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**Quinn replaces Ott on joint legislative committee prior to key vote**

*By WisPolitics.com*

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos pulled suburban Milwaukee GOP Rep. Jim Ott from a joint legislative committee less than 40 minutes after outgoing northern Rep. Romaine Quinn formally asked for an appointment to the committee, according to records obtained by WisPolitics.com.

Speculation on the move has focused on whether Vos was trying to protect Ott from a potentially difficult committee vote on any plans dealing with COVID-19. But the records also showed the Menomonee Falls Republican was poised to break with his GOP colleagues on a Department of Health Services rule on immunizations just before he was yanked from the committee.

Quinn said he contacted Vos, R-Rochester, a couple of times about an assignment on the Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules prior to his formal request May 1 after he realized the role the committee could play in the debate over reopening the economy. But he couldn’t recall when he initially broached the topic as part of his desire to ensure representation on the committee from northern Wisconsin.

“All of our members want a piece of the pie about how we reopen and make that decision,” Quinn said.

The move came days before the state Supreme Court overturned the Evers administration’s extended stay-at-home order. With a conservative majority on the court, the decision was expected with the additional belief that the administrative rules committee would play a key role in any discussion between Gov. Tony Evers and GOP lawmakers on a possible replacement.

Quinn, who isn’t seeking reelection this fall, referenced that court decision in his email to Vos, R-Rochester, sent mid-afternoon May 1. In it, Quinn wrote lawmakers would “have an opportunity to finally work with the Governor to come up with both an effective and attainable plan to safely reopen our economy” through JCRAR if the court ruled in the GOP’s favor.

“Rural Wisconsin deserves a seat at the table when these decisions are being made, which is why I respectfully request that you immediately appointment me to this committee,” wrote Quinn, R-Barron. “If you don’t live north of Highway 29, you’re not from northern Wisconsin.”

Thirty-eight minutes later, Vos sent an email to the Assembly Chief Clerk’s office noting Quinn’s request.

“Effective immediately, I appoint him to the committee in place of Rep. Ott,” Vos wrote.

In the email, Vos didn’t provide an explanation of why he chose to pull Ott, one of three Assembly GOP members on the committee at the time. The other two were Assembly Co-chair Joan Ballweg, of Markesan, who’s running for the state Senate this fall, and Rep. Adam Neylon. President Trump won the Waukesha Republican’s Assembly seat with 58.6 percent of the vote four years ago, beating Hillary Clinton by nearly 25 points.

Ott, meanwhile, is one of the Democrats’ top targets this fall after Clinton won his seat with 49.2 percent of the vote, beating Trump by nearly 5.5 points.

“Speaker Vos agreed JCRAR should have representation from northern Wisconsin especially with possible rules to be considered concerning the COVID-19 outbreak,” said Vos spokeswoman Kit Beyer. “Rep. Quinn was asked to put his request in writing and the change was made.”

The office of Ott, who has served on the committee for four of the past five sessions and co-chaired it in 2011-12, said he wasn’t available to comment.

Pulling Ott from the panel proved to be a deciding factor in JCRAR upholding a committee objection to changes DHS wanted to make to student immunization rules.

The night before Ott was pulled from the committee, his office informed an aide to Senate Co-chair Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, that he wouldn’t support two of the objections.

State law requires DHS to carry out a statewide program to eliminate mumps, measles, whooping cough and other diseases. As part of that effort, DHS sought to modify immunization requirements for entry into Wisconsin schools and child centers.

The modifications included:

* changes to the definitions of “substantial outbreaks” to include chickenpox and meningococcal disease and significantly lowering the threshold defining a mumps outbreak.
* mandating a meningitis vaccine for all seventh graders with a booster in 12th grade.
* changing current practice that allows parents to self-report their child’s chickenpox illness to schools instead require a health care providers’ confirmation of the infection.
* The Assembly Committee on Constitution and Ethics objected to the changes, putting the issue before JCRAR.

Late on April 30, an Ott aide wrote to Nass’ office that the lawmaker wouldn’t support sustaining the first two objections at the scheduled May 5 meeting.

Pulling him from the committee proved pivotal because it voted 6-4 along party lines to sustain all three objections as Quinn sided with his fellow Republicans on the motion. Had Ott remained on the committee, the committee would’ve deadlocked 5-5. A tie vote wouldn’t have sustained the standing committee’s objection, allowing the DHS rule to take effect.

*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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