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Supreme Court of Wisconsin

110 EAST MAIN STREET, SUITE 215
 P.O. BOX 1688
 MADISON, WI 53701-1688

TELEPHONE (608) 266-1880
 FACSIMILE (608) 267-0640
 Web Site: www.wicourts.gov

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SUPREME COURT

March 19, 2024

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You are hereby notified that the Court has issued the following order:

No. 2023AP1399-OA Clarke v. Wisconsin Elections Commission

A "Motion for Clarification of Opinion and Order as it Relates to Recall and Special Elections," having been filed by respondents, the Wisconsin Elections Commission et al.;

IT IS ORDERED that all parties to this case not moving for relief shall file one or more responses to the motion by March 21, 2024.

ANNETTE KINGSLAND ZIEGLER, C.J. (*dissenting*). Any action by the court on this motion is, at a minimum, premature. This court is charged with the responsibility to answer legal questions which come in the form of a case or controversy.¹ This motion is not an independent case or controversy, nor is it a properly filed motion in another case or controversy which is awaiting any substantive legal determinations. Instead, we are now being asked to issue

¹ Gabler v. Crime Victims Rights Bd., 2017 WI 67, ¶37, 376 Wis.2d 147, 897 N.W.2d 384 ("No aspect of the judicial power is more fundamental than the judiciary's exclusive responsibility to exercise judgement in cases and controversies arising under the law."); Tetra Tech EC, Inc. v. DOR, 2018 WI 75, ¶142, 382 Wis.2d 496, 914 N.W.2d 21 (Ziegler, J., concurring).

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what amounts to an "advisory opinion." This court does not issue "advisory opinions."² This court should resist the urge to continue assuming powers and roles outside of its limited judicial purview and should deny this motion as it is procedurally fatally flawed.

More specifically, we are not the legal advisors for the Wisconsin Election Commission ("WEC"). Yet, through this motion, we are being asked to provide WEC with conclusive advice concerning which district boundaries should be used for any special or recall elections. This is a thorny and complicated matter not easily answered, even if we were the law firm for WEC. Not surprisingly, confusion over representation and which district boundaries are in effect exists because four members of this court "impose[d] their will on the entire Assembly and half of the Senate" in a pre-determined, outcome-driven political decision to remap Wisconsin and overturn this court's barely two-year old precedent in the Johnson litigation.³ This confusion was but one of the foreseeable dangers emanating from a majority of this court dragging the institution through a political, rather than a legal, process in a matter that had been concluded in Johnson. The court's conclusion that the Johnson maps were unconstitutional will most certainly have independent and thorny legal consequences for many in this state. But those scenarios will arise within their own unique factual and legal questions and will need to be independently decided in those cases. Imagine if the Wisconsin Supreme Court were tasked with the responsibility to provide legal advice to any person or entity which is affected because the court concluded (in a separate case) that something was unconstitutional.

In any event, it is premature for WEC to request this court's action in the Robin Vos recall election. At this point in time, there is no recall. News articles indicate that the recall organizers do not appear to have the votes to recall Vos under either district boundary.⁴ The court should not even pretend to be poised to issue a decision in a nonexistent case presenting a hypothetical question. Cognizant of our role, we should not "depart from our general practice" of "not offer[ing] an advisory opinion or mak[ing] a pronouncement based on hypothetical facts." State ex. rel. Collison v. City of Milwaukee Bd. of Review, 2021 WI 48, ¶46, 397

² State v. Grandberry, 2018 WI 29, ¶31 n. 20, 380 Wis. 2d 541, 910 N.W.2d 214.

³ Johnson v. Wis. Elections Comm'n, 2022 WI 19, ¶¶78-79, 401 Wis. 2d 198, 972 N.W.2d 559 (Ziegler, C.J., dissenting).

⁴ Molly Beck, Robin Vos Recall Organizers Fail to Submit Enough Valid Signatures, Initial Review Finds, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (Mar. 12, 2024); <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2024/03/12/signatures-to-force-robin-vos-recall-fall-short-initial-review-shows/72941641007/>; Michelle Schmidt, Robin Vos Recall Effort Appears To Have Fallen Short, Wisconsin State Journal (Mar. 12, 2024); https://madison.com/news/state-regional/government-politics/robin-vos-recall-signatures-supreme-court-elections-commission-maps-legislature/article_cf63caa6-e071-11ee-88d5-d3874e3a7a26.html#:~:text=Organizers%20launched%20the%20recall%20effort,short%2C%20according%20to%20the%20review.

