Recall Roundup: Wisconsin's laws primed state for recall

by JOEL CHRISTOPHER, Digital Content Editor

The recall fever that has gripped Wisconsin since Republican Gov. Scott Walker was elected last year has been attributed mostly to his sharp and successful attacks on union power and the hyper-partisanship of today's politics.

Joshua Spivak, however, offers a much simpler explanation: technology.

The effort to organize a recall initiative and collect the signatures is time-consuming, expensive and difficult, especially in the short window mandated by law from filing for a recall to gathering enough signatures. But Spivak points out in a piece this week on theatlantic.com that the Internet, word-processing programs and smartphones have made the task far easier and cheaper today. (See report here: bit.ly/RiseInRecalls)

Spivak is a senior fellow at the Hugh L. Carey Institute for Government Reform at Wagner College in New York. He also runs The Recall Elections Blog, which tracks recalls at every level of government across the country. (See blog here: recallelections.blogspot.com)

His theory on the rise of technology as an aid to recall-minded voters rings true. Think how much easier it is to create a flyer for a lost dog or to connect online with people who share your affinity for sheep's head or distance running or gourmet cooking.

Spivak doesn't mention other important factors that were a big help for recall organizers. Those include the weeks-long 2011 protests in Madison that concentrated supporters from across the state so they could organize petition-signing efforts, and the requirement that the recall couldn't be launched for one year after Walker took office, which gave organizers plenty of time to prepare.

Nonetheless, Spivak's analysis does a good job of explaining Wisconsin's unique set of recall rules that made it a tinderbox for an anti-incumbent effort, and could keep the recall fires ignited last year burning for some time in the Badger State.