

# Evers administration, ag groups, others urge Republicans to not reject Pfaff nomination

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The Evers administration, ag groups and even his old boss U.S. Rep. Ron Kind made a last-minute push to — at a minimum — delay a confirmation vote on DATCP Secretary Brad Pfaff as they tried to persuade Republicans not to reject the nomination.

Kind, D-La Crosse, said his former deputy chief of staff was a “no-brainer” to lead DATCP, while U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, also weighed in, saying the GOP-run Legislature should “put partisan politics aside and confirm him so he can continue doing his job and we can all get to work putting our Wisconsin farmers first.”

But it wasn't clear late yesterday whether the effort had made a difference.

Pfaff's nomination is on today's calendar, along with those of Insurance Commissioner Mark Afable and PSC Chair Rebecca Cameron Valcq.

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The office of Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, didn't have an immediate comment yesterday on the lobbying.

On Friday, Fitzgerald's office said he asked Gov. Tony Evers to withdraw the nomination rather than face the prospect of Pfaff being rejected. The gov's office has said he has no plans to do so.

DOA Secretary Joel Brennan said several GOP senators he's spoken to in recent days were uncomfortable with the prospect of rejecting a cabinet pick, something

that hasn't happened in at least 32 years.

Still, he wouldn't predict whether the lobbying effort would be successful.

"They don't like the way that this is rolling out," Brennan said of the GOP senators. "They're looking for, hoping that there might be an alternative." He declined to name the senators.

Pfaff cleared the Senate Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions Committee 9-0 in February. But since then, he has clashed with GOP lawmakers on funding to help address farmer suicides. And ag groups have pushed back hard on proposed changes to siting rules for livestock facilities.

None of the five GOP senators who serve on the committee and supported Pfaff nearly eight months ago returned calls Monday from WisPolitics.com asking if they'd since changed their minds.

Of the rest of the Senate GOP caucus, only the office of Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, responded to questions from WisPolitics.com about Pfaff's nomination. A Nass aide said the lawmaker was opposed to delaying the vote and planned to oppose Pfaff's nomination on the floor.

Meanwhile, the Dairy Business Association was one of several groups to publicly praise Pfaff Monday, saying the dairy industry was being "battered by a perfect storm of challenges," including low prices, shifting regulations and trade disruptions.

"What we desperately need is certainty and stability, not a political fight," the group said. "DBA supported Mr. Pfaff's appointment at the outset, and we see no reason to change that position now. At this critical moment for Wisconsin's dairy community, the right thing to do is to keep him in place."

DBA was one of the groups that signed onto a letter Friday praising Pfaff's decision not to take the proposed rules changes to the agency board for final approval. The groups also stated they still strongly opposed the draft rule and asked the board to reject it in its current form.

Brennan acknowledged that Pfaff could've better handled his interactions with GOP lawmakers over funding to help farmers with mental health crises.

This summer, Fitzgerald personally clashed with Pfaff after the secretary knocked the Joint Finance Committee for failing to release the funding. Pfaff said the ag “community needs this funding, and they need it now — not when it’s convenient for legislative Republicans.” Fitzgerald at the time called the comments “offensive and unproductive.”

Brennan said Pfaff was expressing his frustration, but it wasn’t something that should merit his nomination being rejected.

“Who amongst us hasn’t had a time where we said something that probably either we regret or there was something that someone else took personally?” Brennan said. “There are ways to make sure we can still have opportunities to work together.”

See the WisPolitics.com press release page for more statements on Pfaff:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2019/11/04/?arcf=cat:19>