

LeMahieu says he's been cut out of negotiations on possible property tax deal

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Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu says he's been cut out of negotiations between Gov. Tony Evers and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos on a possible property tax deal.

LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, at a WisPolitics-State Affairs luncheon in Madison yesterday said Vos and Evers' effort to reach a compromise "seems like purely a political stunt."

LeMahieu said he met Evers and Vos, R-Rochester, on Zoom about a week ago to discuss plans for a potential deal to address property taxes following Evers' partial veto raising per pupil revenue limits by \$325 for the next 400 years.

Unlike LeMahieu, Vos this week said he's open to a deal that doesn't include a repeal of the 400-year veto. LeMahieu said he's heard Vos and Evers are still negotiating, but he hasn't been invited to those talks.

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"If the governor and the speaker are actually serious about accomplishing something, shouldn't they include both houses? Because it's going to need to go through both houses," LeMahieu said. "So it seems like purely a political stunt or just trying to pass something and adjourning and putting pressure on a house to take whatever they come up with."

He also said there has been no communication between his and Vos' offices this week.

Evers spokesperson Britt Cudaback [posted](#) on X today that the gov's office yesterday "suggested that Republican leaders should try talking to each other since they're clearly not on the same page."

LeMahieu said Evers laid out what it would take to eliminate the veto during his previous meeting with legislative leaders. He said the Dem gov's proposal "made it even worse than it currently was, which I thought was a little ridiculous."

LeMahieu said he proposed reversing the 400-year veto and using some of that money toward property taxes and the rest for a partial rebate, adding failing to eliminate the veto handicaps budgets for years to come.

Since then, Evers has [offered](#) GOP leaders a \$1.3 billion package that would put more money into education while creating a property tax break and an exemption for cash tips. LeMahieu said the cash tips component hadn't previously been discussed and wasn't just a GOP proposal as it was proposed in the gov's budget.

LeMahieu said for his caucus, a temporary solution is "a nonstarter."

"We decided that why would we put a Band-Aid on the issue and bail out the problem right now for one year and saddle the next Legislature with a huge ongoing commitment that they need to make?" LeMahieu said.

Instead, LeMahieu has proposed using \$1.5 billion of the state's \$2.5 billion surplus to send rebates of \$1,000 to married couples and \$500 to others. He argued that's the best way to use the money.

Vos, meanwhile, said he texted LeMahieu yesterday saying they needed to sit down and figure out a compromise.

Vos told reporters during a pre-session availability that some GOP lawmakers are calling for a joint caucus to work out a deal on the surplus.

"Everybody's entitled to their own opinion. Sen. LeMahieu is always welcome," Vos said when asked about LeMahieu saying he'd been left out of discussions between the speaker and the governor's office.

Vos maintained that property tax relief was a better use of the funds than the rebate Senate Republicans proposed.

“There are no bad tax cuts, and we have not ruled anything out, but when we have talked to folks, the thing that has the most impact on them is the massive property tax increases that they saw last December,” Vos said ahead of the Assembly’s floor session, noting his own property tax bill had increased by more than 24%.

A rebate, on the other hand, was “less easy to do” and “more expensive.”

Vos also said he felt Evers had a sincere desire to reduce property taxes and a “legitimate point” about the Legislature not meeting special education funding targets. He added the gov was unlikely to budge on repealing the 400-year veto.

“I don’t know why we wouldn’t negotiate in good faith and try to find something that we can actually get across the finish line,” Vos said.

During the WisPolitics-State Affairs luncheon, LeMahieu was noncommittal on whether the Senate would pass a variety of high-profile bills before the end of the session, including one that would allow online sports betting on tribal lands in the state.

The bill has drawn fire from some conservatives, and the Assembly put off a vote after originally planning to take up the bill last fall. Majority Leader Tyler August, R-Walworth, told WisPolitics last week he believes the bill would have 50 GOP votes in the Assembly before the chamber adjourned for the session next week.

LeMahieu questioned if the Assembly will pass the bill.

“I think from a policy standpoint, it makes sense. I don’t know if we can get it across the finish line. I don’t know if the Assembly can get it across the finish line in the next week,” he said.

Also during the event:

*On funding for the state’s food stamp program, LeMahieu voiced support for backfilling funding to counties that was cut under the One Big Beautiful Act.

He said his caucus has concerns about the Department of Health Services’ request for 57 positions. Still, LeMahieu said “they probably do need some more positions” to address new federal requirements that he said make it more difficult to verify cases and keep the state’s error rate down.

*LeMahieu said he would also like to get a bill done before the end of the session on renewing the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. He said he believes the caucus is “getting pretty close.”

GOP state Sen. Pat Testin is co-authoring a bill to extend the program while cracking down on land acquisitions. Last week, the Stevens Point Republican [told WisPolitics](#) he was still working to shore up support in his caucus. That includes the possibility of cutting off land acquisitions in northern Wisconsin. The program is set to expire in June.