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Wis. 2d 246, 960 N.W.2d 1 (citing State v. Grandberry, 2018 WI 29, ¶31 n.20, 380 Wis. 2d 541, 910 N.W.2d 214). Instead, if a future case or controversy is presented to us, we can respond at that time with the process that is due.

The court should not intimate that it might rush to answer these thorny and complicated issues, which clearly will require a thorough, complete vetting. The issues presented in this standalone "motion" are resultant of the court's result-oriented conclusions in Clarke. In any other matter where something has been determined unconstitutional, the subsequent fallout of that determination does not become part of the original case. WEC's request for this court's advice in this Clarke-adjacent premature proceeding is procedurally flawed, at minimum.

WEC makes very important determinations which affect elections. Those determinations may later be determined to be wrong. WEC did not seek the court's advice on absentee ballot drop boxes.⁵ Nor did WEC seek the court's advice on Democracy in the Park.⁶ The court was not WEC's legal advisor then, and the court is not WEC's legal advisor now. The court should not condone WEC's request for legal advice here. No response to this "motion" should be ordered.

For the foregoing reasons, I dissent.

I am authorized to state that REBECCA GRASSL BRADLEY, J., joins this dissent.

Samuel A. Christensen
Clerk of Supreme Court

⁵ Teigen v. Wis. Elections Comm'n, 2022 WI 64, 403 Wis. 2d 607, 976 N.W.2d 519.

⁶ Trump v. Biden, 2020 WI 91, 394 Wis. 2d 629, 951 N.W.2d 568.

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Daniel P. Gustafson

Brian P. Keenan
Electronic Notice

Midwest Environmental Advocates
634 W. Main St. Suite 201
Madison, WI 53703

Faye B. Hipsman
Electronic Notice

Robert Yablon
Bryna Godar
State Democracy Research Initiative
University of Wisconsin Law School
975 Bascom Mall
Madison, WI 53706

Mel Barnes
Electronic Notice

Sarah A. Zylstra
Electronic Notice

Matthew W. O'Neill
Fox, O'Neill & Shannon, S.C.
622 North Water Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dax L. Goldstein
Electronic Notice

Margo S. Kirchner
Wisconsin Justice Initiative, Inc.
P.O. Box 100705
Milwaukee, WI 53210

Christine P. Sun
Electronic Notice

John B. Hill
Electronic Notice

Daniel J. Schneider
2707 W. Augusta Blvd., Unit 2
Chicago, IL 60622

Jessica Amunson
Electronic Notice

Nathan J. Kane
WMC Litigation Center
501 East Washington Avenue
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Sam Hirsch
Electronic Notice

Arjun Ramamurti
Electronic Notice

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No. 2023AP1399-OA Clarke v. Wisconsin Elections Commission

Samuel T. Ward-Packard
Elias Law Group LLP
250 Mass. Ave. NW, Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20001

Barry J. Blonien
David M. Oppenheim
Bock Hatch & Oppenheim, LLC
203 N. LaSalle St., Ste. 2100
Chicago, IL 60601

Nicholas E. Fairweather
Hawks Quindel S.C.
409 E Main Street
Madison, WI 53703

Abha Khanna
Elias Law Group LLP
1700 Seventh Ave., Suite 2100
Seattle, WA 98101

William K. Hancock
Julie Zuckerbrod
Elias Law Group LLP
250 Mass. Ave. NW, Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20001

Jonathan B. Miller
Michael Adame
Public Rights Project
490 43rd Street, #115
Oakland, CA 94609

Prof. Jonathan Cervas
Carnegie Mellon Institute for Strategy and
Technology
5000 Forbes Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Prof. Bernard Grofman
UC Irvine School of Social Sciences
5229 Social Science Plaza B
Irvine, CA 92697

Dixon R. Gahnz
Lawton Cates, S.C.
P.O. Box 2965
Madison, WI 53703