

EXCLUSIVE: GOP State Senate Caves To Evers Again; Rejects Kleefisch Call To Oust Parole Chair

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

The Republican leader of the State Senate tells me the Senate will not act to remove John Tate, the Tony Evers-appointee who heads the state Parole Commission. Senator Devin LeMahieu's position is essentially a tacit refusal to a call by Republican governor candidate Rebecca Kleefisch to remove John Tate. It's certainly not the first time the LeMahieu-led Senate has refused to stand up to Evers.

Kleefisch called for Tate's ouster after Tate's Parole Commission granted parole to a man who murdered his wife in West Allis in 1993 by stabbing her in the face 42 times. Douglas Balzewicz had served only about one-third of his 80 year sentence for second degree homicide. Wisconsin no longer has parole but Balzewicz killed his wife before the law was changed and is therefore still eligible. After relatives of the victim strongly objected, several GOP candidates for governor blasted the decision to release Balzewicz. For one day Evers ducked questions and then on Friday of last week asked Tate's commission to reverse its decision. The decision was indeed reversed Friday.

Tate was never formally confirmed by the Senate. The chamber could hold a confirmation vote on him now and if he was rejected, he would have to leave his position. That's what Kleefisch is calling for but LeMahieu isn't going to do it.

In an email to me, LeMahieu said dumping Tate would take the issue of the leniency shown by Tate and Evers off the table as an issue in this year's election. LeMahieu argues the best way to hold Evers accountable for the lenient actions of the Parole Commission is to keep Tate on the job. LeMahieu, who represents the area surrounding Sheboygan County in the Senate apparently thinks it is more important to keep Tate around as political fodder than it is to stop killers from being let out of jail prematurely.

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UPDATE: Kevin Nicholson and Tim Michels, Kleefisch's opponents for the GOP nomination for governor, this afternoon joined Kleefisch's call for a special session of the State Senate to oust Tate from the Parole Commission.