

# PORTAGE COUNTY DEMOCRAT

Standing up for Democracy

APRIL 2022

## EXECUTIVE BOARD

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*2022 Co-Chair*

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*At Large*

Travis Slattery

*At Large*

Mary Vils

*At Large*

Mary Zinda

*College Dems Pres*

Madeline Miner

*College Dems VP*

Landon Vosters

HQ Phone 715-544-6323

## Spring Election, Tuesday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

### We need a big turnout!

Here are a few quick reminders:

Vote for: **Eric Olson** for County Executive

**Louis J. Molepske Jr.** for Circuit Court Judge District 2

**Patricia Baker** for Circuit Court Judge District 3

SPASH School Board members: **Jeffrey Ebel, Rob Manzke,**

**Barb Portzen** and **Dennis David Raabe**

**YES** for the Portage County Health Care Center Referendum

**To see a sample ballot, go to [myvote.wi.gov](https://myvote.wi.gov)** and

follow the directions. The sample ballot will tell you which Portage County Supervisory District (County Board district) you live in and any other choices on your ballot. Refer to your March newsletter for the Progressive candidates for those offices, or call PCD Headquarters at 715-544-6323.

**Myvote.wi.gov is a very useful website.** You can register to vote online, find your polling place, request an absentee ballot, and track your absentee ballot after you send it in, all in one place

**In no time in recent history** has it been this necessary to assist local candidates in a non-partisan spring election as much as this spring, and yet "these new times" have forced us to get involved and help not only progressives, but all good, honest candidates to be in charge of our county, city, court and school boards. It's been great to see Democrats who are both members of our party, and some who are not, to work together to canvas, make phone calls, get out candidate's lit, make lunch and work for GOTV. It has been a pleasure and satisfying experience to work with amazing local candidates the past few months. A heartfelt thank you to all, from Gary, Jan and the Executive Board.

**Included in this newsletter** is an article written by **Meleesa Johnson** about the PORTAGE COUNTY HEALTH CARE CENTER and how important it is to our community.

**You will also find a very thoughtful article** written by **Tori Jennings** about the road and transportation referendum which will be on the ballot in August. It's important to think carefully about this issue and to understand the unintended consequences of the referendum. You will hear more about this issue as we get closer to the August primary date.

## Many volunteers have been working hard this past month,

addressing envelopes, making phone calls, staffing the office, delivering campaign signs, organizing volunteers and literature for canvassing, walking turfs and handing out literature, making coffee, providing food, making copies, entering data into our voter network, sharing information about our progressive candidates with friends and neighbors, putting up signs in yards, keeping Headquarters “straightened up”, answering phone calls, and more. Here are a few pictures of our great volunteers. **Thank you to everyone who participated!**



Our Health, Our Care, Our Future  
Vote **YES** on the Health Care Center Referendum  
Meleesa Johnson



Rendering of proposed Health Care Center

For nearly a century Portage County has provided nursing home care for our elderly and for those with long-term and short-term disability. Despite providing this care in a seriously aging facility and despite the challenges of a global pandemic, the Center for Medicare Services (CMS) has repeatedly awarded the Health Care Center (a.k.a. Portage County Home) the much coveted 5-Star Rating. Soon though the significant age of the building, coupled with the demands of new federal regulations and inadequate Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements, may mean the end of the Health Care Center.

To avoid that demise, members of the Health Care Center Committee (HCC) have spent the last 6 years evaluating how best to “save the Health Care Center.” With a dedication to that mission, the Committee advanced the 2018 referendum to ask taxpayers for additional money to support the most fragile of our community. When that referendum passed it provided for up to \$1.4 million annually, for a period of 4 years, to help off-set operational costs of the HCC. The Committee also used those four years to build a plan...a plan for a *new* Health Care Center.

However, to make a new facility a reality, once again the County must look to the voters. The April 5<sup>th</sup> referendum will ask voters if they are willing to spend around \$5.64 a month (per \$100,000 of equalized property value) to cover not only the cost of a new facility, but also the cost of care not covered by Medicaid/Medicare. In total, the annual sum requested is up to \$4.5 million per year for the next twenty years (which coincides with the debt service).

