

WisGOP: Gov. Evers continues to throw government transparency to the wayside

Posted on Tuesday, Jun 9, 2020

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[Madison, WI] – In case you missed it, Gov. Tony Evers is continuing to keep the public in the dark regarding important information about Wisconsin's fight against COVID-19. After refusing to provide information about which nursing homes and meatpacking plants were experiencing outbreaks and testing at those locations, the Evers Administration is now refusing to say why they asked a top Department of Health Services Official to resign.

Evers' unwillingness to provide the public basic information regarding a public health crisis demonstrates just how far he is willing to go to skirt public records law. This is not the first time that Gov. Tony Evers' has attempted to keep the public in the dark. Upon taking office, Evers' [rolled back](#) practices to keep government accountable to the taxpayer. Evers previously tried to deny a reporter access to just [one days worth](#) of his emails and threatened to [prosecute a journalist](#).

Read the full write up [here](#), or read excerpts below.

Evers administration won't say why a top Wisconsin health official was asked to resign in the middle of a pandemic

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#)

Maria Perez and Molly Beck

June 8, 2020

Gov. Tony Evers' administration is refusing to say why one of the state's top public health officials was asked to resign in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic.

State Health Officer Jeanne Ayers says she was asked to resign from the Department of Health Services in early May and wasn't given a reason why.

Now, Health Services Secretary Andrea Palm through a spokeswoman won't answer questions from the Journal Sentinel about Ayers' departure.

The refusal by Health Services officials to explain why Ayers was asked to resign comes after the department in at least two cases didn't release information about vital issues of public interest, like which nursing homes and meatpacking plants were experiencing outbreaks and how many residents and workers at each facility tested positive for the virus.

The department didn't notify the public of the resignation and replacement of the state's health officer, despite holding weekly media briefings. The Journal Sentinel learned through an automatic email response that said she was no longer with DHS.

Ayers told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel in an interview she was asked to leave the job that she held for 14 months in a short phone call on May 10 with Palm and Deputy Secretary Julie Willems Van Dijk.

Ayers said she wasn't told why she was asked to resign and that she hadn't received any warnings about the quality of her work. She also said she wasn't aware of any disagreements in how she was handling the fight against the epidemic.

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Ayers worked as administrator of the department's division of public health since March of 2019 and was a key health official in the early weeks of the state's response to the virus outbreak, which began spreading in Wisconsin in early March.

She appeared in a number of press conferences and media briefings before vanishing — including Evers' March 12 press conference to announce his declaration of a public health emergency.

Ayers said Monday she served at the pleasure of Palm and the Democratic governor and it's their prerogative to choose who they want in their team.

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DHS has refused to share key information related to the virus outbreak before.

The department refused to release the names of the state nursing homes with

coronavirus outbreaks until federal authorities announced they would publish them, keeping residents and family members in the dark about the risks they or their loved ones faced.

Even now, DHS is declining to say how many residents got infected or died at each facility or to provide names of assisted living facilities with outbreaks.

A DHS spokeswoman said then they weren't releasing the information for privacy reasons.

DHS has also failed to provide for weeks the names of all meatpacking and food processing facilities with coronavirus outbreaks, or the numbers of food processing industry workers who have tested positive for the virus or died due to the illness.

The lack of data effectively hides the scope of a problem that especially affects vulnerable groups: immigrant workers with modest incomes and the communities where they live.

Now, DHS hasn't answered questions about why Ayers was asked to resign or what impact the resignation had on the state's response to the virus outbreak.

Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, said the unanswered questions raise concerns among his caucus, some of whom have already called for Palm's resignation.

"There are worries about the follow-up related to some of these issues arising at the Department of Health Services from the COVID crisis in Wisconsin," Fitzgerald said in a statement. "Governor Evers would be wise to clean up his agency in a hurry."

Fitzgerald said the administration should "at least assure taxpayers that they're managing the money responsibly" following a USA TODAY Network-Wisconsin report showing the state spent \$15 million in April for 1,500 ventilators the state hasn't yet received.

The purchase order was placed after Fitzgerald and Vos urged Evers to move forward in an effort to purchase 10,000 ventilators, which later fell through, according to DHS.

Miller and a spokeswoman for Evers did not immediately have a reaction to Fitzgerald's comments.

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Read the full write up [here](#).