Assembly passes GOP COVID-19 package on party line vote

Posted on Thursday, Jan 7, 2021

The state Assembly Thursday voted along party lines to pass a COVID-19 package after the chamber convened nearly two hours later than originally scheduled as Republicans caucused on the bill.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, earlier this week said he had good talks with Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, on the bill and was confident it would pass the other chamber. But hours before the Assembly convened, LeMahieu pushed back on the suggestion the bill was a compromise between the two GOP caucuses.

Vos on the floor Thursday touted a number of the package's provisions, including measures that would: give the Joint Finance Committee the power to transfer $100 million from other appropriations to deal with COVID-19 costs; allow visitation at nursing homes and assisted living facilities by a designated essential visitor; and create legal liability protection for schools, businesses and other entities.

Gov. Tony Evers has expressed disappointment that Assembly Republicans were moving ahead with Vos' bill rather than one he proposed last month that he said represented areas of agreement with Vos and LeMahieu.

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On the floor, Vos said the Assembly GOP bill built off the discussions with Evers and LeMahieu, but said the guv "walked away from the table thinking that he could just kind of dictate what the terms of the deal would be."

"That's not how negotiation works. Nobody gets to dictate to anybody else when you have three individuals working in there each with their own unique ability to bring ideas to the table," he said.

Assembly lawmakers Thursday first rejected an amendment that would have changed the bill to mirror provisions in a package Assembly Dems introduced earlier this week. The chamber also approved an amendment to the package Vos described as largely technical and passed by voice vote a resolution condemning political violence.

The COVID-19 package now heads to the Senate with uncertain prospects in that chamber after LeMahieu said, "There is a reason that was an Assembly bill and not a Senate bill." It also faces a possible veto if it clears the other house.

LeMahieu's office didn't immediately return a call seeking comment.

Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz seized on LeMahieu's comments in a pre-session media availability.

He said in light of Senate Republicans indicating they won't take up the bill, Thursday's meeting was "unnecessary political exercise" and said the GOP bill was loaded with "poison pills and ideological measures that are really unnecessary and at times counterproductive."

"The idea that we're here on a day on a bill that the Senate is not going to take up in its current form, that the governor is almost certainly going to veto, despite the lack of workplace safety protocol that we would like to see makes today even more unnecessary and unfortunately risky," he said.

Evers told reporters on a Department of Health Services call on Tuesday that he'd heard about the Assembly GOP bill, but hadn't had a chance to review it fully. He planned to do so later that day, adding if it included provisions he absolutely couldn't support, the likelihood of a veto was "pretty strong."

An Evers spokeswoman was not immediately available for comment.

Members were spaced throughout the chamber with some in the gallery. Some members were also seated at tables to the west side of the chamber that are normally used by legislative staff and some media. Mask wearing was mixed with some Dems opting for both a pair of face masks and a face shield while GOP members removed their masks to speak.

Speaker pro tempore Tyler August, R-Lake Geneva, asked members during the session to put their masks back on if they were not speaking.

See the bill [here.](#)

Watch the session [here.](#)