

Fitzgerald: Appointment controversy imperils Evers cabinet picks

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Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, said Tuesday several of Tony Evers' cabinet picks were in danger of being rejected by Senate Republicans following the gov's decision to rescind appointments to the PSC, UW Regents and other bodies.

Fitzgerald said some members of his caucus wanted to vote down the picks to show their anger at the gov's moves. Fitzgerald said he planned to see how the legal fight over those appointments plays out before deciding how to proceed, but he made clear Senate Republicans wanted to see the picks to the PSC and Board of Regents, among others, restored.

"I think some of those cabinet members are going to be in trouble," Fitzgerald said.

Evers spokeswoman Melissa Baldauff said while it was "refreshing" to hear Republicans speak with "such candor for a change," it was sad they are putting politics before people.

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"Republicans have finally acknowledged that their decisions are motivated not by what's best for Wisconsinites, but by an irrational anger that the people chose a new governor," Baldauff said. "Gov. Evers is here to get things done and ensure that the will of the people is the law of the land. We hope Republicans will join us."

Evers rescinded 82 appointments Senate Republicans approved in the December extraordinary session after a Dane County judge overturned lawmakers' actions. He later restored 67 of them.

The 3rd District Court of Appeals later stayed that decision, but had not yet responded by early Tuesday afternoon to a request to clarify if that ruling also

restored the appointments that had been confirmed.

Fitzgerald said he warned Evers chief of staff Maggie Gau that rescinding those appointments would enrage his caucus. He also told reporters there was a personal aspect to the issue for GOP lawmakers with Ellen Nowak, who Gov. Scott Walker moved from DOA secretary to the Public Service Commission in the final weeks of his administration. She is also a former GOP legislative staffer.

Nowak attempted to return to the PSC the day after the appeals court ruling stayed the Dane County ruling, but was turned away in the building lobby.

"That is not the way you treat a former secretary of DOA and a member of the Public Service Commission," Fitzgerald said, adding he "couldn't wait" to see Evers again to deliver that message personally.

Fitzgerald's comments to reporters came after Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling, D-La Crosse, accused Republicans of slow playing the gov's cabinet picks as payback over the lawsuits that have undercut the December lame-duck actions.

Shilling chided Republicans for how infrequently the Senate has met so far this session and said her GOP colleagues still can't get over Evers winning in November. She added they're also "probably suffering from judicial whiplash" on the extraordinary session rulings.

"But to get small and petty and politically sniping over not bringing forward those cabinet secretaries?" Shilling said. "Come on. We're better than that."

After Shilling spoke, Fitzgerald moved to quickly adjourn the Senate as other members were waiting to address the chamber.