**Godlewski, La Follette seek expanded roles for treasurer, secretary of state**

***Editor’s note:****This column is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members by WisPolitics.com. Proper attribution to WisPolitics.com is appreciated. Also, please publish the tagline that is included at the end of the column.*

Newly elected State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski and longtime Secretary of State Doug La Follette have big plans to address the “years of neglect” of their offices.

For La Follette, it starts with welcoming fellow Democrats back into positions controlled by the GOP since 2011 after they swept the races for constitutional offices last fall.

The secretary of state is entering his 11th term in office, and while the position may not be new, La Follette is approaching the latest term with fresh optimism.

“I’m happy we have a new and much better governor, and I look forward to working with him,” he said.

Much of the work La Follette says he’s looking forward to involves undoing cuts made to his office during the tenure of former Gov. Scott Walker.

In 2015, La Follette sued the Walker administration after it unveiled a spending plan that cut his budget nearly in half — from $510,100 to $265,000, roughly in the same ballpark as the $271,900 figure his office requested for the upcoming two fiscal years.

That budget also made drastic cuts to his staff, which shrunk from four full-time workers to two, stripped him of responsibilities, and moved the physical location of his office to a “cubby hole” in the basement of the state Capitol.

While the lawsuit was not successful, La Follette had eyes on a moving his office out of the basement and restoring his staff ever since.

“Being in the basement makes things difficult,” he said.

“We have lots of people to serve, and sometimes they get lost trying to find our office.”

While LaFollette isn’t in danger of getting lost on his way to the basement, Godlewski might be as she settles into her new digs in the office next door.

The newly elected state treasurer is excited to get to work but has a long way to go in order to get her office operating the way she wants it. Much like La Follette’s office, lawmakers have eliminated or shifted duties away from the state treasurer’s office and cut it down to the brink of elimination.

“The first thing you have to understand is that my constitutionally mandated salary takes up 85 percent of the office’s budget,” Godlewski said.

That budget was submitted last September by former Republican treasurer Matt Adamczyk. Only one position — that of the state treasurer — is listed in the organizational chart and $95,700 of the requested $116,700 budget is earmarked for the treasurer’s salary and benefits, leaving only $21,000 per year to operate the office.

Godlewski doesn’t plan to work under those restraints for very long.

“We are absolutely going to submit a new budget, and that’s what we are working through right now,” she said.

But while she plans on boosting the profile of her office, Godlewski says the changes won’t “cost taxpayers a dime.” She says the funding would be generated by program revenue, or revenue created by programs run by the treasurer’s office.

The biggest driver of program revenue in Adamczyk’s budget was unclaimed property, which he estimated would bring in $118,600 this year and $120,800 next year. But Godlewski sees opportunities to grow those numbers and bring more money into the state’s coffers.

“The state of Ohio has over 20 offices that look into unclaimed property accounts, Wisconsin only has six,” Godlewski said.

Beyond budget battles though, both Godlewski and LaFollette say they are eager to work with the Evers administration.

“There is a clear gap between what constituents should expect and what is being done,” said Godlewski.

“It’s time to change that.”

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics, and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

*Copyright © WisPolitics.com*