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**Democrats press abortion issue**

Five weeks out from the election, Wisconsin Democrats sought to place a spotlight on abortion as Gov. Tony Evers told a Capitol rally he and Democrat Attorney General Josh Kaul have been a “brick wall” against GOP efforts to restrict access to the procedure.

Evers addressed an Oct. 4 rally on the Capitol steps shortly after GOP legislative leaders quickly gaveled in and out of a special session Evers called seeking to give voters a pathway to overturning the state’s 1849 abortion ban, which only allows an exception to save the life of a mother.

“I believe people deserve a voice since they’ve been failed by the Republicans in this building time and time again,” Evers said. “We should give the people an opportunity to vote on these important issues.”

Evers added if voters can’t weigh in on abortion by referendum, they should do so at the ballot box in November.

The rally and special session came 100 days after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the right to an abortion, injecting the issue into the fall elections. Evers and Kaul have since filed a lawsuit seeking
to overturn the state’s criminal abortion ban, and it has become a significant theme in the Ever’s reelection bid against GOP construction exec Tim Michels.

“We have to win — we cannot afford to have Wisconsin become the worst state in the union,” Evers said of the upcoming election.

Kaul told rally attendees voters should believe Republicans about their positions on abortion.

“These Republicans want to take freedom away from women in Wisconsin,” Kaul said. “They want to leave women less safe, and they want women to be less equal — we will not stand for that.”

Kaul also criticized his opponent, Fond du Lac County District Attorney Eric Toney.

“Think about what you’ve heard from my Republican opponent: that he would help lead efforts in Wisconsin to enforce that draconian abortion ban, taking resources away from investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes in our state to instead going after people for abortions for political grandstanding,” Kaul said.

As they have with other special session calls from Evers, GOP leaders took seconds to gavel out Tuesday’s proceedings.

Senate President Chris Kapenga, R-Delafield, acted first. He was the only Republican in the chamber as he gaveled in and out the session in less than 20 seconds. Democrat Senators Melissa Agard, of Madison, Tim
Carpenter, of Milwaukee, and Brad Pfaff, of Onalaska, were the only other lawmakers in the chamber.

Pfaff, who’s running for western Wisconsin’s 3rd Congressional District, spoke up when Kapenga asked if there were any objections before bringing down the gavel.

In the Assembly, Speaker Pro-Tempore Tyler August convened and adjourned the special session in under 30 seconds. The Lake Geneva Republican convened the session and asked if there were any objections to GOP Rep. Mark Born’s immediate proposal to adjourn.

Amongst a loud chorus of Democrat “nos” from at least 17 lawmakers, including lieutenant governor candidate Rep. Sara Rodriguez, D-Brookfield, August said “the ayes have it” before adjourning the chamber and leaving.

Born, of Beaver Dam, was the only other Republican in the room.

The chamber was slated to convene at 10 a.m., but Democrats were standing around their seats for a little more than an hour until August got things going.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, and Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, didn’t comment on the proceedings.

Evers had called on the Legislature to take up a constitutional amendment that sought to allow voters to implement new laws, repeal existing ones or amend the Wisconsin Constitution. He argued it was a pathway to allowing voters to have a direct say on the state’s 1849 abortion ban.

Anna Kelly, a spokesperson for GOP gubernatorial candidate Michels, knocked the effort.

“Tony Evers is pushing a California-style initiative scheme to hide his support for abortion-on-demand up until the moment of birth,” she said. “Wisconsinites didn’t have any say when Evers shut down our economy, kept our schools closed, and granted early release for brutal murderers, but they will on November 8.”

Meanwhile, Wisconsin Right to Life’s legislative/PAC director, Gracie Skogman, praised the Legislature’s move and challenged Evers to join the group at pregnancy centers to meet women “with empathy, compassion, and the real resources they need to choose life for their preborn children.”

“Today the Legislature refused to cave to the governor’s political theater and his ongoing attacks against Wisconsin’s lifesaving law,” she said.

During a campaign stop in Madison, Democrat U.S. Senate candidate Mandela Barnes blasted U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson for supporting the Supreme Court’s overturning of federal abortion protections while opposing government-funded programs for parents.

“He wants babies to be born into a world he refuses to protect,” Barnes said at Monty’s Blue Plate Diner on Madison’s east side.

Johnson earlier this year applauded the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn protections in Roe v. Wade. The Oshkosh Republican also earlier this year said he opposes the federal child tax credit and he would support cutting unemployment benefits. Barnes today at a campaign event said Wisconsinites are dealing with rising costs most families have to face.

“People are dealing with some significant challenges right now. We’re dealing with rising costs at the grocery store, rising costs at the gas pump. It’s difficult to get health care,” he said. “And in addition to not supporting a woman’s right to choose, Ron Johnson said it’s not his responsibility or this country’s responsibility to take care of our children. So think about the situations that he wants to force families into.”

Barnes also criticized Johnson for supporting tax cuts that reduced costs for many wealthy Americans.

“But not only did he say it’s unfair, or it’s not his responsibility or this country’s responsibility to take care of our children,” Barnes said. “He has zero problem taking care of millionaires and billionaires in this country.”

Johnson, who previously supported legislation to implement a national ban on abortion after 20 weeks, said Tuesday that the courts, Congress and the state Legislature shouldn’t be allowed to settle the issue.

Speaking to the Milwaukee Rotary on Oct. 4, the Oshkosh Republican again called for a statewide referendum to decide what limits — if any — should be imposed on abortion in Wisconsin. He has called for such a move in the past, though he has acknowledged it isn’t currently possible under Wisconsin law.

Johnson said he’d like to see similar referendums in all 50 states to settle the issue once and for all. He said that debate should address the question at what point in a pregnancy society has the responsibility to protect life.

Johnson commented after he was asked about GOP U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham’s proposal to ban abortion nationally after 15 weeks.

“Nine justices couldn’t decide,” Johnson said. “I don’t think 535 members of Congress should decide, I don’t think 132 members of the Wisconsin state Legislature should decide this for Wisconsin.”

In his comments, Johnson didn’t directly address Evers’ call for creating a pathway to allow voters to make changes to state law through referendums.

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