

# Senate passes NIL bill over GOP opposition, adjourns regular session

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UW-Madison would get \$14.6 million a year in taxpayer money to cover the costs of athletic facilities, freeing up money to pay athletes for name, image and likeness deals, under legislation that cleared the Senate today.

AB 1034 cleared the chamber 17-16 over the objections of Seven Republicans. The bill, which was backed by six Dems, now goes to Dem Gov. Tony Evers.

It was the last bill the Senate voted on before recessing the 2025-26 regular session.

The NIL bill and one to allow online gaming both passed the Senate on its final day thanks to Dem support after splitting the GOP caucus, which has an 18-15 majority.

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In an interview with WisPolitics after the chamber adjourned, Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, defended pushing through both bills with Dem support.

“I thought they were good legislation,” LeMahieu said.

Sen. Dora Drake, D-Milwaukee, originally voted no, but received permission to switch her vote to a yes, allowing the bill to pass. She told WisPolitics afterward she made a mistake on the initial roll call.

There was no discussion on the bill ahead of the vote.

Along with the money to UW-Madison for principal and interest payments on athletic facilities, the Green Bay and Milwaukee campuses would get \$200,000 each

annually for the same expenses. Both schools also compete in Division 1 across multiple sports.

The bill also would put into state statute language for NIL deals that compensate student athletes, along with declaring those who receive such compensation aren't employees of the UW System. Under the bill, those deals also would be exempt from the state's open records law.

According to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau, the proposed \$14.6 million for UW-Madison exceeds current projected costs of \$9.3 million in debt service for 2025-26 and \$8.3 million for 2026-27. Under the bill, if the \$14.6 million in general purpose revenue exceeded actual costs in any year, the leftover funds would lapse to the state's general fund.

The Senate Republicans who opposed the bill were: Julian Bradley, of New Berlin; Rob Hutton, of Brookfield; André Jacque, of New Franken; Chris Kapenga, of Delafield; Steve Nass, of Whitewater; Rob Stafsholt, of New Richmond; and Pat Testin, of Stevens Point.

Along with Drake, the Dems who backed the bill were: Jodi Habush Sinykin, of Whitefish Bay; Dianne Hesselbein, of Middleton; Melissa Ratcliff, of Cottage Grove; Mark Spreitzer, of Beloit; and Bob Wirch of Pleasant Prairie.