

America Follows a United Wisconsin.

Sunday's Wisconsin State Journal featured a story highlighting Wisconsin's influence on national policies by highlighting some of the ways Wisconsin helped make ours the America story.

Being true to our state motto, Wisconsin's "Forward" DNA has led the country in essential ways. The Wisconsin Idea, the first kindergarten, the first workers compensation law, Earth Day, welfare reform, among others, were all engineered right here in Wisconsin setting the national standard.

In addition, as noted in the story, Wisconsin is the birthplace of the Republican Party. While barely resembling its current iteration, this was the Republican Party whose first president was Abraham Lincoln, who helped free the slaves; the Party that idolized Teddy Roosevelt, often called "the conservation president," who began the National Park System; and the Party that gave Democratic President Johnson the votes to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

What you may not know is that the birth of the original Republican Party came about due to an electoral reform known as "fusion voting." When four dozen men, representing Free Soilers, anti-slavery groups and other fringe parties gathered, debated and negotiated in Ripon, Wisconsin, these men were part of parties that fused their votes together in order break the stranglehold of the party bosses. These parties banded together to create the Republican Party.

Today, both nationally and here in the Badger State, we again feel the grip of a two-party system that rejects collaboration and compromise and embraces a zero-sum, win-at-all-costs politics.

Because of the toxicity and inefficacy of today's politics, fusion voting's time has come again. Fusion is built on a simple concept: voters have more choices, those choices can have more impact, and voters can band together to determine who wins elections. By allowing issue-driven parties to nominate the same candidate, voters can support minor party platforms without wasting their vote on doomed candidates, or spoiling an election. With fusion, the major parties vie for third party cross-nominations, making new parties constructive players in the political process.

The practical impact of fusion voting could be wide and varied. It will be a helpfully disruptive democratic tool unifying people around shared priorities, instead of forcing people into just two warring camps, as the current system does. A party of the center using fusion will help fend off divisive social agendas driven by the ideological extremes and help elect leaders who are willing to work across the aisle to solve public problems.

Fusion voting is a powerful means to change our politics. In the late 1800's it worked so well, the major party leaders passed a law banning the practice.

All of these are reasons why a bipartisan, statewide group of citizens have formed United Wisconsin. We are citizen- and values-driven, and we're working to restore fusion voting in Wisconsin. If reinstated, in our current hyper-polarized climate, fusion voting will elevate common-sense, moderate voices on issues upon which our friends

and neighbors agree: support for conservation, public schools, small business, and upholding the rule of law.

It's an exciting time to live in the Badger State. We know that when we're at our best, working together, we can solve any problem and create a society that allows every resident to maximize their human potential. We invite you to be part of the story by joining this movement. United Wisconsin looks to use fusion voting like the Radical Republicans did – elevating the voices and ideas that most Wisconsinites want.

United Wisconsin wants to restore fusion voting so we can all live our state's motto with a twist: Forward, *United!*

David F. Gundersen

Board Member

United Wisconsin