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Is 5th Time the Charm for DNR Proposal?

Black's bill ending partisan control may finally succeed with Doyle's support

For the fifth time in as many sessions, Representative Spencer Black will introduce legislation to end political control of the Department of Natural Resources. "With a new Governor who supports insulating the DNR from politics, I am optimistic that the fifth time will be the charm," Black said today.

Black's proposal would ensure the DNR's independence by giving a seven-member citizen board the power to hire and fire the department's secretary. This would restore the department's nonpartisan status that existed before 1995, when Republicans made the DNR secretary a cabinet position subject to hiring and firing by the Governor.

Black, who led the fight against the 1995 change and has introduced legislation to reverse it in every session since, said this time he is more hopeful than ever that his DNR independence bill will succeed. "For the first time since I took on this fight eight years ago, I believe there is an excellent chance of success because in Jim Doyle, we finally have a Governor who agrees that our natural resources should not be at the mercy of every shift in the political winds," Black said.

Governor-elect Jim Doyle has pledged his support for restoring the DNR board's authority to choose the department's secretary, but the change would have to be approved by the Republican-controlled Legislature before it would go into effect.

"Wisconsin's long-standing tradition of a politically independent conservation agency made our state a national leader in protecting our environment. That's because decisions about our outdoors were based on science, not politics. The change to a politically controlled DNR undermined our proud tradition of nonpartisan stewardship of the environment," Black said.

Black pointed out that the law keeping direct political influence out of natural resources decisions dates all the way back to 1927 when the great Wisconsin conservationist Aldo Leopold led the fight to end political control and cronyism in our conservation agency.

"It is time that we return to the Aldo Leopold system of conservation that served our state so well for almost 70 years. Our environment is too important to our state and our future to allow political control over conservation to continue. Decisions about our outdoors should be based on what is best for our environment - not on what is best for politicians," Black said.