

For weeks now, the Government Accountability Board has been in the news, and not in a positive light. The GAB has been embroiled in the very contentious recall drives, as the arbiter of how the process must work. This “watchdog” agency was set up and tasked with bringing integrity and common sense back into our state elections. But the Director and its five Judge panel are all Jim Doyle appointees, and their actions reflect none of the virtue of their original intent.

Over the past few weeks, the GAB has made news of its own, as it makes and interprets the laws regarding recall elections and petition drives. The most brazen rule was their plan to only check and see if each signature included the requisite information (address and date) on the petitions submitted by recall organizers. This plan was due to the GAB’s assumption that all signatures on the recall petitions are otherwise presumed to be valid and lawfully obtained.

When asked if that meant obvious fictitious names like Adolf Hitler and Mickey Mouse were OK, the GAB said “Yes”. The law doesn’t require the GAB to look at names, so that would not be an area of focus. Additionally, their plan would not spot duplicate signatures, or check if the signer was old enough to meet the qualifications.

Judge Mac Davis upended those plans when he ruled that the GAB “must take reasonable, affirmative steps to identify and strike duplicate, fictitious or unverifiable signatures from recall petitions.” He based his ruling on the Statute the GAB was quoting, which “provides that the GAB must determine by careful examination whether the petition on its face is sufficient.” Liberal groups howled at Judge Davis’s “activist” ruling, which seemed pretty tame compared to recent actions by Dane County judges. In fact, A State Appeals Court in Dane County reversed Mac Davis’s ruling, throwing the whole controversy up in the air.

The GAB also delayed the release of Governor Walker Recall petitions due to new “privacy concerns”, even though they were public documents and all previous recall petitions had been released. They stated no statute or rule to back up their concerns, and eventually released the petitions when their position could not withstand scrutiny.

Then came the loss of hundreds of petitions that they had scanned online but could not be viewed by the public. A GAB spokesman said the petitions were all uploaded, they just were mis-numbered and needed to be reworked.

And now, the GAB has ruled that Wisconsin voters cannot even report recall fraud to the GAB. Insisting that only recall targets can introduce evidence of fraud, GAB Director Kevin Kennedy said “no one in the state of Wisconsin may bring to the Board’s attention any known instance of fraud involving the recall petitions. The only way the GAB will consider any accusation or defense of fraud is if the person raising the issue either worked for the recall effort, signed a petition, or works for a political campaign facing a recall election.”

This edict is in response to numerous “Verify the Recall” programs that voters and Tea Party groups have been pursuing. Verify The Recall allows Wisconsin residents to submit their name and confirm it hasn’t been used on a recall petition. Sixty thousand residents have submitted their names to ensure they haven’t been fraudulently used. (Verify The Recall is a joint effort of The Wisconsin GrandSons of Liberty and We the People.)

Verify The Recall has obtained True The Vote software, and has been manually inputting ALL of the recall petition information into a sortable database. The software uses multiple input checks and has been aided by thousands of volunteers to ensure accuracy. When the finished database was offered to the GAB to complete their work, Kennedy and the Board declined. Instead, they hired Data Shop Inc. to input just the names from the recall petitions, so they could check for duplication. This decision cost the taxpayers \$75,000, for a listing of names that offered little else.

So the GAB staff will direct temporary workers hired to process the recall petitions, and will do as little as is statutorily required of them. Kennedy even admitted that their job was “to review, not verify” the recall petitions. As is the case with so many of their opinions and edicts, the partisanship runs deep for this non-partisan Board and the integrity of the process suffers.