



Howey Political Report

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Statehouse Democrats Need to Show Up

Woody Allen once famously said that “80% of success is just showing up.” This week, Indiana statehouse Democrats took a different approach to success, by disappearing from the statehouse in mass on a Democrat State Party sponsored junket to Champaign Illinois. Through this disappearance, Democrats were able to deny Republicans the constitutionally required quorum of 67 legislators needed to conduct business - effectively shutting down the legislative process for the foreseeable future.

Later, statehouse Democrats issued a statement demanding that they would not return to business unless Republicans agree to have eleven labor and education bills taken off the table for consideration through the rest of this session. .

Now -- just hours into this quandary -- it is impossible to know the full political fall out from their actions. Some argue House Democrats will be rewarded for standing on principle. Others argue they will pay a high price for walking out on the job. The truth is that time will well, and none of us really know.

But, this much is clear. Our state now stands at a constitutional crisis. By disappearing from the Statehouse and walking out on their duty, House Democrats have thrown out the rulebook and brought the usual statehouse jousting to levels never before seen in the recent history of the chamber.

In prior years, both Democratic and Republican minority caucuses have been known for “slow walking” the legislative process and using procedural tricks to kill a bill or two along the way. In 2004, then Representative (now Senator) Dennis Kruse brought the chamber to a halt with several “blast-motions” in an attempt to force the full House to consider a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. In 1994, the Statehouse rocked when more than 10,000 workers showed up to protest changes in the state’s prevailing wage law.

Simply put: this is not the first high energy controversy to hit the chamber. But, never before has the minority caucus left the state in an attempt to hold the chamber hostage and dictate the state’s policy agenda.

In effect, House Democrats want the Speaker to agree that the 40 members of the minority caucus can tell the 60 members of the majority caucus what agenda items are appropriate for consideration in the chamber.

If they were to prevail, it would be a terrible precedent for our state. Elections matter. And, the simple truth is that Democrats lost the last election by a very wide margin. By sweeping in a new, broad majority of Republican legislators, Hoosiers knew they were sending our state in a new direction.

Unhappy with those election results, House Democrats are now bullying the legislative process in an attempt to thwart the results of the election and halt our state's progress.

Don't get me wrong. House Democrats have every right to stand up for what they believe. They should debate these issues vigorously. They should encourage their supporters to organize and make sure their points of view are heard.

And then, House Democrats should vote.

That is what makes our system of government different than many other countries in the world. In America, we settle our disputes at the ballot box. In America, we follow the rule of law.

But, that system only works if our leaders agree to follow the law as well. When they lose an election, our leaders must live with the results of that election until the next election occurs.

If House Democrats and their supporters don't like the results of what happens during this session in the Statehouse chamber, there is a remedy for those concerns. It is called the next election.

This principle is one of the cornerstones of representative government. We ignore it at our peril