

Senate Republicans rebuff attempt to add Kaepernick to Black History Month resolution

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Dem Sens. Lena Taylor and LaTonya Johnson — the only African-Americans serving in the Senate — ripped into their white GOP colleagues today, questioning their audacity to dictate who was acceptable to honor on a resolution proclaiming February Black History Month.

Taylor, D-Milwaukee, accused her GOP colleagues of believing they were best suited to decide for African-Americans who they should value and which forms of protest are acceptable as they rebuffed an attempt to restore former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick to the resolution.

She recounted a long history of racial disparities in Wisconsin and the nation in challenging her GOP colleagues to defend their stance.

“Who are you to deny our reality?” she asked.

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It was the second day of controversy in the Legislature over a resolution authored by the Wisconsin Legislative Black Caucus that included Kaepernick, a Milwaukee native who was one of the first NFL players to kneel during the national anthem, saying he did so to protest the oppression of people of color and ongoing issues with police brutality.

Prompted by opposition from Republicans, the Assembly on Tuesday stripped Kaepernick from the resolution the chamber approved. Senate Republicans on Wednesday rebuffed Dem efforts to restore Kaepernick to the resolution 19-14 along party lines. They also rejected other procedural moves Dems attempted to

prevent a vote on the Assembly version of the resolution.

GOP senators then approved the Assembly version 19-14 along party lines that lists a series of prominent Wisconsin African-Americans, from Lucien Palmer, the state's first black lawmaker, to Carolyn Stanford Taylor, whose recent appointment made her the first black state superintendent.

During the debate, which lasted some four hours, Taylor went from Republican to Republican asking the GOP members to yield to a question. But each declined. As Taylor made her way through the list, Senate President Roger Roth, R-Appleton, asked Taylor if she wanted to ask Republicans en masse if they'd yield to a question.

"I want each and every one to answer whether or not they have the courage to tell Wisconsin why they believe a Wisconsin native does not deserve the right to stand up for the injustices that exist," Taylor said, declining the offer.

Johnson said the Senate had approved other resolutions that some members considered controversial. But those with concerns didn't insist on dictating who sponsors should be able to honor. She called it an insult for Republicans to now insist on removing someone who the Legislative Black Caucus wanted to honor.

She also said it sent a message to African-Americans around Wisconsin that Republicans refused to stand and defend their position.

"The fact that a body in this building would have the audacity to remove a name that had been voted on by the only African-Americans in this building says it all. It says it all," Johnson said.