

GOP leaders reject Evers' call to act on 'red-flag,' background check bills in special session

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The Legislature's top two Republicans Monday rejected Gov. Tony Evers' call to act on a "red-flag" law and universal background checks in a special session next month, vowing they will stand to protect Second Amendment rights.

Evers, anticipating their stance, told reporters in Milwaukee Monday he could call "serial special sessions" until they vote on the bills. He believes the Legislature will ultimately take up the bills or face consequences from voters.

"Even if they don't agree with the policy, the politics are this: They'll start losing positions in the Legislature," Evers said.

While Evers has the power to call the Nov. 7 special session to address gun violence, he can't force lawmakers to take up the bills.

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Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, who's running for Congress, pledged his chamber "will not be part of a drawn-out strategy to infringe on constitutional rights."

"Liberals across the country are upping their rhetoric in support of taking guns from law-abiding citizens," the Juneau Republican said. "After the governor opened the door to a long-term plan of gun confiscation at his press conference last month, it's easy to see how today's action could just be the first attack on the Second Amendment."

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, added the special session call won't

change the position of protecting Second Amendment rights and suggested the call was a sign that Evers “stands ready to confiscate guns in our state.”

Evers said last month he would consider a mandatory buyback program for assault weapons similar to what has been proposed by Dem presidential candidate Beto O’Rourke. While Evers hasn’t said he supports such an approach, Republicans have suggested him saying he’d consider the proposal was a sign he wants to confiscate guns.

“Governor Evers would rather score political points than effectively govern Wisconsin, where a vast majority want their Second Amendment rights protected,” Vos said. “Assembly Republicans are committed to bringing people together by working on legislation that addresses important issues affecting the state including water quality, suicide prevention, homelessness and adoption.”

In repeatedly urging the GOP-controlled Legislature to act on the proposals, Evers has cited the Marquette University Law School Poll, which has found around 80 percent of voters surveyed back both bills.

Evers’ call singles out two bills he wants the Legislature to take up. Both were already unveiled by Dems earlier this year, but identical versions are being introduced to receive special session bill numbers.

One would require background checks for firearms sales with exemptions only for sales or transfers that are to a firearms dealer or law enforcement agency; the weapon is classified as an antique; or it is a gift, bequest or inheritance to a family member.

The other would create extreme risk protection temporary restraining orders. Under current law, anyone subject to a domestic abuse or child abuse injunction is prohibited from possessing a firearm and must surrender all guns. The firearms can’t be returned until a court determines the injunction has been lifted or expires.

The bill would expand on that by creating a new process for law enforcement, a relative or a household member to seek a temporary restraining order prohibiting someone from possessing a firearm if the court finds reasonable grounds that person is likely to injure the respondent or someone else. The temporary restraining order would remain in effect until an injunction hearing, where the court could extend the ban for up to one year. The protection order could be renewed.

Dem legislative leaders praised Evers' call with Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz, D-Oshkosh, saying while "there are no easy solutions to end gun violence in our communities, we cannot sit back and do nothing."

Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling, D-La Crosse, called gun violence "one of the most pressing public health issues we face today."

"Families should feel safe from the threat of deadly weapons and dangerous individuals," she said. "Action is needed to prevent more tragedies from happening."

See the executive order:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/191021EO.pdf>

Watch the Milwaukee news conference:

<https://wiseye.org/2019/10/21/news-conference-gov-evers--signs-executive-order-54-calling-for-a-special-session-on-legislation-to-address-gun--violence/>

See the Fitzgerald statement:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2019/sen-fitzgerald-reacts-to-gov-evers-special-session--announcement/>

See the Vos statement:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/191021-Vos-Special.pdf>