

# Assembly Republicans pass rule changes despite Dem objections

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Rep. Jimmy Anderson joined his fellow Assembly Dems in voting against accommodations allowing him to call into committee meetings even after GOP leaders pulled from the package a contentious measure allowing unlimited veto override attempts.

Before the proposals were split into two packages, Dems denounced them as a power grab and Anderson, D-Fitchburg, chided his GOP colleagues for tying the accommodations he's sought all year to changes that he said were designed to undercut the minority.

Republicans then broke up the package. But the provisions to provide accommodations for Anderson were still paired with changes such as giving the majority leader the power to set debate time limits if an agreement can't be reached with the minority leader.

After the split, Anderson initially said he would support the rules changes that included his accommodations despite the other provisions because Republicans had sought to work with him on the issue.

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But he still joined all Dems present in the chamber against the accommodation package, which passed on a 61-36 party-line vote. He didn't explain his decision ahead of the vote.

The measure was originally included as part of an update to the chamber's rules that would allow multiple attempts at overrides of a gubernatorial veto and made changes to a process that allowed the minority party to pull bills to the floor, among other things.

But Dems cried foul, saying the “poison pill” measures were an attempt to “completely undermines how political engagement is supposed to work in Wisconsin.”

“What does taking away power from the minority... have to do with (Americans with Disabilities Act) accommodation?” Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz, D-Oshkosh, referencing other changes GOP leaders added to the package. “This is just another black eye on Wisconsin.”

Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke, R-Kaukauna, fired back that the GOP was operating in good faith, noting that Republican leadership unveiled the package on Tuesday and negotiated with Anderson afterward to ensure his needs were met.

“But it seems you guys can’t get to yes,” he said.

Dems introduced an amendment that would have broken the accommodations out from the rest of the package, but the Republican majority voted against the proposal.

In an emotional floor speech that recounted the car accident with a drunk driver that claimed the lives of his mother, father and brother and left him paralyzed, Anderson slammed the decision.

The Fitchburg Dem first requested a call of the Assembly, a procedural move that forced members to return to the chamber and take their seats. He then described a series of medical procedures that he needed to start at 4:30 a.m. in order to make it to the Capitol for a 10 a.m. meeting, including a procedure in which his bowels are digitally stimulated and emptied to avoid relieving himself while on the floor.

“So when I ask for the accommodation that we do things at reasonable times with reasonable notice it’s because I don’t want to talk to you about these things,” Anderson said. “But you don’t give me these accommodations so I have to sit here and debase myself and talk to you about these things in public that you don’t understand otherwise.

If you have any respect for me as a fellow colleague, if you respect me as a human being, turn this down and let’s find another way.”

After a near two hour break, which included a ceremony honoring first responders, Republican leaders brought forward a proposal to split the rule changes, allowing

members to vote on disability accommodations separately for the rest of the package.

“After discussion, we took the words of (Anderson) to heart,” Steineke said.

As Anderson announced he would vote for the measure, he still called on his Dem colleagues to vote against it saying it “removes their voice from the process.”

The changes include three changes that Anderson had requested to the original GOP approach to providing him accommodations.

That includes changing a provision that had required a lawmaker with a certified disability to give two hours notice before being allowed to phone in for a committee hearing. The new requirement would be 30 minutes to give Assembly sergeant staff time to set up the phone system.

The changes also include adding the sergeant staff to those who need to be notified when the phone-in accommodation is needed. Also, the language in the rules package would be tweaked to read a committee chair “shall” provide the accommodation rather than “may.”

Still, Rep. Chris Taylor, D-Madison, told reporters two aspects of the accommodation were likely violations of the ADA. She highlighted a provision that required the speaker and minority leader in addition to the body’s ADA coordinator to authorize a member’s disability in order to be allowed to utilize the call-in option and the rule’s requirement for a “permanent” disability.

Taylor said the rule would likely need to be resolved through litigation.

The provisions that were stripped out of the accommodation package — including the veto provision, a definition of which rooms were part of the Assembly chamber, and a change to the timeline for referring a proposal to the calendar — were passed separately on a 60-36 vote. Rep. Scott Allen, R-Waukesha, voted with all Dems against the measure.

A spokeswoman for Gov. Tony Evers called the measures “Lame Duck 2.0.”

“The people of our state want elected officials who will do the right thing for the right reasons—that’s why they elected the governor last November,” spokeswoman Britt Cudaback said. “It’s a shame that Republicans in Wisconsin continue to lower

the bar for decency and respect in our state.”