



Profile of the 2021 Wisconsin Legislature

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When the Wisconsin Legislature convened on January 4, 2021, the most diverse group of lawmakers ever to serve the state took their seats in the assembly and the senate. This session, there are 41 women and 10 Black members seated in the legislature. These are the highest numbers both of women and of Black legislators ever to serve together in a session. There are four Hispanic members of the legislature, which matches the record set in the 2019 session for the most Hispanic legislators ever to serve together. In addition, the legislature gained its first Asian American member this session. This report profiles the members of the Wisconsin Legislature as of January 31, 2021.

Senate profile

The Wisconsin Senate has 33 members, including 20 Republicans, 12 Democrats, and one open seat.¹ This is the largest majority held by one party in the senate at the start of the session since 1971. This session, 10 senators are women and three are African American. This is the largest number of Black legislators ever to serve together in the senate.

Legislative experience. Of the 16 seats up for election in 2020, eight members of the 2019 senate were reelected and eight new members were elected. Five of the eight new senators have previous legislative experience. Sixteen members are senators in the middle of their terms.

Twenty-three senators have served previously in the assembly. In the 2021 Wisconsin Senate, four senators have served 10 or more sessions; four have served between five and nine sessions; and the remaining 24 have served fewer than five sessions. The longest-serving member is Senator Rob Cowles (R–Senate District 2), who has served in the senate since 1987.

Two senators have had previous experience in a legislative staff position. One worked as an aide in the state legislature. The other worked as a staff person for members of the U.S. Congress.

Local government experience. Twelve senators have had experience in local government as elected public officials: five have served as county board supervisors; two have served on city councils; two have served both as members of city councils and as city mayors; one has served as a county clerk; one has served on a school board; and one has served as a town board chairperson.

Age. As of January 31, 2021, the average age of a senator is 56. The youngest senator is 32 and the oldest is 77.

Occupation. Fifteen senators list themselves as full-time legislators. Three senators are practicing attorneys and one is a farmer. Most others are small-business owners in a variety of fields, from accounting to farm supplies to real estate.

1. After Senator Scott Fitzgerald (R–Senate District 13) was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in November 2020, he resigned from his state senate seat in January 2021.

Education. Thirty-one senators continued their formal education beyond high school. Seventeen earned a bachelor’s degree or associate degree and five attended either a technical school or a college or university. Nine senators continued on to earn advanced degrees in fields ranging from education to public administration.

Military service. Six senators have served in the nation’s armed forces, including the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Army Reserve, and the Air National Guard. One senator is a Persian Gulf War veteran and two are Iraq War veterans.

Assembly profile

There are 99 representatives elected to the Wisconsin Assembly, including 60 Republicans, 38 Democrats, and one vacant seat.² There are 31 women serving in the assembly, three more than served in the 2019 session. There are seven Black members in the assembly, the highest number of Black representatives ever to serve together. Four representatives are Hispanic. Representative Francesca Hong (D–Assembly District 76) is the first Asian American to serve in the legislature.

Legislative experience. Eighty-two representatives were reelected from the 2019 session, and 16 are serving their first terms in the assembly. The longest-serving member is Representative Christine Sinicki (D–Assembly District 20), who has served in the Assembly since 1999.

Twelve representatives have had previous experience in a legislative staff position. Four worked for members of the U.S. Congress, five worked in the state legislature, and three worked for both Congress and the state legislature.

Local government experience. Of the 48 representatives who have been locally elected officials, eight have held office at both the county and the municipal levels, 13 have held county offices, and 27 have held municipal offices.

Twenty-one representatives have served as county board supervisors or board members. Sixteen representatives have served as city council members, eight have served as town board members, and three have served as village trustees. Eight have served as school board members and two have served as city mayors.

Age. As of January 31, 2021, the average age of a representative is 51. The two youngest representatives are 21, and the oldest is 82.

Occupation. Thirty-five representatives do not list a current occupation outside of serving in the legislature. Among the other representatives, eight list themselves as attorneys, eight list themselves as farmers, and 35 list themselves as small business owners. Other current occupations include realtor, sales representative, municipal consultant,

2. After his reelection in November 2020, Representative John Nygren (R–Assembly District 89) resigned from the assembly in December 2020 to pursue a career in the private sector.

and veterinarian. Former occupations range from educator to probation officer to foundation director.

Education. Ninety-three representatives have continued their formal education beyond high school. Thirty-eight hold a bachelor's or associate degree, and 28 have attended college, university, or agricultural, business, technical, or trade school after high school graduation. Twenty-seven representatives have continued on to earn a graduate degree or law degree.

Military service. Nine representatives have served in the nation's armed forces, including the U.S. Army, the U.S. Army Reserve, the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Air Force, and the Air National Guard. Two representatives served in the Persian Gulf War and one representative served in both the Persian Gulf and Iraq Wars. ■

Personal data on Wisconsin legislators, 2011–2021 sessions

	2011		2013		2015		2017		2019		2021	
	Sen.	Rep. ¹	Sen.	Rep.	Sen.	Rep.	Sen.	Rep.	Sen.	Rep.	Sen. ²	Rep. ³
Party affiliation:												
Democrat	14	38	15	39	14	36	13	35	15	34	12	38
Republican.....	19	60	18	60	19	63	20	64	18	64	20	60
Number with previous legislative service:												
In Senate.....	26	0	30	0	27	0	30	0	28	0	24	0
In Assembly	23	69	25	74	24	74	24	83	26	82	23	82
Highest number of prior sessions in same house ...	24	14	25	13	26	14	27	12	28	10	17	11
Occupations:												
Full-time legislator.....	11	32	12	35	11	34	24	56	22	47	15	35
Attorney	3	8	3	7	2	7	2	6	2	7	3	8
Farmer	2	6	2	4	1	6	1	7	1	6	1	8
Other	16	53	16	53	19	52	6	30	9	39	13	47
Education:												
High school only	0	4	1	5	1	4	0	5	0	8	1	5
Beyond high school ...	33	95	32	94	32	95	5	20	7	19	5	28
Bachelor's or associate degree	29	73	28	72	28	69	18	48	17	47	17	38
Advanced degree	10	27	9	27	9	24	10	26	9	24	9	27
Number with experience on local governing body:												
County board	6	16	7	18	9	19	9	26	7	19	5	21
Municipal board.....	9	29	11	30	9	29	16	49	14	41	6	35
Age (shown in years):												
Oldest	83	72	85	72	87	76	89	78	91	80	77	82
Youngest.....	30	25	32	25	34	24	36	26	31	19	32	21
Average.....	56	49	57	49	57	48	58	49	58	49	56	51
Veterans	2	13	2	10	3	7	7	10	7	9	6	9
Number of women	8	23	9	24	11	22	9	22	8	28	10	31

Sen.—Senators; Rep.—Representatives

1. Includes one Independent.

2. The senate currently has one open seat. Data here does not include Senate District 13, which was vacated in January 2021.

3. The assembly currently has one open seat. Data here does not include Assembly District 89, which was vacated in December 2020.

4. Highest degree obtained.