

# Assembly passes DNC bar hour expansion bill with amendment appealing to Senate skeptics

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The state Assembly on Thursday approved a pared-back bill to extend closing time for bars by two hours until 4 a.m. during the Democratic National Convention in Milwaukee this July.

The bill's author Rep. Rob Swearingen, R-Rhineland, said the changes were an attempt to win over some Senate Republicans who had expressed reservations about the proposal, including the possibility it would lead to a spike in drunk driving during the weeklong event.

The bill had first been changed to allow the extended hours across Wisconsin in an attempt to win support from out-state lawmakers. But the amendment pulled it back to the original 14 counties targeted for the extended hours: Kenosha, Racine, Walworth, Rock, Milwaukee, Waukesha, Jefferson, Dane, Ozaukee, Washington, Dodge, Columbia, Sheboygan and Fond du Lac County.

The other provisions include:

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\*requiring municipalities in the 14 counties to opt into offering the extended hours rather than requiring them to opt out as in the previous version of the bill.

\*removing a provision that would've required breweries to have the same closing time as other taverns.

\*adding \$25 to a \$50 surcharge on drunk driving arrests that would go to a fund at DOT to help pay for the Safe Ride program offered by the Tavern League.

The amendment also would retain a provision in the bill to address an issue at State Fair Park and Road America. Lawmakers also kept a separate amendment which removed language from the bill that would've placed regulations on wedding barns and other private event venues.

"We are encouraging our colleagues in the Senate to pass it because it addresses their concerns," Swearingen said, noting the Assembly doesn't have plans to return this year.

Secretary Peter Barca, whose Department of Revenue oversees many alcohol laws, was in the Assembly chamber during negotiations on the revised proposal. Barca said he couldn't speak for Gov. Tony Evers. Still, he thanked Swearingen for his work on the proposal, saying "We certainly view this as great progress made." Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, told reporters yesterday ahead of the Assembly session that he "wouldn't rule it out" for his chamber to pass the bill when it meets again in March.

"What I'm anticipating right now is the Assembly is going to pass over a version of that bill and then we'll have to look to see whether or not we can get it through or maybe we can work with the minority," he said.

It passed the Assembly 84-13, with a mix of GOP and Dem no votes, including: Scott Allen, R-Waukesha; Barbara Dittrich, R-Oconomowoc; Rob Hutton, R-Brookfield; Cody Horlacher, R-Mukwonago; Debra Kolste, D-Janesville; Jim Ott, R-Mequon; Sondy Pope, D-Mt. Horeb; Timothy Ramthun, R-Campbellsport; Joe Sanfelippo, R-New Berlin; Melissa Sargent, D-Madison; Lisa Subeck, D-Madison; Chris Taylor, D-Madison; and Don Vruwink, D-Milton.