

Assembly kicks off budget debate, GOP rejects Dem prevailing wage amendments

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The Assembly kicked off its debate on the biennial budget this afternoon, with Republicans shooting down Dem amendments on their proposed repeal of the prevailing wage.

Democrats said the repeal, which would apply to state construction projects, would lower wages for Wisconsin workers and encourage out-of-state contractors to flood into the state. One of the amendments that Dems proposed aimed to encourage companies bidding on state projects to hire Wisconsin workers.

“Repealing prevailing wage targets working Wisconsinites who desperately need family-supporting jobs and a better life,” said Rep. Tod Ohnstad, D-Kenosha.

But Republicans, including JFC Co-chair John Nygren, R-Marinette, called it an “artificial wage that’s established by government.”

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Rep. Bob Kulp, R-Stratford, said Democrats’ arguments are “plain wrong” and the prevailing wage repeal would encourage more construction workers to relocate to Wisconsin and “join in our success.”

Ahead of today’s session, Assembly Republicans hailed the budget as one that cuts taxes, invests in K-12, expands school choice and makes government more accountable.

“I think you have to work really hard to figure out a way to vote against it,” said Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke, R-Kaukauna.

But Democrats slammed the majority party for failing to reach a long-term deal on transportation, even after a two-month delay in passing the budget. They also criticized GOP lawmakers for nixing Gov. Scott Walker's proposal to boost sparsity aid for rural school districts.

"It took them months to get this budget done, and they couldn't even invest in our rural schools," said Rep. Katrina Shankland, D-Stevens Point. "It took them months to get this budget done, and we still don't have a road funding solution. It's actually embarrassing."