

Senate approves making Veterans Day state holiday

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The Senate approved by voice vote adding Veterans Day to the list of holidays where state agencies are closed, which would make Wisconsin the final state to formally recognize the holiday.

But it rejected a Dem amendment that would have mandated giving veterans at private employers a paid day off as well.

The amendment from Sen. Dave Hansen would exempt those employees who are needed to provide a public safety function, but give them another paid day off that month.

Hansen, D-Green Bay, said he has introduced similar proposals for almost a decade to no avail and questioned the sincerity of recognizing Veterans Day without giving actual veterans the day off as well.

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“I can’t imagine that any patriotic business owner would object to that,” Hansen said.

But Sen. Roger Roth, one of the bill’s co-authors, said the legislation was only intended to recognize Veterans Day as an official state holiday. Hansen’s amendment would improperly expand the legislation, a violation of Senate rules, he argued.

Roth, as Senate president, ruled the amendment was non-germane, and Republicans voted 19-13 to uphold his ruling.

“The state of Wisconsin does not mandate employers in the private sector to follow

any holiday, not Memorial Day, not the Fourth of July, not Christmas, not Thanksgiving, not New Year's," Roth said.

Currently, there are nine state holidays where offices are generally closed other than Saturdays and Sundays.

State employees would get Veterans Day as a paid day off, but they would lose a personal floating holiday they can now use to take off a day of their choosing.

Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, said he would prefer that Veterans Day only recognize those who have served. He noted the lack of attendance at events on Memorial Day or Martin Luther King Day as a sign people treat them more as a day off than one of remembrance.

"If you really want to recognize veterans, then make it 'Only for Veterans Day,'" said Nass, who spent 33 years in the Wisconsin Air National Guard.