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**Medical marijuana legislation could return as Assembly bill**

Speaker Robin Vos says he wants the Wisconsin State Assembly to look at legislation that would legalize medical marijuana when the body returns from its summer break in the fall.

The Rochester Republican told reporters June 28 that he has long been open to the concept of legalizing pot for medical purposes but added he first wanted to huddle with his caucus to see where other Assembly Republicans stand on the issue. Republicans stripped Gov. Tony Evers’ medical marijuana and decriminalization plan from the budget before sending their version to the governor.

“I’d certainly love for us to be able to have a discussion that is rational, that takes our time, that we figure out an answer to see if Republicans could actually support it who are skeptics like I am,” Vos said.

He added he would “much rather figure out a way to get to yes” than automatically be a no and said that started by bringing his caucus together.

But Vos quickly nixed the idea of fully legalizing marijuana and slammed Evers’ budget proposal on marijuana. The governor called for the legalization of medical marijuana, but also added a separate provision that would decriminalize possession of up to 25 grams of the drug.

Vos called that proposal “half-handed” and said Evers officials “created more problems than they created opportunities” by linking the two measures in the budget.

“People see medical marijuana as a slippery slope toward recreational, which is why him putting (medical marijuana and decriminalization) together is exactly the fears that almost every single person had to say, this is why we can’t do medical,” Vos said.

He also warned that Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, a long-time skeptic of medical marijuana, would likely not be open to the measure.

In a statement, the Juneau Republican said he believed a measure similar to what Evers proposed “would have a difficult time getting Republican support in the Senate.” But Fitzgerald did not specifically touch on Vos’ call to look at a standalone medical marijuana proposal.

Ultimately, Vos said, his goal was to find a “path to be able to talk about” medical marijuana and try to find “a way that could work here in our state and actually get across the finish line.”

Vos also highlighted the three Speaker’s taskforces dealing with water quality, adoption, and suicide prevention as areas where bipartisan compromise on legislation could be found when lawmakers return later this summer.

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics, and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

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***Additional editor’s note:*** *The second part of this column listed below is likely to be outdated by the time most member newspapers go to print. If you will be printing the column on or before July 5, and the governor has not yet signed or vetoed the budget, this section can be added before the tagline.*

**Budget countdown begins**

Vos on Friday added his signature to the budget lawmakers passed last week, starting the countdown for Gov. Tony Evers to act on the document.

The signing gave the governor until July 5 to sign the document, allow it to become law without his signature, use his partial veto authority, or reject the document outright. Vos said he was “optimistic” that Evers will sign the appropriations bill.

“There is no good reason that Gov. Evers would not choose to sign the bills that we are moving forward,” Vos said.

Regardless of how Evers chooses to handle the two-year spending plan, Vos said lawmakers “probably would not come back until October.”

“If there was some kind of a dire need, of course, I’d talk about it with our leadership team and Sen. Fitzgerald to see if we could come back sooner,” he said.

But Vos noted that government funding would continue at the previous level if Evers chose to fully veto the document, and thus Republicans would be unlikely to feel pressure to quickly propose a new budget.

“Last year we didn’t pass a budget until September and nobody noticed any difference,” he said.

Vos also signed Assembly Bill 188, the proposal to close the Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake youth prisons by July 2021, six months later than originally planned. The bill would also give counties additional time to apply for grants to fund the regional facilities slated to help reshape the juvenile justice system in Wisconsin.