

Building Commission deadlocks on Evers' capital budget

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The State Building Commission deadlocked along partisan lines on all motions relating to Gov. Tony Evers' \$2.4 billion capital budget before it goes to the Joint Finance Committee.

GOP lawmakers at the start of yesterday's meeting sought to send the capital budget to JFC without a recommendation. The move failed 4-4, and the commission then took up each project Evers listed in the capital budget. Dems proposed backing each one ahead of JFC input, but all votes again failed 4-4.

Republican lawmakers on the commission tried a similar tactic two years ago as their GOP colleagues objected to the \$2.5 billion capital budget Evers originally proposed. The Legislature eventually pared that back to about \$1.8 billion.

Commission member Rep. Rob Wittke, R-Racine, called for a more "fiscally responsible" approach to the capital budget, noting he believes most private industries have also pulled back on their own capital budgets lately due to the pandemic.

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And Sen. André Jacques, R-De Pere, said while he personally thought some of the projects might have merit, he wanted to draft the budget "in a better, bipartisan way" by sending all projects to the GOP-controlled JFC.

"Lot's of things have merit, but we can't afford everything we want, either," he said. "And everybody's going to draw that line differently."

The commission consists of four GOP lawmakers, two Dems, Evers and an Evers citizen appointee.

The gov slammed his GOP counterparts for largely ignoring the commission's purpose: collaboration between the executive and legislative branches.

"It's hard to at this point in time to craft something everyone would agree to, but that's our job," he said. "I find it unacceptable that we're not going to do what the folks who created this law want us to do."

Ahead of voting on the portions of the budget constructing new youth prisons, Evers warned the closing of the troubled facilities of Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake "won't happen any time in the near future" without approval of new facilities. The commission deadlocked 4-4 on gov's capital projects for the youth corrections system with Republicans opposed.