

Thanks, Joy, it's always great to see you, and thanks for inviting me to speak again to the League of Women Voters.

I love the League and all its chapters! It's one of the most crucial organizations we have in this state for defending our democracy, so thank you all for your interest and for your activism.

I got to say, at the outset, that I've never been more worried about our democracy than I have been over the last year and a half.

And here we are, one year after Jan. 6, and the Big Lie continues. President Biden was right, in his magnificent speech the other day, when he said that it represents a dagger at the throat of our democracy.

And we've had our own collaborators in the Jan. 6 coup attempt, right here in Wis, with their fingerprints on that dagger.

-- There were 10 false electors on the Republican side who submitted their names as a fraudulent slate to the Electoral College. I don't know if you knew that. And one of those false electors was Robert Spindell, who happens to be one of the six commissioners on the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

--You might also not know that 15 Republican legislators in Wisconsin, on Jan. 5, 2021, of all dates, sent a letter to VP Pence to delay the counting of electoral votes for 10 days so the Legislature could meet and certify its own slate. This was part of the whole plot, outlined in the Eastman memo. One of those 15 was Janel Brandtjen, who heads the Assembly Committee on Elections.

And there's been no accountability, here in Wisconsin, for the false electors or these 15 legislators.

Instead, the denialism and nihilism about the November elections continues.

Brandtjen told her constituents that Trump actually won the election.

And Rep. Tim Ramthun proposed a resolution in November to retroactively withdraw Wisconsin's electoral votes from the Electoral College.

And of course, we have the endless fishing expedition from Michael Gableman, who also said after the election that it was stolen. And his chief of staff, Andrew Kloster, said the same thing. Kloster also said that rightwingers need their own "irate hooligans" and "captured DAs" to let the hooligans, like the Proud Boys, off the hook.

These are the folks wasting \$676,000 of your tax dollars and counting!

We've also had endless drumbeat of propaganda to discredit the Wisconsin Elections Commission, which Sen. Republican Kathy Bernier, to her everlasting credit, has denounced as a "charade."

The Purpose of this ongoing denialism and assault on our election administration:

First, to keep feeding rancid red meat to the enraged Trumpite base so they will turn out in huge numbers in 2022 and 2024.

Second, to enact laws that will make it harder for people to vote, especially people who lean Democratic.

And third, to sully the reputation of the Wisconsin Elections Commission so badly that partisan Republican officials in the Legislature can destroy it and hand over the administration – and more dangerous still, the certification – of our elections to the Legislature itself or to a particular partisan official the Legislature appoints. In this way, Republican partisans could overturn the will of the people and decide, by fiat, who won the election, regardless of the actual vote count. And we'd be just like Georgia.

Let's be real clear about what we're facing: We're facing a militant anti-democracy movement, in this state and around the country.

It consists of the Trump cult, white nationalism, irrationalism, and a rightwing media ecosystem that feeds it all 24/7.

Now Jan. 6 occurred after I had finished my manuscript and I was just combing it for typos, so I was only able to waive at it in the introduction. But this anti-democracy movement is a more imminent threat than anything I discuss in my book, though several of the chapters certainly relate to what's going on right now.

So let me talk about my book for a bit. That's why you invited me, right?

Start here: Wisconsin used to be a laboratory for democracy. I came here 40 years ago, and it had a well-earned reputation for progressivism and clean government. It's one of the reasons I was happy to move here. Back then, it was a scandal if a lobbyist was buying drinks for a State Senator.

But our reputation has gone way downhill.

And I got to thinking: What would it take to restore Wisconsin's pro-democracy reputation?

Over the last 7 years at the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, we've been working on several of these problems.

One, of course, is **banning gerrymandering**. And while we haven't achieved that yet, the Wisconsin Fair Maps Coalition has created a huge mass movement to accomplish this. The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign is a part of this movement, the League is a part of this movement, and many of you are a part of this movement. And we're not going away, no matter what the Wisconsin Supreme Court says.

