

# Senate approves constitutional amendment to place new limit's on gov's partial-veto power

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Guvs would no longer be able to use their partial-veto authority to increase state spending beyond what lawmakers had approved under a constitutional amendment approved by the state Senate 19-14 along party lines.

Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling, D-La Crosse, called it the latest "power grab" from Republicans as they seek to undercut Dem Gov. Tony Evers as Dems complained their GOP counterparts didn't both with such a proposal while fellow Republican Scott Walker was in office.

But Sen. Kathy Bernier, R-Lake Hallie, argued the executive branch at the state and federal levels have too much power. Bernier said she understood that guvs could take spending out of the budget, but not that they could "create money out of whole cloth" in the document.

"We have the power of the purse," she said. "The governor does not have the power of the purse. It's our power."

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Currently, guvs aren't allowed to use their partial-veto authority to cross out a number in a spending bill and replace it with a larger one. But Evers was able to direct more money to K-12 education in the state budget by changing the per-pupil aid payment.

Republicans had set it at \$679 in fiscal year 2019-20, an increase of \$25 over the year before, and \$704 the following year.

Instead, Evers was able to set those payments at \$742 per student in each year.

Per-pupil aid is a sum sufficient appropriation, meaning the Department of Public Instruction is authorized to spend whatever is necessary to meet the cost, and Evers' vetoed amounted to an addition \$87 million for K-12 education.

The amendment, up for first consideration, would have to pass both houses of the Legislature in back-to-back sessions

Sen. Fred Risser, D-Madison, warned the amendment would open the door to "vindictive" legislators enacting their revenge on others in state government. As examples, he said lawmakers could slash the salaries of state Supreme Court justices if they were unhappy with court decisions. Or they could cut the salaries of state employees.

Risser said the amendment's backers and others couldn't provide him assurances that a gov would still have the power to reverse such cuts.

"Think about the consequences," said Risser, the longest serving state lawmaker in the country. "Think about the unintended results."