

# Brooks on 'UpFront' says lawmakers may reduce local contribution in Brewers stadium maintenance bill

Posted on Monday, Sep 25, 2023

Rep. Rob Brooks, co-author of the GOP's \$700 million Brewers ballpark maintenance bill, expects changes will be made to the current plan including a lower contribution from Milwaukee city and county governments.

The Saukville Republican adds there likely isn't enough support yet to pass the bill in the Assembly.

"It would be very close and very tough if we had to do it," Brooks said on WISN's "UpFront," which is produced in partnership with WisPolitics. "I think we're going to need some Dem votes, but what I have found in talking to Speaker Vos and my colleagues, every time we explain the details to people one on one, they get it."

Brooks said it's his goal to get half of the Democratic caucus to eventually back the plan.

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"I would hope 14 to 18," he said. "Do I need that many? I don't know."

Brooks said he met with local officials in Milwaukee and Milwaukee County in recent days and anticipated the local buy-in requirement would drop from \$7.5 million annually to \$5 million between the city and county. The lower amount would put the local contribution at \$135 million over 27 years rather than the \$202.5 million proposed in the bill.

"If they come up with the things they've counted they can do and we think we can do, I do think it will be around \$5 million," Brooks said.

He also anticipated changes to the makeup of the new stadium district board. The GOP plan currently eliminates appointees from Milwaukee and Milwaukee County, a major concern of Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson.

“Through our process, the governor had two appointments, and at the last minute we gave him four,” Brooks said. “So it’s four for the governor, four from the Assembly and Senate, and so we assume, and we’ve talked to the leadership, that they would like to see maybe we take two of the governor’s and give them to the county and the city, and I think that’s an easy solution.”

Brooks also added he doesn’t oppose auditing the stadium district board, as both state Sens. Rob Cowles, R-Green Bay, and Tim Carpenter, D-Milwaukee, have expressed publicly in recent days, but wouldn’t wait for an audit to pass the bill.

“I will put it in the bill, and guarantee we’ll put it in the bill that we will require an audit now, and we’ll require one every five years,” Brooks said.

Rick Schlesinger, Brewers president of business operations, met with members of the Senate Dem caucus in recent days as negotiations continue.

“My job is to make the case why this is important, not only for the city of Milwaukee, the county of Milwaukee but the whole state,” Schlesinger said. “It was a great opportunity to speak to the Democratic caucus in the Senate, hear their concerns, get a chance to talk about some of the things that are important to us, talk about potential solutions.”

Schlesinger also pushed back at calls Johnson to develop some of the parking lots surrounding American Family Field to generate new tax revenue.

“The economics of developing the parking lots are much more complicated than the average person might think,” Schlesinger said. “This is an area where we are protective of our tailgating culture. There’s certainly a lot of parking lot spaces, but to think we can just short-term turn this into a ‘beer district’ or a major development, the economics are somewhat daunting.”

Meanwhile, the mayor dismissed the Brewers’ response.

“There’s been discussions about development around American Family Field since its inception,” Johnson said. “The baseball stadium has been open since 2001. That’s four U.S. presidencies, so they’re pushing back? When is it going to happen?”

We should be talking about this right now.”

Johnson acknowledged the desire for Republicans to include a local contribution but said his ideal number would be zero, pointing to Brewers’ attendance from outside the county.

“A vast majority, the lion’s share, come from elsewhere in the state and elsewhere in the country. Should the city kick in? Perhaps so, but I think other communities who once upon a time were on the hook to help support American Family Field are no longer on the hook with doing so, either.”

Johnson said he will continue to publicly push to ensure the city’s appointee to the stadium district board is returned.

“That is textbook taxation without representation,” Johnson said. “That ought to change.”

Johnson also announced his reelection bid last week. The election will take place this April, the same day as Wisconsin’s presidential primary.

“I will serve the full term, yup, that’s my desire is to continue to serve as mayor,” Johnson said when asked whether he planned to serve the entire four-year term if re-elected.

U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil, chair of the House Administration Committee, says he’s still hopeful Congress can avoid a government shutdown as he huddled with Speaker Kevin McCarthy on Friday.

“We’re having lots of conversations about how we get there,” the Janesville Republican said. “We’re way behind on the appropriations bills, both the House and Senate are in the same position on that, which may force us into a position where we fund the government for a short period of time until we get the work done. It’s beyond frustrating. We shouldn’t be here, but hopefully, we can prevent a government shutdown.”

House Republicans failed to pass any spending provision last week, increasing the likelihood of a government shutdown when the fiscal year ends Saturday.

Given the House inaction, the U.S. Senate could pass a bipartisan continuing resolution to fund the government short-term. But the provision would likely include

funding for Ukraine and disaster relief, a measure that would require Democratic support in the House to pass.

“We’re going to have to look at what comes over, if it does come over from the Senate,” Steil said. “It would be far better to send the Senate a House bill which would claw back some of the reckless spending and secure some of the U.S.-Mexico border. Those would be my priorities. I’d rather the House act and have the Senate respond to us, but at the end of the day we’re all going to have to come together to address the fact time is running out.

“Failure to do that would force us to the left,” Steil added. “I think there’s still a true opportunity in the days ahead.

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