

Three Senate Republicans want budget changes to win their support

Posted on Thursday, Sep 14, 2017

Three Senate Republicans are demanding a [series of changes](#) to the budget to win over their votes, including raising the income limit for the statewide school choice program and banning UW from spending money on diversity, sensitivity and cultural fluency training.

The three — Sens. Chris Kapenga, of Delafield; Steve Nass, of Whitewater; and Duey Stroebel, of Saukville — also want to move up the planned repeal of the prevailing wage on state projects to Jan. 1 rather than Sept. 1, 2018, and to delete language the Joint Finance Committee added to the budget that would pre-empt local regulations of quarries that produce material for road and construction work.

If they refuse to vote for the budget without the changes, it could halt passage in the GOP-run Senate. Sen. Dave Craig, R-Big Bend, is expected to be a no, and Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, can only lose three members from his 20-13 majority and still pass the budget.

A Fitzgerald spokeswoman did not respond to a text or call Wednesday.

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Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, was dismissive of the requested changes by the three conservative senators.

He again said the Assembly is not coming back to take up the budget after passing it last night, and knocked the trio for failing to “engage in the process,” but rather resorting to “holding out in the end.”

Assembly Republicans publicly backed moving the income limit for the statewide voucher program to 300 percent of the federal poverty level as the three Senate

Republicans demanded. But Senate GOP leadership backed an increase to 220 percent, which is what Republicans inserted in the budget through the Joint Finance Committee.

Vos said Assembly Republicans were open to the provision on the list of demands seeking to move up the repeal of the prevailing wage. But Vos said he was told just adding that provision would not have brought any of the three to a yes.

“The deal expired,” he said.

Fitzgerald has said he was short of the needed votes to approve the budget, though he has not put a hard number on how many members he needed to win over.

Some have wondered if Sen. Rob Cowles, R-Green Bay, would back the proposal. But he told WisPolitics.com he’s a yes, in part, because the structural deficit that would be produced by the budget would come in at \$991 million for 2019-21, better than he had anticipated. Still, he plans to “seek the removal of as much policy as possible through the governor’s veto pen.”

The Legislative Fiscal Bureau [noted Wednesday](#) the \$991 million structural deficit projected for 2019-21 would be the second smallest since 1999-2001. There also was a projected surplus for 2013-15.

Other provisions on the three senator’s list of demands includes:

*reverting to the gov’s call to end an exemption to school property tax levies for energy efficiency projects. The budget JFC approved calls for a one-year moratorium on such projects.

*adding language from pending legislation that would a local wheel tax could only be imposed if approved via referendum.

*changing language on seeking to swap federal money for state funds on some highway projects to avoid some federal requirements.