

Natural Resources Board appointments remain in limbo after referral to committee that rarely meets in person

Posted on Thursday, Jul 22, 2021

Senate GOP leaders have taken the unusual step of referring to its organization committee two of Gov. Tony Evers' appointments to the Natural Resources Board, raising the prospect they could be bottled up indefinitely.

Evers made the appointments to the board in late April just before the terms of two Scott Walker appointees expired. But Wausau dentist Frederick Prehn has refused to step down until a replacement is confirmed by the state Senate, and that means a majority of the board continues to be Walker appointees.

Dem Sen. Melissa Agard, a member of the Natural Resources Committee, said she feared the referral to Senate Org would allow Prehn to serve indefinitely even though his term expired May 1.

Agard, D-Madison, and fellow Natural Resources Committee member Sen. Bob Wirch, D-Kenosha, sent a letter to Senate President Chris Kapenga asking the Delafield Republican to refer Prehn's replacement, Sandra Naas of Ashland, to committee for a public hearing so she could receive a vote on the Senate floor.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

"It's really disappointing to me that my Republican colleagues appear to be playing political games with our natural resources," Agard said.

The offices of Kapenga and Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, didn't return calls Wednesday seeking comment on the referral to Senate Org.

In April, Evers announced he was appointing Naas, an Ashland teacher and owner of an environmental consulting firm, and Sharon Adams to the board. Walker appointee Julie Anderson left her post, clearing the way for Adams to begin serving. But Prehn refused to vacate his spot, citing precedent that allows appointees to continue serving until a replacement is confirmed by the state Senate.

Prehn, who was re-elected in January as board chair for a one-year term, didn't return a call today seeking comment. His reelection as president was his third, and board rules would bar him from seeking another term if he still remained on the body. Agard and Wirch also sent him a letter yesterday asking him to reconsider and leave the board.

Senate Org rarely meets in person and typically votes via paper ballot on procedural things, including to set the floor agenda.

The committee last met for a public hearing Jan. 11 on a COVID-19 bill that had originally been noticed for the Joint Finance Committee. At the time, Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, said "logistical challenges" kept Finance from hearing the bill and he didn't want to cancel a hearing on the bill before the Senate planned to take it up the following day.

According to the Senate Chief Clerk's office, 86 Walker appointees who hadn't been referred to committee by the end of the 2015-16 session were temporarily sent to Senate Org. They were then referred to standing committees after the 2017-18 session began. Likewise, 48 Walker appointees at the end of the 2017-18 session were referred to Org. Some of those were confirmed during the December lame-duck session. After Evers took office, he rescinded the nominations of others who hadn't been confirmed.

Read the Dem letter to Kapenga:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210721Kapenga.pdf>

Read the Dem letter to Prehn:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210721Prehn.pdf>