



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Legislative Republican Leaders Respond to Special Session Request

Madison... Legislative Republican leaders call on Governor Evers to take ownership of the problems with the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system. Legislative audits have shown the major issues with the backlog at the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) during the pandemic were not due to an old computer system but rather mismanagement of the agency itself. In addition, a [new Legislative Fiscal Bureau memo](#) states that the Evers administration has the authority to initiate these IT upgrades on its own.

“Governor Evers continues to cast blame on others and accepts little fault himself,” said Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester). “We are always open to passing necessary legislation, but unfortunately, this Special Session call is about politics; not about policy.”

"Governor Evers already has the funding and tools he needs to fix the problems at DWD," said Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu (R-Oostburg). "Now, instead of effectively using his resources, he's scrambling to shift blame while people are still left waiting."

“We are unfortunately seeing the same song and dance from Governor Evers that we’ve come to expect: a lack of leadership,” said Majority Leader Jim Steineke (R-Kaukauna). “The governor has consistently slapped down the legislature’s extended hand to address the unemployment backlog, and now is trying to pass the buck when ownership of the UI failure is both needed and warranted.”

“The Governor calling us into a Special Session is pure political grandstanding,” said Rep. Mark Born (R-Beaver Dam), Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Finance. “Governor Evers has had the ability to initiate an IT system upgrade at any time over the past two years. This is just another example of failed leadership and finger pointing that has harmed tens of thousands of the unemployed across Wisconsin.”

“Suddenly, the Governor decides there is urgency for an IT upgrade that should already be started,” said Sen. Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green), Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Finance. “The Governor has ample resources, right now, to be preparing the plan and RFP to modernize the UI system so that he can incorporate a solution in his next biennial budget proposal. What is he waiting for?”

According to a Legislative Fiscal Bureau memo, the Evers administration has numerous current appropriations that could potentially be used for IT upgrades.

- Finance a system through the state master lease program (which is how IT upgrades are typically financed)

- Expedite the procurement of a new system and any contractors needed to successfully implement a new system
- Utilize past or future federal funds made available to the administration
- Existing appropriations which the governor has the authority to prioritize
- Request expenditure authority through the Joint Committee on Finance review process

The GOP leaders also point out the falsehood that Governor Evers continues to claim that former administrations and legislatures left the UI system alone. In fact, Governor Scott Walker's administration made many significant upgrades. According to the [DWD Annual Report of 2018](#), the modernization projects under Governor Walker improved online claim applications from 53% in 2014 to 98% in 2017.

The report states: *"Due to enhancements to the online filing system and retirement of the antiquated telephone filing system (IVR) finalized in 2017, approximately 98% of initial and weekly claims are currently filed online."*

"Governor Evers chose to shut down the state, and was woefully unprepared to handle the crisis he played a part in creating," said Senator Chris Kapenga (R-Delafield), Senate President. "Ten months later, after firing his own DWD secretary and a damning audit by the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau, Gov. Evers has finally found it convenient to have enough urgency to address his own management failures."

"At a time when Wisconsinites need leadership more than ever, Governor Evers is once again shifting blame and playing politics," said Representative Tyler August (R-Lake Geneva). "Families that need this money to survive have had to wait up to 6 months for their claims to be processed. This is unacceptable and it is due directly to the gross incompetence of this administration."

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