

Proposed Assembly rule changes would allow Anderson to phone into hearings, permit multiple veto override attempts

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Dem Rep. Jimmy Anderson, who is paralyzed from the waist down, would be allowed to phone into committee hearings to accommodate his disability under a package of rule changes GOP Assembly leaders proposed Tuesday.

But Dems said the changes — which include a provision that would allow the Assembly to make multiple runs at overriding a gov veto — was an attempt by the GOP to “jam in a whole kitchen sink of partisan political objectives.” Now, the Assembly is only allowed one vote on a veto.

“You’re going far beyond the scope of (the accommodation) and turning what should be something we all agree on unanimously into very partisan process and using a member with a disability as an excuse to do that,” said Rep. Mark Spreitzer, D-Beloit, during the Rules Committee meeting. “I think that’s disgusting.”

Majority Leader Jim Steineke, R-Kaukauna, told committee members that GOP leaders were looking at rule changes and “that was part of it.”

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The chamber has yet to approve a new rule package for the 2019-20 session.

“One of the things that we found out when we were going through looking at the ability to do a veto override was that if we tried a veto override and it failed and circumstances on the ground changed over the course of the coming weeks or months, we could not revisit that,” he said. “We did not think that was right.”

A spokeswoman for Gov. Tony Evers accused Vos of using turning Anderson's request "into an opportunity for political retribution."

"It's time for Vos to get over last November's election and start working on the issues facing our state," spokeswoman Britt Cudaback said in a tweet.

Anderson said he has been pushing for rule changes since the beginning of the legislative session in January. He claimed his disability, combined with Assembly rules barring him from phoning into Assembly hearings, prevents him from properly representing his constituents. He also called for an end to overnight floor sessions except in case of emergencies and requested all committee hearings and non-emergency floor sessions be held during "reasonable hours."

But he was rebuffed by Vos in August. The Rochester Republican told Anderson at the time he can't change chamber rules via "fiat" and accused the Fitchburg Dem of "political grandstanding." Vos has long opposed allowing lawmakers to call into meetings, noting on several occasions that he finds it offensive to witnesses who make their way to the Capitol to testify.

Anderson then reached out to Disability Rights Wisconsin for legal representation, and the organization in September sent Vos a letter reiterating Anderson's request and warning they will "be forced to pursue legal action" if "you continue to continue to reject these reasonable requests.

But in a news conference this afternoon, Vos, Steineke, and Rep. Tyler August, R-Lake Geneva, unveiled a package of rules that would allow members with a "permanent disability" certified by the chamber's Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator to call into meetings.

Vos said despite the mudslinging between him and Anderson over the summer, Republican leadership "looked at the situation and tried to take politics out of it."

"I think we took the politics out of it, just took a step back and all figured out the best way to make sure that Rep. Anderson can represent his district, but also do it in a way that doesn't really compromise the integrity of what we think the Legislature should be," Vos said.

But while speaking with reporters after the Rules meeting, Anderson blasted the rules package. The Fitchburg Dem said if Republicans were serious about making

accommodations for him, they would have drafted the accommodation separately from the veto override measure and consulted with him.

“Excluding me from the process I think is, again, offensive, disappointing and frankly really frustrating,” he said.

He warned the proposed changes to the veto override process “encourages them to take advantage of individuals like myself.”

“Knowing that I may not be able to be there for an entire session allows them to take advantage of that and maybe do a veto override in violation of what I would think would be the will of the people,” he said.

Republicans currently hold a 63-36 advantage in the Assembly and need two-thirds of members in attendance during floor sessions to override a gubernatorial veto.

— Other proposed rule changes include:

*Establishing time limits for debate on each proposal scheduled for a floor vote. The proposal calls for negotiations between the majority and minority leaders on time limits, but notes if no agreement is reached, the majority-controlled Rules Committee establishes time limits for each proposal.

*Adding partisan caucuses to the list of motions and procedures the presiding officer can deem out of order if “being used for the purpose of delay.”

*Allowing the presiding officer to order a call of the Assembly to require absent members to return to the chamber without needing seconds. Under current rules, such a request requires 15 members to second the call.

*Moving resolution to the last order of business for the chamber to take up during a floor session.

*Changes to the process of withdrawing proposals from committee.

*A modification of a rule that would allow a majority of members to vote to return a proposal to the second reading stage.

*Changing the timeline for referral of proposal to the calendar.

*Excluding the offices of the majority leader from the definition of the Assembly Chamber.

See the Anderson letter:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Anderson.Attorney.Letter.pdf>

See the proposed rule changes:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/10081902.pdf>

See Cudaback's tweet:

<https://twitter.com/BrittCudaback/status/1181656304143753216>