The \$20 million, state-of-the-art HCC will be located on the same property as the current facility at the corner of Whiting Avenue and Water Street. In addition to long-term skilled nursing and rehabilitation rooms, it will have a suite of eight assisted living quarters. The welcoming design uses “green” building concepts and honors our central Wisconsin environmental heritage. It will be cheerful with natural sunlight, have home-like private rooms with modern amenities and spacious common areas.

When you vote “Yes” on the HCC referendum, you will be showing our elderly and disabled that you care about their well-being. It will show that you wish to be a part of the legacy of Our Health, Our Care, Our Future. You will be a part of making history.

To learn more about the entire projects, visit the County’s website: [www.ourhealthourcareourfuture.com](http://www.ourhealthourcareourfuture.com)





# Referendums & Populist Politics

by Tori Jennings, PhD

The road and transportation referendum organized by Kevin Flatoff and a group of Church Street business owners will be on the August 9th partisan primary ballot. Aided by the Freedom Fighters of Central Wisconsin, the group collected the 1,816 valid signatures necessary to initiate direct legislation. If the referendum passes in August, all city road and transportation projects with a capital expenditure of \$1 million or more must go to referendum for voter approval. The referendum underscores a polarized community where many are skeptical of professional expertise and indifferent towards representative government. It also serves as a cautionary tale about direct democracy and populist politics at the local level.

The unintended consequences of the Flatoff referendum are easy to predict because most neighborhood street reconstruction projects cost at least \$1 million. The referendum is fiscally irresponsible since it will likely delay projects, increase construction costs, turn away development projects and lead to higher taxes. Apparently, these impacts are of little or no concern to the ordinance authors, whose goal is to “create a law keeping the City Council from abusing its power on road projects.”

What began as disagreement over communication about the Bus51 corridor redesign quickly morphed into a call-to-action for those who believe they are “not listened to,” “oppressed” or view our government as “illegitimate.” Using a campaign of misinformation about Bus51, bike lanes and road diets, referendum proponents found political traction through populist rhetoric aimed at progressive alders running for re-election. A campaign to replace incumbents with “hand-picked” candidates who share these grievances quickly took shape. Mayor Wiza played his part by not only voting against his professional staff on the recommended road design for Bus51, but also fomenting resentment towards incumbent alders who value and support staff expertise. For example, speaking to Channel 9 News on November 30, 2021 about the referendum, the Mayor stated: “If we don’t agree with what our representatives are doing for us then we have an obligation to step up and serve and vote someone else in.”

Government by referendum may seem like the highest form of democracy. But many experts on the subject argue that referendums can in fact be dangerous to democracy. The problem was described by Harvard University’s Sakina Haider: “The rising tide of populism is carried by an undercurrent of political opportunism, and referendums provide the perfect opportunity to strengthen this surge. When we reduce complex issues into yes-or-no questions, we similarly simplify the debate. This kind of debate is ripe for hijack. Rhetoric begins to take precedence over discussion of the issue at hand, which often becomes conflated with other—often unrelated—social and political grievances.”

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—Sakina Haider

*Referendums Are Dangerous for Democracy*

Elected representatives are accountable for their comments and expected to make informed decisions that best serve the community. When the City Council voted 10:1 to move forward with the 30% design phase of Bus51, it did so following recommendations from city staff and AECOM transportation engineers. Non-elected members of the voting public have no such accountability or obligation to rely on factual information. Unlike referendums to support funding for the Portage County Health Care Center or Stevens Point Area School District, the road and transportation referendum is both punitive and politically opportunistic.

