

Vos makes late switch to JCRAR membership; COVID-19 debate may end up before committee

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Assembly Speaker Robin Vos removed one of his most vulnerable members from JCRAR and replaced him with a departing state rep just as the committee could be thrust into the COVID-19 reopening debate.

Vos spokeswoman Kit Beyer wrote in an email to WisPolitics.com that Rep. Romaine Quinn, who isn't running this fall, was added to the committee after the Barron Republican made a request to the speaker. He replaced GOP Rep. Jim Ott, who has served on the Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules for four of the past five sessions and co-chaired the body in the 2011-12 session.

In a Friday Facebook post, Quinn wrote that he asked to be added to the committee because it needs "rural representation" as it considers proposals to reopen the economy. The Assembly co-chair of the committee is Rep. Joan Ballweg, who is from Markesan, which had a population of less than 1,500 after the last census.

Quinn didn't return a message left on his cell phone Thursday seeking comment, while Ott's office referred questions to the speaker.

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Beyer didn't address whether the move was made to protect Ott from what could be a difficult vote on a possible emergency rule on COVID-19. The issue could end up in the committee's lap if the state Supreme Court overturns the Evers administration's latest stay-at-home order.

But Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz, D-Oshkosh, questioned the motivations for the move.

Hillary Clinton won Ott's suburban Milwaukee Assembly seat with 49.2 percent of the vote in 2016, besting Donald Trump by nearly 5.5 percentage points. The Mequon Republican, who was first elected to the Assembly in 2006, is one of the Dems' top targets this fall.

"The swap is not lost on me that they're putting a retiring member on a committee and removing a vulnerable incumbent, recognizing that they're about to make what are likely unpopular decisions," Hintz said.

It is rare to see members swapped out on a committee so late in the session. A decade ago, then-Dem. Rep. Ann Hraychuck, of Balsam Lake, was removed from the Special Committee on Clean Energy Jobs just before it approved legislation limiting carbon emissions. At the time, she said the move was made because she expressed she didn't have enough time to review late changes to the bill. She lost reelection that fall.

Beyer said this session can't be compared to any other because "our state has never faced such a dire situation."

"Speaker Vos agrees the committee should have representation from northern Wisconsin," Beyer said. "Rep. Quinn's views also reflect the caucus' belief that any reopening plan should have a regional approach."

The state Supreme Court this week heard oral arguments in a suit GOP lawmakers filed to prevent enforcement of a second stay-at-home order, which runs through May 26. The suit asks for an injunction of the order, along with a stay of the decision. Republicans argue that would then give them time to work with the Evers administration on an emergency rule that would guide the state's handling of COVID-19 issues, including reopening businesses that were closed under the gov's order.

Under state law, agencies are allowed to promulgate emergency rules for the "preservation of the public peace, health, safety, or welfare." The process requires agencies to prepare an outline of the rule for the gov's approval. Once drafted, the rule is again submitted to the gov for approval. Emergency rules can be in place for up to 150 days unless extended by JCRAR. The committee also has the power to suspend the rule.

Quinn, who announced in mid-March that he's not seeking reelection this fall, wrote

in his Friday Facebook post that if Republicans win their lawsuit, “the Governor will have to finally work with us, and it will be through this committee.

“We need rural representation on this committee as we work to implement a safe and regional approach to re-opening our economy. With no new cases for weeks, we can’t keep being treated like Milwaukee. I may only be in office until the end of the year, but until then, I’m going to make sure they know WE EXIST!”

See Quinn’s post:

<https://www.facebook.com/WisconsinStateRepresentativeRomaineQuinn/photos/a.-727430134036925/2982945808485335/?type=3&theater>