

EXCLUSIVE: Milwaukee Harbor Cleanup Bill Stalled In Legislature As Vos, Stroebel Clash Over Effort To Squeeze Out Small Contractors

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

A battle between two powerful Wisconsin Republicans is endangering passage of a bill that would send major federal funding for a cleanup of the Milwaukee harbor. The bill's concept is supported by both Republicans and Democrats. No state money would be involved. Milwaukee area taxpayers would have to pay a portion of the cost which is coming from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD). The project will target cleanup of the Milwaukee harbor on Lake Michigan.

Here's the hang-up: Assembly Speaker Robin Vos is refusing to schedule the bill for an Assembly vote unless he gets support for an amendment requiring that all contractors on the project be subjected to drug testing. So far, some Senate Republicans, led by conservative Ducey Stroebel, are refusing to go along with the provision. When the Senate passed the bill, it included its own amendment banning the drug testing. The harbor cleanup bill is in limbo unless the issue is resolved.

Why does Vos want to mandate the drug testing? Some say it's because he is doing the bidding of the large heavily unionized construction firms, like Michels Corporation. Virtually all of the large contractors have agreements with their unions for drug testing. But, and here's the key: most non-union small contractors do not. Vos contends most of the small contractors, and their lobbying group, are fine with the provision.

Vos also states he is concerned with a provision that would allow MMSD to significantly raise property taxes if the lower share of the cost of the project goes up.

Mark Belling
October 21