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Republicans Hold On to Wisconsin Senate After Recall Vote

By MONICA DAVEY

SAYNER, Wis. — Two Republican state senators lost their seats in recall elections around Wisconsin on Tuesday, but Republicans maintained their control of the State Senate, ultimately handing a defeat to union groups and Democrats who had spent months and millions of dollars trying to wrestle away at least some of the state's political power.

The outcome was seen as a victory for Gov. Scott Walker, a Republican whose move to curtail collective bargaining rights for public workers this year set off a firestorm of protests, then counterprotests and finally a summer of unprecedented recall efforts.

Although two of the Republicans — Senators Dan Kapanke of La Crosse and Randy Hopper of Fond du Lac — were removed by Democratic challengers on Tuesday before the ends of their terms in office, Republicans still hold a majority — now 17 to 16 — over Democrats in the Senate. Until Tuesday, Republicans had dominated with a 19 to 14 majority, but with six recall elections in a single day, the damage for Republicans could have been far worse, and Democrats and some national labor groups had hoped it would be.

Two Senate Democrats also face recall elections next week — one more chapter in the same collective

bargaining rights battle — but given the results on Tuesday, those races now cannot affect which party controls the State Senate, the question that had always been the ultimate concern on both sides. If anything, Republicans could now increase their hold next week.

That appeared to assure Mr. Walker and leading Republican lawmakers that they can continue to pursue their agenda — which has included budget cuts, a concealed weapons provision and a requirement of identification to vote — with relative ease.

In the election on Tuesday, four Republicans held onto their jobs, including Senators Robert Cowles of Green Bay, Luther Olsen of Ripon and Sheila Harsdorf of River Falls. The counting of votes in a challenge to Senator Alberta Darling, who is the powerful Republican co-chair of the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee and someone the Democratic Party's state chairman last week described as the "crown jewel of our recall efforts," dragged into the early hours of Wednesday; ultimately, Ms. Darling was deemed the winner, preliminary results from The Associated Press showed.

In a way, these recall elections — more than have ever been pursued against Wisconsin lawmakers in the state's history — grew out of a different election. Last November, in a pattern that played out in several states, Republicans swept into power in Wisconsin, taking over control of the governor's seat, the State Assembly and the State Senate and pledging to make major changes.

In February, Mr. Walker proposed a "budget repair bill" that would cut benefits to state workers and significantly diminish future collective bargaining rights for most public employees. The point, Mr. Walker said at the time, was to solve the state's budget deficit. But the move set off a wave of anger, and protesters called for the removal of Republican lawmakers who had supported the idea, and began collecting thousands of signatures on recall petitions. Others demanded the removal of Democratic lawmakers who had fled the state for weeks as a procedural maneuver to delay a vote on the collective bargaining question, and began collecting thousands of signatures on other recall petitions. In March, with tensions flaring, Republicans used a procedural maneuver of their own to approve the collective bargaining measure with the Democrats still hidden in Illinois.

The recall campaigns have been battering, time-consuming, confusing (four separate elections have been set for July and August) and remarkably expensive. By one estimate, outside groups and the campaigns will have spent at least \$35 million to recall senators, making some of the races the most expensive Wisconsin legislative campaigns in memory.

Until now, recalls of state lawmakers were rather rare here. Since such recalls were first permitted in 1926, only four such elections, which allow a new challenger to oppose an incumbent before a term's end, had been held, and only two incumbents lost.

To some, the recalls had become not just a measure of control over legislation in Madison but a larger referendum on Republican takeovers of statehouses in 2010 and also a gauge of voters' moods, at least in one battleground state, in the lead-up to the 2012 presidential election.

The campaigns have been fierce, personal, all-consuming. Campaign advertisements have run non-stop in several television markets, and accusations of untoward campaign methods have been exchanged on many fronts; as late as Tuesday night, some Democrats were raising questions about the fairness of the vote count in Ms. Darling's district.

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