

Sen. Larson: Statement on GOP obstruction in the wake of COVID-19 and Kenosha shootings

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MILWAUKEE, WI – There is a cost to legislative obstruction. In Wisconsin, this cost can be measured in dead bodies. The current count stands at 1,102. How did we get to this point? A brief timeline:

March 12th: Governor Tony Evers declares a public health emergency for the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, not a single Wisconsinite has died from the virus.

April 7th: Despite our Governor's attempts to shift to an all-mail election and give more time for ballots to come in, thanks to Republican lawsuits, Wisconsin holds its Spring Election as scheduled. Speaker Vos, wearing a full Hazmat suit, declares it is "incredibly safe to go out." To date, 92 people have died.

April 15th: Despite mounting cases and desperate pleas from across our state, the Republican-controlled legislature waits until this day to pass legislation in response to the pandemic. It is viewed by many as wildly insufficient. 182 have died.

May 13th: Bowing to Republican lawsuits once again, the Wisconsin Supreme Court overturns Safer at Home. Taverns in many parts of the state begin to reopen immediately. In the absence of a statewide policy, local governments scramble to figure out what to do. 421 people have died.

June 19th: In response to widespread protests following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Joel Acevedo in Milwaukee, Governor Evers calls for the legislature to meet and consider a package of 9 policing reforms aimed at racial equity. The Republican-controlled legislature refuses. With no plan to replace Safer

at Home, cases and deaths of COVID-19 continue to skyrocket. 730 people have died.

August 1st: After heavy public pressure from around 17,000 petitioners, and in the wake of a tremendous surge in COVID-19 cases, Governor Evers enacts a statewide mask mandate. Republicans immediately threaten to call the legislature in to overturn it, but ultimately choose not to do so. 947 people have died.

August 25th, Daytime: After two nights of protests in the wake of the shooting of Jacob Blake by Kenosha police, which left Mr. Blake paralyzed from the waist down, Governor Evers calls a special session of the legislature, to take place the following Monday, August 31st. Speaker Vos dismisses this call, and announces the formation of a task force instead. To date, 1,094 Wisconsinites have died of the coronavirus.

August 25th, Nighttime: A 17-year-old gunman from Illinois opens fire on protesters, hitting at least three people. Moments before, law enforcement tosses a water bottle to the armed youth, and words of appreciation are exchanged. It is all caught on video. The gunman surrenders, but police let him go, despite the warnings from bystanders of what he had done. The shooter is eventually arrested in Illinois. 2 more people are dead, this time by vigilante gun violence.

Every step of the way, Republicans in the State Legislature, led by Speaker Robin Vos, have refused calls from the Governor, legislative Democrats, and their own constituents to do something, anything at all, to address COVID-19 and the racial equity crisis in policing. Each time they have resisted, refused, and even sued to undo actions taken by the Governor without them. As of August 26th, 1,102 Wisconsinites are dead in the wake of legislative obstruction, and no task force on Earth can bring them back.

It is time for the legislature to meet and finally begin to address the crises facing our state. As has become abundantly clear these past few months, our neighbors' lives are very much at stake. No amount of policy will fix everything, but doing nothing is not an option.