Another issue that we deal with, day in and day out, at the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign is the **problem of money in politics**. Did you know there's an expression that's gone extinct in Wisconsin just over the last 7 years? That expression is "I've maxxed out." And the only people who used to use it were super wealthy individuals who liked to play the money game in the political arena. Up until 2015, there was a de facto limit on what any individual could give in Wisconsin during an election cycle, and that limit was \$10,000. So if you'd given \$10 grand to Jim Doyle, and a candidate for State Assembly or State Senate came along and asked you for money, you could happily say, "You know, I'd love to help you, but I can't. I've maxxed out." Well today in Wisconsin, the rich can never max out. Because in 2015 the Wisconsin legislature said individuals can give unlimited amounts of money to political parties and legislative campaign committees. And – get this! – corporations for the first time in 100 years can give to those parties, too. So we need to fix our campaign finance law, and we have to overturn Citizens United!

I also write about a few other issues that haven't gotten as much attention as they deserve, like prison gerrymandering and reenfranchising the formerly incarcerated.

Prison gerrymandering is the counting of prisoners as living where the prison is located and not in the community they came from. Say you were arrested and convicted in Milwaukee and sent up to Waupun a year and half ago. You're getting out in six months, but the Census will have you living in Waupun till 2030. And as a result, the Waupun area gets more representation and more resources because of that inflated count, and Milwaukee gets less. That's not fair, and it's racially biased, as well, and we got to change that.

Reenfranchising the formerly incarcerated is a voting rights issue. Right now, there are about 64,000 Wisconsinites who've served their time and they're out of prison but still they can't vote because they're "on paper" – probation, parole, or extended supervision. And this can last for more than a decade. That's not right! They did their time; they should be able to vote. Many states allow the formerly incarcerated to vote as soon as they get out of prison. And two states allow people to vote while in prison: Maine and Vermont.

But Wisconsin is falling behind here. And there's a bill circulating right now that would have us fall even further behind: It wouldn't let the formerly incarcerated vote until they had paid up all their court fees, fines, and restitution. These amounts can run into the five figures, so this amounts to a nasty poll tax on top of everything else.

I've got other chapters on other subjects, including **tightening recusal rules for judges** and **one on bolstering local media**.

And I have two big chapters at the end on the huge national issues of **uprooting racism and moving toward economic democracy**.

Because you don't have an equal voice if someone has a knee on your throat, and you don't have an equal voice when the superrich can drown out your voice.

You know, 100 years ago, Teddy Roosevelt said, "We can't have a real political democracy until we have something approaching economic democracy, and we're going the opposite direction right now.

We got to turn that around too if we're ever going to get to a democracy where everyone has an equal voice.

So what do we do about all this? How do we respond?

You've taken the first step already by being part of the League of Women Voters. It's really important for people who believe in democracy to join an organization that is doing good work in this field, and we're lucky in Wisconsin to have so many of them. Not just the League, not just the Democracy Campaign, but Common Cause, the Wisconsin Conservation Voters, All Voting Is Local, All on the Line, BLOC, LIT (Leaders Igniting Transformation), Voces de la Frontera, and many more.

Specifically, to counter the anti-democracy movement, we need to do at least three things:

1. Uphold decent Republican voices
State Sen Kathy Bernier, State Sen. Rob Cowles, and Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger

2. Form a United Front of all pro-democracy forces
3. Each of us needs to try to bring two or three people in our wide social circle back from the anti-democracy abyss.

(See “The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization,” by Peter Coleman)

None of this easy. It’s not going to happen overnight. But we need to get on this task, right now, before it’s too late.

If you’ll indulge for a few more minutes, I’d like to read just a couple offerings from my book.

One’s from the Appendix, and it’s really short, and it’s called

“How to Avoid Burnout.”

My other reading, which won’t take more than three minutes, is from the Conclusion, and is entitled, **“Why I’m Hopeful.”**