



DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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Republicans use Corrupt Lame Duck Law to Tie the Hands of the Attorney General

MADISON, WI - Today, Joint Finance Committee (JFC) met in a completely unprecedented meeting to approve a settlement agreement proposed by Attorney General Josh Kaul on an undisclosed case. This is a direct result of last December's lame duck Extraordinary Session and 2017 Wisconsin Act 369, which changed state law to require the Attorney General to have his settlement agreements approved by the Joint Finance Committee. Despite the November 2018 general election where Attorney General Kaul was democratically elected statewide to execute the duties of his office without the interference of Speaker Vos or Leader Fitzgerald.

Despite the fact this meeting did not meet the statutory grounds cited in the committee meeting notice, Republicans on the committee moved to go into an unlawful closed session. This allows the committee to operate in the dark by shutting the doors to the press and the public. Democrats objected adamantly.

In order to move forward, in an open session, Democrats offered a motion to approve Attorney General Kaul's settlement plans, but it was rejected by the Republican membership of the committee. This act has the potential to jeopardize unknown, possibly substantial settlement funds for the State of Wisconsin.

In response, the Democratic members of the Joint Finance Committee issued the following statements:

"Today's actions by my Republican colleagues on the JFC were questionably legal at best. The Attorney General should be able to do his job without interference from politicians, and today it was clear that the GOP lame duck laws do not work," Senator Jon Erpenbach (D- West Point). "The Attorney General cannot move forward with cases without the approval of JFC. JFC Democrats introduced a motion to allow the Attorney General to move forward in the case that was before JFC, which would result in 'significant harm to Wisconsin,' if no action is taken today and Republicans blocked the motion. He was elected to do a job, and today we witnessed how that job was drastically impacted by power-hungry Republicans."

"It was abundantly clear in the last general election that the people of Wisconsin trust Attorney General Kaul to represent their interests and make the right decisions on behalf of the State of Wisconsin," said Senator LaTonya Johnson (D-Milwaukee). "Once again, JFC Republicans ignored the will of the people and blocked our state's Attorney General to do the job he was elected to do in the most efficient way possible."

“We warned the Republican JFC members that requiring JFC to weigh in on settlements would never work. Republican JFC members, in their lame duck power grab, put Attorney General Kaul in a position where he has to either breach his legal and ethical confidentiality obligations *or* comply with the lame duck laws,” said Representative Chris Taylor (D-Madison). “Today, is a perfect example of how these lame duck laws are deeply flawed. The JFC Republicans’ move today was more of their political power games, and could potentially jeopardize substantial settlement monies to our state.”

“The wheels of Justice came to a screeching halt today – because of Republican inability to govern under their own party-line Lame Duck legislation. Unlike any Attorney General ever before (either Republican or Democrat), Wisconsin’s Attorney General Josh Kaul cannot settle a pending case without Legislative approval from the Joint Committee on Finance, said Representative Evan Goyke (D-Milwaukee). “Today, Republicans on Joint Finance thwarted their own legislation by failing to empower the Attorney General to move forward. Unwilling to work with Democrats or the Attorney General, Joint Finance Republicans today placed important litigation at risk and set an unacceptable precedent for the resolution of future lawsuits.”

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