

Vos: Action on abortion bill unlikely before spring election, won't 'die on that hill' for flat tax

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Assembly Speaker Robin Vos says every election cycle is a chance to hit the reset button or argue about old scores.

"I have done plenty of both. This time around, I've made the decision that I'm hitting the reset button," the Rochester Republican said in a new WisPolitics.com interview.

Vos says that means he's not drawing bright lines to start the new legislative session in the hopes of reaching compromises with Dem Gov. Tony Evers on various issues.

So while Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, has said his caucus is working on a plan to pave the way to a flat tax, Vos said Assembly Republicans are just starting to talk about tax cuts for the 2023-25 budget. Vos has said the \$3.4 billion in tax cuts enacted during the current biennium are the minimum of what he wants in this budget. Still, he is open to looking at changes to property, income and corporate taxes.

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Meanwhile, Gov. Tony Evers has said he can't envision signing a budget that includes taking Wisconsin's four individual income tax rates — which top out at 7.65 percent — and reducing them to one.

"Look, if we had Gov. Michels, tax reform and a flat tax obviously would've been my top priority," Vos told WisPolitics.com in his Capitol office. "It's still a huge priority, but I'm not going to die on that hill and say we can't do anything if we don't do it."

Vos, who became the longest serving speaker in Wisconsin history two years ago, is entering his sixth session leading the chamber. The past four years have been marked by a contentious relationship between GOP legislative leaders and Evers.

The gov, though, reached out to Vos and LeMahieu shortly after winning a second term, and the speaker spoke with WisPolitics.com yesterday just ahead of a meeting with Evers at the executive residence.

Vos said he envisions three areas for compromise in the upcoming session: addressing learning loss, tax cuts to help residents with inflation and innovation to address the state's demographic challenges. With a population graying faster than the rest of the nation, Vos said Wisconsin faces a choice of an increasing tax burden or a drop in the services that government can afford unless there's an injection of younger residents — and workers.

The speaker also said in the interview:

*it's unlikely the Assembly will pass legislation to add exceptions to the state's 173-year-old abortion ban ahead of the spring election.

The ban, which went back into effect after the U.S. Supreme Court reversed *Roe v. Wade*, only allows abortion to save the life of the mother. Vos has floated the idea of adding exceptions for rape and incest, but requiring a police report to be filed for qualify for either. Some Dems have objected to that condition, and Evers has said he only wants the Legislature to revoke the ban, period.

Vos said he was disappointed Evers said he wouldn't sign a bill adding exceptions to the ban because he knows a full repeal is "never going to happen."

"That seems to me not something he's against. He just wants more," Vos said. "Maybe you take what you can get and we argue about the rest later."

*Evers would hurt the chances of medical marijuana becoming law by putting the legalization of recreational pot in the budget.

The gov told WisPolitics.com earlier this week he will include a call to legalize marijuana in his budget as he did two years ago. Still, he said medical marijuana could be a compromise even though it falls short of where the public is.

Vos has said he's open to medical marijuana as an alternative to opioids, for

example. But he said putting recreational marijuana in the budget would be a waste of time and end up scaring “people like me and a whole lot of others out of saying this is not just a gateway to recreational marijuana.”

“If he really wants to generate consensus, he needs to get off his liberal bandwagon and start by saying where can we generate consensus, and that’s not by pitching the farthest extreme position,” Vos said.

*he doesn’t plan to bring back all 126 bills that Evers vetoed this session. But he will look for ways to tweak some to win the gov’s approval.

He cited a bill designed to improve reading scores as one example. Evers vetoed that, noting the Legislature didn’t include funds to pay for the initiative. Vos also pointed out a bill on shovel-ready workforce housing that passed on a voice vote in both chambers but fell to Evers’ veto.

“There’s got to be something that we can look at some of these bills and say, ‘OK, it’s not things that he would hate that we can tweak,’” Vos said.

*Vos, as expected, removed Rep. Janel Brandtjen, R-Menomonee Falls as chair of the Campaigns and Elections Committee. She backed Vos’ primary opponent, and her colleagues voted to bar her from closed caucus going forward.

Vos said he removed her as chair because she has “zero ability to generate consensus. She’s focused on the past and can’t even think about the future.”

Meanwhile, Vos said he hasn’t spoken with Donald Trump since before the former president endorsed his primary challenger. Trump pressured Vos to overturn the 2020 election results — something Vos has said is not possible — and backed Adam Steen in his primary challenger of the speaker.

Vos said he hasn’t spoken to Trump since before he endorsed Steen.

“I’m sure I’ll support the Republican nominee,” Vos said when asked if he’d back Trump in 2024 should the former president win the party’s nomination. “I’m going to do everything I possibly can to make sure it’s not Donald Trump. I think he’s bad for our party, and I think he does not do a good enough job attracting voters to our side of the aisle.”

Listen to the full [interview](#).

