five Voting does not require politicians or voters to abandon their ideological views — or their parties (we’ll proudly remain members of ours) — but it does encourage reaching across the aisle to solve big problems in a sustainable, consensus-building, bipartisan fashion. Members of Congress, having been elected by and held accountable to the general electorate, will feel more supported in seeking out common ground and making the difficult compromises required to solve the nation’s most serious challenges.

Why not make Wisconsin a leader in advancing election reform? We hope this starts a robust conversation about that question. Let’s consider this together.

Our founders and framers did not include any of these details in the Wisconsin or U.S. constitutions. Instead, they gave this responsibility to each state. We have an opportunity to embrace the responsibility they placed in us. And in the same way that the two of us, Republican and Democrat, are ready to serve our country together on the front lines, we are ready to work side by side to make our elections a model for the rest of the country.

*Dale Kooyenga is a Republican state senator from Brookfield. Daniel Riemer is a Democratic member of the state Assembly from Milwaukee. Learn more about Final-Five Voting at [www.DemocracyFound.org](http://www.DemocracyFound.org). Democracy Found is a Wisconsin-based advocacy group.*