

Republicans reject series of Dem budget amendments, criticize opposition's strategy

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Assembly Republicans are continuing to reject a series of Dem amendments to the biennial budget, with 10 rejected as of 2:20 p.m. today.

But they also are criticizing Democrats for their strategy to offer amendments that individually touch on a wide range of topics. One amendment, for example, would have added an anonymous hotline for those in veteran homes, boosted science positions at the Department of Natural Resources and accepted the federal Medicaid expansion.

Other amendments have aimed to increase funding for broadband expansion grants, boosting tuition assistance for UW System students and requiring the system to report yearly on the amount of loans its students have taken out.

Joint Finance Committee Co-chair John Nygren, R-Marinette, contrasted it to the strategy two budgets ago of Dems opting against introducing any amendments and said they're now trying to "jam as many things as we possibly can" into individual amendments.

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"As far as governing, this is a complete and utter joke," Nygren said, likening it to the wrap-up 999 motions that his committee has authored in the past and this session limited.

Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca, D-Kenosha, said even if JFC didn't have as massive of a wrap-up motion this time, it had "more than a few" questionable last-minute additions.

And Rep. Jill Billings, D-La Crosse, defended the Dem approach, saying their amendments are “absolutely no joke.”

“This is our side of the aisle listening to the people of Wisconsin and showing them that we hear them and we care about them,” she said.

But Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, criticized the “smorgasbord” approach and said it was aimed at getting Assembly Dems a chance to “audition” for leadership roles since Barca is leaving his post.