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Bill on water ski spotters passes Assembly

Posted on Thursday, Nov 9, 2017

Those towing waterskiers would no longer need a second person in the boat acting as a spotter so long as the boat is equipped with a rear-view mirror under legislation the Assembly approved and sent to the guv.

The bill passed on a 63-29 vote, with four Dems breaking ranks to vote for it and two Republicans voting against it.

Dems hit Republicans for jeopardizing safety out of convenience, saying current law, in which a boat towing someone on water skis, aquaplane or similar device is required to have a second person to observe those being towed, is safest.

Saying it's "vitally important to have a spotter," Rep. Peter Barca pointed to the "rare circumstances where somebody goes down, where somebody gets hurt."

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In those situations, the Kenosha Dem said, "timing is of the essence."

And, he says, another person on the scene could make all the difference.

Rep. Ron Tusler, though, said "mirrors are safer than using a spotter," adding spotters are generally distracted and don't maintain the attention "they need to do their job correctly."

"This is a bill that's going to increase safety in Wisconsin, it's not going to decrease anything," the Harrison Republican said.

The chamber also shot down a series of Dem amendments, including one that would require anyone using water skis to wear a life jacket.

Rep. Gary Hebl, D-Sun Prairie, backed the effort, saying current law existed for the safety of not just the skiier but also because “it’s really important for other people who use our lakes.”

“It only makes sense that if we take the spotter away, the skier should wear a life preserver for safety purposes,” he said.

The four Dems who voted for the bill were: Reps. Jimmy Anderson, Jonathan Brostoff, Eric Genrich and Leon Young, while the two Republicans who opposed it were: Reps. Joan Ballweg and Nancy VanderMeer.