

DOT's Thompson clears committee; Nass, Stroebel raise objections

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A Senate panel has unanimously backed the confirmation of Craig Thompson to lead DOT despite Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, urging Republicans on the panel to either oppose Thompson's nomination or delay the vote.

Before Thursday's vote, committee Chair Jerry Petrowski, R-Marathon, praised Thompson as "a class act" that "will do a great job for the state of Wisconsin." He also bemoaned the politics around Thompson's nomination.

"I know there is constantly, in the world we live in, a lot of sniping going on for some of the secretaries. But I believe Craig has been involved in transportation for a long time and I believe he will do a good job," he said.

The committee voted 4-0 to back Thompson and Mary Kolar to lead Veterans Affairs with Sen. Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green, absent due to a pre-planned family trip.

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A Nass spokesman ripped the vote, saying the Whitewater Republican would continue to oppose Thompson's nomination. Sen. Duey Stroebel, R-Cedarburg, also expressed opposition to the nomination.

With a 19-14 majority, Thompson would need the support of all other Senate Republicans to win confirmation without Dem support. Typically, Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, has avoided votes that require Dem support to pass.

A Nass spokesman told WisPolitics.com the Whitewater Republican was "extremely, extremely upset" by the allegation of sniping and bashed Petrowski for "willfully ignoring your oversight duties."

“Anybody who’s a proper committee chairman should want to conduct oversight and ask questions. But to move it forward without even asking questions and then refer to people bringing it up as sniping just pretty much speaks to the problem of why taxpayers can’t always count on the legislature to defend them,” said spokesman Mike Mikalsen.

Nass raised concerns over the nomination over a report detailing the number of single-bid contracts approved since he became secretary.

In a release, Stroebel slammed Thompson for perceived coziness with road builders.

“There is a fundamental conflict of interest inherent in appointing the lobbyist of a group of vendors to head an agency that hands out contracts to those same vendors,” he said.

A Stroebel spokesman did not comment to WisPolitics.com when asked if the Cedarburg Republican would vote against Thompson on the floor.

But speaking with reporters after the hearing, Petrowski said he believed Thompson’s job history should be considered a benefit.

“I think your life history probably helps you to understand the issues much better than somebody else that’s not involved in transportation,” he said. “If you want the brightest and best people, I think you try to get the people that have a background and knowledge not only of managing people but managing the process.”

See Nass’ statement:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2019/sen-nass-senate-committee-vote-on-appointment--of-secretary-designee-craig-thompson/>

See Stroebel’s statement:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/190808-Stroebel.pdf>

See the committee vote:

<https://wiseye.org/2019/08/08/senate-committee-on-transportation-veterans-and--military-affairs-3/>