

Evers rules out rebates in tax deal, says general school aids needs boost

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Gov. Tony Evers ruled out using some of the state's \$2.5 billion surplus to send taxpayers rebates as he expressed hope he'll meet in the coming weeks with GOP legislative leaders to hash out a deal.

Speaking at a WisPolitics-State Affairs luncheon in Madison Thursday, Evers again said any increase to general school aids would have to be part of any deal, as well as meeting special education funding targets set in last year's budget.

He said he expected to reach a deal with Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, "because it's part of politics."

"Do I think we're going to get a solution? Yes," Evers said.

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The offices of Vos and LeMahieu didn't immediately return messages seeking comment on Evers' remarks.

Vos and LeMahieu [last week proposed](#) a \$2.3 billion package that paired an income tax rebate and property tax relief with special education funding, but left out general school aid increases. That followed LeMahieu calling for rebates of \$1,000 for married couples and \$500 for other filers, which carries a price tag of nearly \$1.5 billion.

Asked if rebates were still on the table, Evers responded, "Not in my world."

He further characterized the idea of an election-year rebate as "maximum politics" and said "we can use that funding better."

Evers suggested stalled legislation to reauthorize the stewardship program could work its way into the tax plan he hopes to reach with LeMahieu and Vos.

Funding to continue the state's Knowles-Nelson stewardship program will expire on June 30.

A bill that would significantly cut back funding for land acquisition under the program passed the Assembly last month but lacks support in the Senate. Efforts by Sen. Patrick Testin, R-Stevens Point, to negotiate a compromise fell through before the Assembly adjourned last week.

Evers called the stewardship program "part of our DNA" and agreed legislative leaders might be able to "unstick" funding negotiations.

"It could be that I give up on something else. You never know," Evers said.

He also reiterated his support for a constitutional amendment barring partisan gerrymandering, though he acknowledged legislators lacked enthusiasm for such a measure.

Evers has said he plans to call legislators into a special session this spring to take up the constitutional amendment.

"Either side is conservative, because they want to be in a position to make it their map," the gov said.

He told reporters after the WisPolitics luncheon that he'd heard "through the grapevine" that some Democrats opposed the special session. Still, Evers said he hadn't noticed a dip in applause when he announced his plans to call the special session at the State of the State last week.