

# High-capacity wells bill passes Assembly, heads to Walker's desk

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A bill that would loosen regulations of high-capacity wells passed a divided Assembly on a 62-35 vote, over a little more than two hours of Dem protests.

The state Senate last month signed off on the bill 19-13, under which DNR would not review the impact of existing wells when they are replaced or the property is sold. Today's passage in the Assembly sends the bill to Gov. Scott Walker's desk.

Dems lined up in opposition to the legislation, including Rep. Deb Kolste, D-Janesville, who said while the bill provides certainty to farmers to ensure they'll "get water forever," the state's residents "need a plan that takes all water users into account."

And Rep. Cory Mason blasted what he calls the "Western water rights style" that he said pits farmers against other residents.

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The Racine Dem also drew a comparison of denying the connection between high capacity wells and declining water levels with denying the connection between science and climate change, as he criticized a provision of the bill that calls for a study that he said punts the problem down the road.

"These are real problems that we are facing and we have to come up with real solutions," he said.

But GOP Rep. Scott Krug, who represents the Central Sands region that is at the heart of the debate, said while Dems are right in that "there are a ton of studies," he added that targeted ones are necessary to find "what the solutions are in those areas."

Meanwhile, Rep. Adam Jarchow called the bill “reasonable” and not controversial.

“If you own something and it’s critically important to your business and it’s broken, then you can fix it,” said Jarchow, R-Balsam Lake.

Before the bill’s passage, Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca made a motion to send the bill back to the Assembly Agriculture Committee, which previously did not exec on the bill.

The Kenosha Dem criticized the ag committee and the Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform, which passed the bill by a paper-ballot vote at the end of March, saying that “neither committee did any work” on the legislation.

“This is the least deliberative body that I have ever seen,” Barca said.

Dems also proposed a couple of amendments to the legislation, including one from Mason that would require a 10-year periodic review of the wells, and another from Rep. Katrina Shankland that would require a 30-year periodic review. Both were shot down.