

GOP-controlled Senate rejects 8 appointees, including 4 Evers picks for Natural Resources Board

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The GOP-controlled state Senate voted today to fire more than half of the gov's appointees to the Natural Resources Board as Republicans rejected eight appointments in today as part of an unprecedented move.

According to the Legislative Reference Bureau, the Senate has rejected just five executive appointments since the start of the 1981-82 session.

Along with the nominations of four appointments to the Natural Resources Board, the GOP senators also shot down a Dem pick for the state Elections Commission, a gov nominee for the Council on Domestic Abuse, a DATCP appointment to a Livestock Facility Siting Review Board and an Evers selection for the Medical Examining Board.

Dems defended Natural Resources Board nominees Sharon Adams, Dylan Jennings, Sandra Naas and Jim VandeBrook as incredibly qualified to serve and accused Republicans of playing a political game.

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Sen. Mary Felzkowski, R-Irma, said her vote against Adams was nothing personal; she found her incredibly nice. Instead, she found it troubling that Adams, of Milwaukee, wasn't well versed on issues affecting her northern Wisconsin district when they first met. Felzkowski said Adams didn't have a deeper understanding by the time a public hearing rolled around.

"This is a message to Gov. Evers to appoint people who are up to speed on the state as a whole," Felzkowski said.

She also knocked Naas for saying she would support a proposed rule before the board even if it violated state law. Felzkowski added Vandebrook said he'd have to think about it.

Senate Minority Leader Melissa Agard, D-Madison, knocked her GOP colleagues, saying their votes highlighted the “dysfunction of this body and the Republican Party not being able to govern.”

The vote on all four board appointees was 21-11 with Sen. Rob Cowles, R-Green Bay, joining Dems in support of the nominees.

According to Leg Council, a majority of the seven-member board is required for a quorum. The rejection of four picks today temporarily left the body short of that mark. But Dem Gov. Tony Evers quickly appointed four members to restore the body to full strength.

The others rejected were:

*former Milwaukee County Clerk Joseph Czarnezki, a Dem appointee to the Elections Commission. Republicans have objected to his decision to abstain from a vote to renominate Meagan Wolfe as the agency administrator. Dems have argued that move allows her to remain in the job indefinitely, and Sen. Dan Knodl, R-Germantown, called it a dereliction of duty. The vote was 21-11 with Cowles joining Dems in opposition.

*former Evers Deputy Chief of Staff Melissa Baldauff, an appointee to the Council on Domestic Abuse as a representative with domestic abuse knowledge. No GOP senator stood to express an issue with Baldauff. She told WisPolitics last month Sen. Jesse James, R-Altoona, asked her before a committee hearing during a one-on-one call about her past tweets knocking Republicans. She said he asked if she would describe herself as emotional when she wrote the tweets and if she hated all men. The vote was 22-10.

*Jerry Halverson, a member of the Livestock Facility Siting Review Board. He was nominated to the board by DATCP Secretary Randy Romanski. Dem Sen. Brad Pfaff, who was Evers' DATCP secretary until Senate Republicans fired him, demanded to know what Halverson had done to draw the GOP's ire. No one stood to explain their opposition. The vote was 22-10.

*Sheldon Wasserman, a former Dem lawmaker who now chairs the Medical Examining Board. No Republicans explained their opposition to his appointment before he was rejected 22-10. Sen. Dianne Hesselbein, D-Middleton, noted Wasserman had previously been confirmed by the Senate for a full term and demanded to know what he'd done wrong since then. Wasserman is a plaintiff in the lawsuit Dem AG Josh Kaul filed seeking to overturn Wisconsin's 1849 abortion ban.