

Assembly fails to override gov's veto on unemployment payments

Posted on Tuesday, Jul 27, 2021

Assembly Republicans today fell short of the two-thirds vote needed to override Gov. Tony Evers' veto of a bill to cut off extra unemployment payments from the federal government.

Assembly Republicans in a 59-37 party line vote during an extraordinary session failed to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority of members present to overturn Evers' veto of the bill. That bill would have ended the \$300 per week extra unemployment checks ahead of the existing September end date.

Reps. Janel Brandtjen, R-Menomonee Falls, John Spiros, R-Marshfield, and Sara Rodriguez, D-Brookfield, did not vote on the measure.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos in a press conference ahead of the floor session said ending the benefits is necessary because businesses across the state are working as hard as they can to fill empty job positions, but they can't find willing workers because of the unemployment payments. He added the economy is growing stronger and now is the time to eliminate the extra funds.

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Dems, however, said there is no evidence showing the extra benefits are causing the workforce shortage. They also pointed to unemployment claim numbers dropping since the middle of last year as evidence that people are going back to work despite the extra unemployment money. They also pointed to a lack of available childcare and concerns of contracting COVID-19 as contributing factors.

Vos, R-Rochester, slammed Dems for seeking to give taxpayer benefits to those who do not want to work and contribute to the economy. The extra benefits are due to end Sept. 6.

"If you pay somebody more to not work, far too many people will choose the option to stay home and do whatever they want in their leisure as opposed to go to work," he said. "That is not a rocket science concept."

He added the only reason he believes Dems oppose ending the extra payments is to score political points.

"Because human nature knows that working and supporting yourself is one of the best things for the human soul," he said. "We also know that it's one of the best things for the family. We know it's one of the best things for yourself."

However, Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz, D-Oshkosh, said the extra unemployment payments should stay until the existing September end date because unemployment claims in Wisconsin have dropped significantly this year.

"Fewer and fewer people are filing for unemployment," Hintz said. "They've gone down since the \$300 bump, since the Biden bump and after the Trump bump, down to levels that we haven't seen since early-mid-2020, and we're still bouncing back."

Department of Workforce Development numbers show 56,093 weekly unemployment claims during July 11-17 this year, down from the 215,411 during the same period last year.

The atmosphere in the Assembly chamber grew tense when Speaker Pro Tempore Tyler August, R-Lake Geneva, muted Rep. Francesca Hong's microphone as the Madison Dem berated Republican lawmakers for complaining about the inability to fill empty jobs. She said she would pay those bussing tables at her restaurant more than GOP lawmakers if she could.

Hong continued, adding it's business owners' responsibility to pay their employees more than they take home with the extra unemployment payments from the federal government. The lack of workers in Wisconsin has been a problem for years, she added.

But August muted Hong's microphone on the floor after she said: "I didn't confess shit to you," directing her comment at Rep. Michael Schraa, R-Oshkosh.

Ahead of Hong's floor speech Schraa said Hong "confessed" to him outside of the chamber that she had to bus tables in her own restaurant to make up for a lack of workers.

The Lake Geneva Republican said vulgar language is not allowed on the floor and that's why he stopped Hong's comments.

"I'm really glad I'm not a puppet of the WMC," Hong said after her microphone came back referring to Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce.

Hong expanded on her comments in a tweet during the session, adding she was proud to work in a restaurant and "buss tables, wash dishes, take orders & sling noodles."

But Joint Finance Committee Co-chair Rep. Mark Born, R-Beaver Dam, said dozens of other states have shown that cutting the extra benefits does help businesses fill vacant job positions.

He said, anecdotally, the second week after Missouri ended the extra payments one business saw at least 40 job applications submitted.

"This isn't just political theater. This is real world stuff that I hear in my district, talking with employers, and I'm glad to be here to do my job to vote to override his veto," Born added.

Evers, after vetoing the bill late last month, issued a statement saying Wisconsin's unemployment numbers are better than many other states and unemployed Wisconsinites need the extra weekly payments.

"Wisconsinites are hard-working people, and these numbers demonstrate as much," he said. "I am opposed to changes that would have such a profound effect on our neighbors who are struggling the most."

Evers also signed an executive order this week calling on lawmakers to meet in special session and take up a bill to increase education funding. As of 12:45 p.m., lawmakers had not started the special session.

See the Hong tweet:

<https://twitter.com/StateRepHong/status/1420048476952567813>

See Evers' statement on the veto:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2021/gov-evers-takes-action-on-three-bills/>