



# Profile of the 2023 Wisconsin Legislature

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The first Wisconsin Legislature convened in 1848. For most legislators elected that session, serving in the legislature was a part-time position that separated them from their families, farms, or businesses for only part of the year. Today, 175 years later, members of the 2023 legislature face this same challenge but serve the state in a full-time legislature; many legislators have left behind careers and small businesses and sacrificed family and personal time to serve the state. This report profiles the members of the Wisconsin Legislature as of January 31, 2023.

## Senate profile

The Wisconsin Senate has thirty-three members, including twenty-one Republicans, eleven Democrats, and one open seat.<sup>1</sup> This is the largest majority held by one party in the senate at the start of the legislative session since 1979. This session, eight senators are women.

**Legislative experience.** Of the seventeen seats up for election in 2022, ten members of the 2021 senate were reelected and seven new members were elected. Six of the seven new senators have previous legislative experience. Fifteen members are senators in the middle of their terms.

Twenty-three senators have served previously in the assembly. Five senators in the 2023 Wisconsin Senate have served ten or more legislative sessions; thirteen have served between five and nine legislative sessions; and the remaining fourteen have served fewer than five legislative sessions.<sup>2</sup> The longest-serving member is Senator Rob Cowles (R–Senate District 2), who has served in the senate since 1987.

Two senators have had experience in a legislative staff position. One senator worked as a communications director for a state representative and one worked as a staff member for a U.S. representative and a U.S. senator.

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

**Age.** As of January 31, 2023, the average age of a senator is fifty-four. The youngest senator is thirty-two and the oldest is seventy-nine.

**Occupation.** Twelve senators list themselves as full-time legislators. Among the other senators, three list themselves as practicing attorneys, three list themselves as realtors, and one lists himself as a farmer. Most others are small-business owners in a variety of fields, ranging from insurance to farm supplies.

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1. Senator Alberta Darling (R–Senate District 8) resigned from her state senate seat in December 2022, resulting in a vacancy.

2. These counts include sessions served in the assembly.

**Education.** Thirty senators continued their formal education beyond high school. Twenty-six earned a bachelor's degree or associate degree, and four attended either a technical school or a college or university. Nine senators continued on to earn a law degree or advanced degree in fields ranging from education to nursing to public administration.

**Military service.** Four senators have served in the nation's armed forces, including the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Army, the U.S. Army Reserve, and the Air National Guard. Two senators are Persian Gulf War veterans.

## Assembly profile

The Wisconsin Assembly has ninety-nine representatives, including sixty-four Republicans and thirty-five Democrats. There are thirty-three women serving in the assembly, two more than served in the 2021 legislative session.

**Legislative experience.** Seventy-five representatives were reelected from the 2021 session, and twenty-four are serving their first terms in the assembly. Seventy-six representatives have served for fewer than five sessions, and twenty-two have served between five and nine sessions. The longest-serving member is Representative Christine Sinicki (D–Assembly District 20), who has served in the assembly since 1999 and is the only representative to have served ten or more sessions.

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

**Local government experience.** Fifty-two representatives have had experience in local government as elected officials. Nine have held office at both the county and the municipal levels, fifteen have held county offices, and twenty-eight have held municipal offices.

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

**Age.** As of January 31, 2023, the average age of a representative is fifty. The two youngest representatives are twenty-three, and the oldest is seventy-seven.

**Occupation.** Thirty-two representatives list themselves as full-time legislators. Among the other representatives, thirty-six list themselves as business owners, seven list themselves as attorneys, and nine list themselves as farmers. Other current occupations include nonprofit leader or director, nurse, realtor, teacher, firefighter, onion broker, and veterinarian.

**Education.** Ninety-four representatives have continued their formal education beyond high school. Seventy-two hold a bachelor's or associate degree, and twenty-two have attended college, university, or agricultural, business, technical, or trade school after high

school graduation. Twenty-six representatives have continued on to earn a law degree or an advanced degree in fields ranging from biochemistry to criminal justice to religion.

**Military service.** Ten representatives have served in the nation’s armed forces, including the U.S Army, the U.S. Army Reserve, the U.S. Navy, and the U.S Air Force. One representative is a Persian Gulf War veteran and one is a veteran of both the Persian Gulf and Iraq Wars. ■

**Personal data on Wisconsin legislators, 2013–23 sessions**

	2013		2015		2017		2019		2021		2023	
	Sen.	Rep.	Sen.	Rep.	Sen.	Rep.	Sen.	Rep.	Sen.	Rep.	Sen. <sup>1</sup>	Rep.
<b>Party affiliation</b>												
Democrat . . . . .	15	39	14	36	13	35	15	35	12	38	11	35
Republican . . . . .	18	60	19	63	20	64	18	64	20	60	21	64
<b>Previous legislative service</b>												
Senate . . . . .	30	0	27	0	30	0	28	0	24	0	25	0
Assembly . . . . .	25	74	24	74	24	83	26	82	23	82	23	75
Most prior sessions in the same house . . . . .	25	13	26	14	27	12	28	10	17	11	18	12
<b>Occupations</b>												
Full-time legislator . . . . .	12	35	11	34	24	56	22	48	15	35	12	32
Attorney . . . . .	3	7	2	7	2	6	2	8	3	8	3	7
Farmer . . . . .	2	4	1	6	1	7	1	6	1	8	2	9
Other . . . . .	16	53	19	52	6	30	9	39	13	47	16	51
<b>Education</b>												
High school only. . . . .	1	5	1	4	0	5	0	8	1	5	2	5
Beyond high school. . . . .	32	94	32	95	33	94	33	91	31	93	30	94
Bachelor’s or associate degree . . . . .	28	72	28	69	28	74	26	72	26	65	26	72
Advanced degree . . . . .	9	27	9	24	10	26	9	25	9	27	9	26
<b>Experience on local governing body</b>												
County board. . . . .	7	18	9	19	9	26	7	19	5	21	8	24
Municipal board . . . . .	11	30	9	29	16	49	14	41	6	35	8	37
<b>Age (years)<sup>2</sup></b>												
Oldest . . . . .	85	72	87	76	89	78	91	80	77	82	79	77
Youngest. . . . .	32	25	34	24	36	26	31	19	32	21	32	23
Average . . . . .	57	49	57	48	58	49	58	49	56	51	54	50
Veterans . . . . .	2	10	3	7	7	10	7	9	6	9	4	10
Women. . . . .	9	24	11	22	9	22	8	28	10	31	8	33

Sen.—Senators; Rep.—Representatives.

1. Data do not include Senate District 8, which is vacant at the time of publication.

2. Ages for 2023 session calculated as of January 31, 2023.

Source: Data collected from legislative surveys by Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, March 2023.