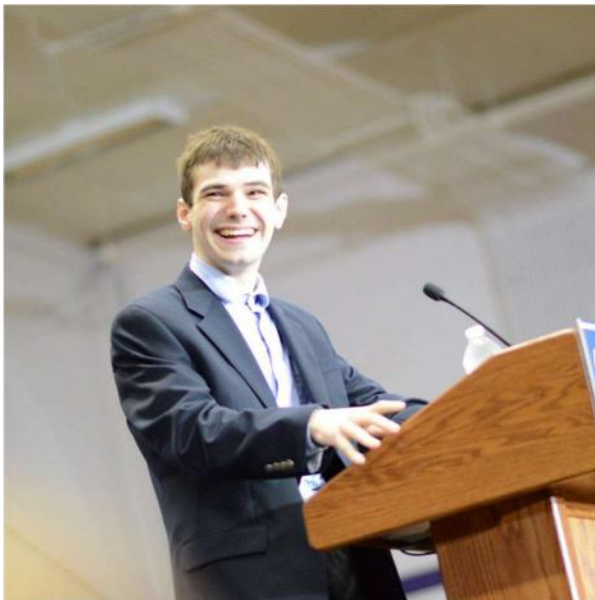
Right-wing populists, according to political science assistant professor Thomas Greven, view themselves as the sole authentic voice of “The People” and thus favor direct democracy over representative democracy. Both locally and nationally the antagonistic interface between we (the people) and them (the ‘corrupt’ elite) is being played out in local elections for city council, school board and county board. Populist rhetoric has clearly set the stage for a political showdown in the April 5<sup>th</sup> spring election and August partisan primary. At the time of this writing the outcome of both elections is unknown. What seems clear however, is that the national and the local look uncomfortably alike.



One of several billboards attacking City Council

tori.jennings1@gmail.com

**Our next General Meeting will be held on April 12<sup>th</sup> at 6:30p at Headquarters.** This will be a **"Grand Reopening"** event **in person**, with food and refreshments. All of our candidates (win or lose), members, and volunteers are invited. This will be an opportunity for our candidates to debrief and for us to celebrate their willingness to "throw their hats into the ring" at this very important time in history. Masks are now optional and if that policy changes, we will let you know.



**Isaac Murtha is the new Field Organizer for Portage and Wood Counties**, and couldn't be more excited to have this opportunity to a) work with you and b) elect some really good Democrats! He thinks we need to make healthcare not bankrupt us, to keep the planet inhabitable and the water drinkable, and to save democracy from the insurrectionists. He also thinks that anti-vax conspiracy theorists are bad, and don't belong in any level of government. He wishes these positions weren't controversial, but knows that's why we need to knock on doors and make phone calls. He enjoys reading, losing at board games (usually), and watching the Packers win (hopefully).

You can reach him at 708-548-3299 or at [isaac.murtha@wisdems.org](mailto:isaac.murtha@wisdems.org) and he'll be delighted to talk to you! (We're all in this together to win!)

Isaac will be working with us later in April to help us prepare for the August and November elections.



**(INTENTIONALLY) LOST IN TRANSLATION**

**Democrats:** We'd like cops to stop killing minorities.  
**Republicans:** Dems hate police.

**Democrats:** Women should have the right to choose.  
**Republicans:** Dems want to kill babies.

**Democrats:** We need reasonable immigration policies.  
**Republicans:** Dems want open borders.

**Democrats:** We kneel in protest of inequality.  
**Republicans:** Dems hate the flag, soldiers and America.

**Democrats:** We should wear masks to protect others.  
**Republicans:** Dems want to take away your freedom.

**Democrats:** We should have background checks.  
**Republicans:** Dems want to take your guns.

**Democrats:** Feds should not be policing in cities.  
**Republicans:** Dems encourage rioting

**Democrats:** People should have a living wage.  
**Republicans:** Dems want to give everyone free stuff.

**Democrats:** We want religious freedom for everyone.  
**Republicans:** Dems want Sharia Law.

**Democrats:** Taxes should be used for the benefit of everyone  
**Republicans:** Dems want socialism.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Join us for coffee on Thursday mornings at 10 at Headquarters.





Portage County Democratic Party  
2220 Division St.  
Stevens Point, WI 54481

[www.portagecountydems.org](http://www.portagecountydems.org)

Facebook: PortageCountyWIDems

Twitter: PortageCoWIDems@portagecountywidems



### **PCDP April 12, 2022 General Meeting**

Call to order: 6:30pm

Program: A Grand Reopening!

Welcome all Members, Volunteers,

Candidates and Elected officials

**Food and refreshments provided**

**VOTE APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>**

**EARTH DAY APRIL 22nd**

**Second Call to 3<sup>rd</sup> CD Convention, April 23rd**

(see article in March Newsletter for details)

**DPW State Convention June 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>**

*Authorized and paid for by Portage County Democratic Party*