

Senate Dems: Letter to GOP leadership regarding 178 days of inaction

Posted on Friday, Oct 9, 2020

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

October 9, 2020

Senator Scott Fitzgerald
Sen.Fitzgerald@legis.wi.gov
Representative Robin Vos
Rep.Vos@legis.wi.gov

Dear Senator Fitzgerald and Representative Vos:

It has been 178 days since the Legislature has met to help Wisconsinites deal with a global pandemic. We need you to start taking COVID-19 seriously. Our state is in crisis, worsened by your inaction and by your desire to file lawsuits instead of passing bills that will make a difference in the lives of your constituents.

We shouldn't need to tell you the grim reality of the global pandemic in Wisconsin but every time Governor Evers has tried to respond to this crisis, Republicans in the Legislature take him to court or outright reject his efforts to begin the rules process. In one month's time we have tripled the number of hospitalizations, our health care facilities have become overwhelmed and we've found ourselves on the unenviable list of states forced to open a field hospital to handle the record-breaking surge of new cases of COVID-19.

It is time to come off the sidelines and take action. We are facing shortages of frontline health care workers across Wisconsin. ThedaCare reports that 250 of their employees missed work because they were forced to quarantine. Proposals like the Health Care Heroes Act would give our health care workers hazard pay, free testing

and treatment, paid medical leave and increase the number of people with health insurance.

We put forward legislation two and a half months ago to eliminate hurdles, delays and burdens you imposed on working men and women seeking unemployment benefits they earned by showing up to work. It's worth noting that one of those burdens, passed during the lame duck session you rushed back for in 2018, limited seasonal workers to only 12 weeks of unemployment. As of today, it's been 25 weeks since you came to work for them. Without question, given the severity of the downturn, these bills won't solve all the issues that have created delays, but it's time to correct the mistakes that we can and start to address the challenges facing our constituents.

A record number of Wisconsinites will vote absentee because they don't feel safe casting a ballot in person. Our clerks are faced with counting an overwhelming number of ballots on Election Day, we could help by joining the majority of states who allow clerks to begin counting earlier. [Senate Bill 574](#) allows the early canvassing of ballots, starting the day prior to Election Day.

According to a [CNBC report](#), about 34 percent of Wisconsin's renting population were at risk of eviction as of July. Further, the global pandemic has shed a glaring light on the disparities that exist in our state not only in terms of health outcomes but also in access to basic necessities. For instance, Milwaukee County received 4,600 applications for their eviction assistance program as of September 15. Of those applications, 80% were filed by Black Wisconsinites and 67% of applicants were those in extreme poverty.

Accepting MA expansion is critical now more than ever as a lack of federal leadership has put states in the position to do whatever is necessary to take care of their constituents. As proposed by Governor Evers in his inaugural state budget proposal, accepting MA expansion dollars would create new opportunities for Wisconsin to invest in the health and wellbeing of our families, such as the Community Health Benefit program. This proposal sought to allow the Department of Health Services to determine specific, nonmedical services that contribute to the determinants of health to be included as an MA benefit and initiate federal approval to provide these services. Vitaly, as we face the budget challenges ahead, accepting MA expansion would also end your practice of sending Wisconsin tax dollars to Illinois, California and other states instead of bringing them home.

This is just the beginning. States nearby and next door have met several times to help their people handle the mounting challenges of this unprecedented pandemic. In contrast you and your allies have filed more lawsuits than you have passed bills in the last six months. Come to the table and join us. As the Majority Party, you have the power to affect change. It's past time to help the people we serve.

Sincerely,

  
SEN. JON ERPENBACH SEN. DAVE HANSEN SEN. BOB WIRCH

  
SEN. PATTY SCHACHTNER SEN. FRED RISSER SEN. LATONYA JOHNSON

  
 SEN. TIM CARPENTER SEN. JANIS RINGHAND SEN. CHRIS
LARSON

  
SEN. MARK MILLER SEN. JEFF SMITH SEN. LENA
TAYLOR


SEN. JANET BEWLEY