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**Kaul: GOP lame-duck oversight law wastes time, money**

*By WisPolitics.com*

Democratic Attorney General Josh Kaul says Republican legislative leaders have wasted taxpayer money by paying private attorneys $19,670 so far to review proposed settlements under a lame-duck law he says doesn’t work.

So far, the GOP-controlled Joint Finance Committee has only signed off on one proposed settlement reached by the Department of Justice under the new attorney general. This comes after Republicans a year ago gave themselves new oversight powers.

Kaul twice in late summer went to the committee seeking approval of cases only to have discussions break down.

“The best thing I can say about it, I think, is we’ve managed to avoid a disaster so far,” Kaul told WisPolitics.com in a year-end interview on Dec. 13. “But at some point in time, there will be a case that has to be resolved quickly or else the state will lose out on a significant part of a recovery. That’s bad for taxpayers. It could be bad for people who need restitution. I’m hopeful that we’ll get this process changed.”

The state Supreme Court earlier this year heard oral arguments in a challenge to the extraordinary session laws that included the provision giving lawmakers oversight of proposed settlements reached by DOJ. Kaul said if the court doesn’t throw out the provision, he hopes lawmakers will change it after recognizing the process is unworkable.

As he has in the past, Kaul said the legislative oversight is incompatible with how complex case negotiations work and creates an impediment to persuading other parties to settle.

One of the cases Kaul tried to take before Joint Finance was a proposed multi-state settlement with Purdue Pharma, which was sued over its role in the opioid crisis as the manufacturer of OxyContin. JFC members from both parties refused to sign nondisclosure agreements before hearing details of the proposed settlement, and the process broke down.

Kaul later rejected joining a proposed multi-billion-dollar settlement with states and local governments to settle the suit, believing it didn’t go far enough. Instead, he decided to continue pursuing the state case he filed.

Kaul said the company filed for bankruptcy not long after the multi-state settlement was announced. It is now part of those bankruptcy proceedings, along with the state’s suit.

The AG said that however the bankruptcy case plays out, he doesn’t believe a proposed agreement to settle the state suit would be subject to the lame-duck laws. He said that statute refers to civil actions pursued by DOJ, but a bankruptcy proceeding wouldn’t qualify.

“One of the challenges of this law is it clearly didn’t think through the many scenarios that arise in real cases,” Kaul said.

In the interview, Kaul also said:

\*He will continue pushing for “common-sense measures” after he previously called for lawmakers to approve a so-called “red flag law” and legislation to expand background checks. Gov. Tony Evers called a special session on the bills earlier this fall, but GOP legislative leaders quickly gaveled it in and out.

\*He hasn’t started to think about whether he will seek reelection in 2022. “I’m focused at this point at doing the job and what’s in the best interest of Wisconsinites,” Kaul said. He’s also been mentioned as a possible governor candidate someday, but said he is focused on his current job.

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