

Shilling says taxpayers 'being held hostage' by GOP budget delay

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Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling, D-La Crosse, said today taxpayers are "being held hostage" by Republicans' delay in passing a budget.

The Senate gavelled in today to vote on the budget, though Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald said he still didn't have the required 17 GOP votes to pass the budget. The Senate is in recess until 11:30 a.m.

Sen. Dave Hansen, D-Green Bay, told reporters at a news conference Republicans reached out to two Democratic senators to see whether they may vote on the budget but didn't offer specifics. Shilling described those as "side conversations" that GOP leaders held with her members and said the caucus is "united."

In trying to reach a deal, Gov. Scott Walker could offer to use his partial veto authority, the most powerful in the nation, to make alterations that would appeal to three senators who have a [list of changes](#) they'd like to see.

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For example, Walker has publicly said he would be open to moving up the planned repeal of the prevailing wage on state projects, which would kick in under the budget on Sept. 1, 2018. The three senators have called for that implementation to be moved up to Jan. 1.

Walker spokesman Tom Evenson said the gov called a few senators from South Korea, where he is on a trade mission, to hear their concerns.

"The senior staff here and (budget Director) Waylon (Burton) have been engaged with these guys to reach a deal," Evenson said.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, said this week he wouldn't be "held hostage" by senators who want to add in last-minute budget requests. His chamber passed the budget bill on Wednesday.

But Shilling told reporters ahead of today's session that taxpayers are the ones who are affected.

"It's the taxpayers that are being held hostage right now," she said. "It is communities across the state that are being held hostage because of the inability of Republicans to govern."

Sen. Lena Taylor also criticized the three GOP senators' list of demands, noting one of them was to block funding for diversity training at the UW System. Taylor, D-Milwaukee, said companies are demanding that university graduates have cultural fluency and are able to work positively with people of all backgrounds.

Senate Democrats have prepared three amendments that Shilling said would push back against Republicans' efforts to "further rig the economy for the wealthy."

Among the provisions in the three amendments — though individual Dem senators may offer more during the debate — are:

- *adding \$514 million in K-12 general aid that Democrats say would make up for the GOP's 2011 cuts on schools;
- *creating a state authority so people can refinance their student loan debt;
- *accepting the federal Medicaid expansion, along with boosting the reimbursement rates that providers get paid;
- *upping funding for local road aids by \$100 million;
- *restoring the Department of Natural Resources' oversight over high-capacity wells;
- *letting voters decide in a referendum if they want their property taxes going "toward unaccountable voucher schools";
- *and boosting funding for broadband expansion grants.

"Rather than give away more to wealthy special interests, we're going to fight to expand opportunities to strengthen communities and to level the playing field for everyone who works hard and wants to get ahead," Shilling said.