

# Evers urged to fire staffer who recorded call without GOP leaders' knowledge

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Amid a bipartisan call to fire the staffer who authorized taping a phone call with GOP leaders, Gov. Tony Evers has declined to name the aide who approved recording the conversation.

"I will not discuss personnel issues in public, but needless to say the practice has ended with this one time," Evers told reporters on a conference call Thursday.

Meanwhile, Hispanic groups knocked Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, for comments he made on the recorded call that a "difference in culture" with an immigrant population in his area of the state contributed to the number of COVID-19 cases.

The taping of the May 14 phone call, which focused on the state's next step after the state Supreme Court overturned Evers' extended stay-at-home order, has further inflamed tensions between Evers and GOP lawmakers.

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Evers told reporters he didn't know about the recording, which he said a staffer wanted for help in taking notes on the content of the call. The call concerned a possible rules package to replace the stay-at-home order, which had been set to expire May 26. Pressed how he couldn't have known he was being taped, Evers said he was in a different room than others who were on the call.

Wisconsin is a so-called "one-party consent" state, meaning only one participant in the conversation needs to consent to the recording to make it legal. Only Evers, his Chief of Staff Maggie Gau, the gov's Chief Legal Counsel Ryan Nilsestuen, Senate

Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos spoke on the call, according to a recording released by the gov's office.

Nilsestuen said legislative and gubernatorial staff were also on the call and a staffer consented to the recording. He didn't name the staffer who consented and declined to address whether that staffer spoke on the call.

Evers insisted he and GOP leaders would be able to move past the episode.

The gov noted he was unhappy about the lame-duck laws Republicans approved in December 2018 before he took office. But Evers said he got past that to work with Republicans to get a budget passed

"We can move forward," Evers said. "The situation is not something that is going to prevent us from doing the work of the people of Wisconsin," Evers said.

Meanwhile, a Hispanic advocacy group is demanding Vos apologize for a comment they said implies immigrants are at fault for the high percentage COVID-19 cases in his district.

During the conversation that was taped without his knowledge, the Rochester Republican said he was open to a state response to a "multi-jurisdictional" COVID-19 outbreak. But he demurred when Evers Chief of Staff Maggie Gau asked if he wanted the administration to promulgate an administrative rule, saying he was "trying to understand the need for" such a move.

"I know the reason, at least in my region, is because of a large immigrant population where it's just a difference in culture where people are living much closer and working much closer," Vos said on the call. "Certainly you want to coordinate that amongst where people live and work. I'm just trying to understand the need for a rule at DHS, separate from what you're already doing, to be able to accomplish that goal."

Speaking with reporters at a Milwaukee news conference, Forward Latino President Darryl Morin slammed those comments.

"One minute we hear they are coming to invade our country," Morin said. "In the next moment, we see villages and children separated from their parents and locked in cages."

Morin also called on Vos to recognize immigrant workers are critical to the food supply chain, noting many of these workers have been forced to work in conditions without social distancing, proper PPE and healthcare.

“I would appreciate the acknowledgment from Speaker Vos that these are truly essential workers and critical to the well being of every resident of our great state,” said Morin.

A Vos spokeswoman responded by calling the recent headlines about the Vos’ comments sensationalist and that what he said during the meeting is backed up by science.

“Speaker Vos has been very concerned about the COVID-19 outbreaks in his area,” spokeswoman Kit Beyer said. “A few days before the secretly recorded call, he was briefed by local hospital officials about the spike in cases. As a result, he has been in frequent communications with local officials including the county executive about the response.”

Racine County, home to much of Vos’ district, has the highest rate of coronavirus infection per 100,000 people tested in the state, according to a Department of Health Services report.

Evers declined to respond to Vos’ comments.

Meanwhile, Dr. Ryan Westergaard, chief medical officer of the Bureau of Communicable Diseases, said immigration status and ethnicity play no role in the risk of contracting COVID-19. Exposure due to proximity is a significant factor, he said, such as working in an environment without physical distancing between employees or face masks.

Hear the comments at the 21:41 mark:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/vos-fitz-5-14-part-3>

See the DHS COVID-19 rate map [here](#).

Dem state Rep. Jonathan Brostoff called on Vos to resign and for Evers to fire the staffer who OK’d recording.

Brostoff, D-Milwaukee, via Twitter asked how Vos’ constituents of color can “trust him to represent their interests if he holds those kinds of hateful and backwards

views?”

Meanwhile, he wrote a staffer secretly recording a conversation is “never a good look,” especially if Evers didn’t know.

“With all of the polarization in this state and country, we were already in a fragile moment, and now we’re also facing down multiple crises. If we’re going... to serve the people of Wisconsin to the best of our abilities, we need to be able to build trust and find some sort of middle ground with our political opponents,” Brostoff wrote in a Twitter thread.

Hispanic advocacy group Voces de la Frontera also called for Vos’ resignation.

“This is 2020, not 1920. Instead of recognizing the important contributions immigrant essential workers and their families make to Wisconsin’s economy, he scapegoats them to absolve himself of his own failure to protect the health and lives of all workers against COVID-19,” said Christine Neumann-Ortiz, executive director of Voces de la Frontera.

The group stated Vos’ push to re-open businesses quickly and his failure to work towards securing proper protections and access to paid sick leave for families, combined with his recent comments about immigrants are cause for Vos’ resignation.

See the thread [here](#).

See the Voces de la Frontera release [here](#).