



ROBIN J. VOS

SPEAKER OF THE WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

August 1, 2019

Rep. Jimmy Anderson
Room 9 North
State Capitol
P.O. Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708
HAND DELIVERED

Dear Representative Anderson:

The Americans for Disabilities Act is an extremely important and necessary law that ensures that those with disabilities can participate freely in our society, without discrimination. I whole-heartedly believe in the importance of this law and everything it stands for, and have always made sure that the Assembly abides by it and makes the accommodations that are necessary for everyone to participate in open government. I also believe that nothing is more counterproductive to our ability to make those accommodations than political grandstanding.

In 2017 when you became a state legislator, the human resources manager made clear to you that the correct way to request accommodations in the Assembly is to work through Legislative Human Resources. To this date, that office has not received your request for phone accommodations during public hearings held in the Capitol. Additionally, you have not contacted my office directly to make that request. You have asked for an accommodation for task forces that travel, which we granted, and you are currently allowed to call in to those meetings.

As you may also remember, the staff of the Assembly Chief Clerk's Office met with you one-on-one in 2017 to inquire about any special accommodations you might need. At that time, the Assembly Chief Clerk purchased a digital wireless microphone, at a cost of \$3,713.84, to accommodate your needs during our floor sessions. We also installed special voting equipment, gave your personal care worker access to the Capitol and to your computer even though she is not a state employee. Finally, we reimbursed your staff for cab fare every time he drove you home.

Even though you have not directly made your most recent request for phone access to human resources, the Speaker's Office, or any of the current Assembly standing committees that you serve on, we have received your request via various news outlets after you travelled to the Capitol to hold a news conference last week on a different topic. This is an unfortunate way to communicate. It calls into question your seriousness. Instead of resorting to political grandstanding, you could have called my personal cell phone at any time to discuss this matter.

If, in the future, you find it difficult for any reason to be present at an Assembly standing committee public hearing, we will have a videographer present at each committee hearing, provided you give adequate notice of an intended absence.

Additionally, I will propose to the Assembly Republican caucus that we consider allowing paper ballots for voting in Assembly executive sessions.

As the Speaker, I cannot change the Assembly rules for standing committees by fiat; the full Assembly must approve rule changes. Ostensibly, you know this, as you voted against allowing Skype and videoconferencing in committee hearings in 2017.

As I have said to the media, I have always been opposed to a call-in option for Assembly standing committee hearings. This tends to lend itself to disruptive, ineffective meetings. Additionally, it is disrespectful to the members of the public who come to testify on legislation. I have always been disappointed to walk into a Senate hearing to see a chairperson surrounded by only phones because the members did not show up in person to listen to testimony.

When I became speaker in 2013, I engaged in a process to professionalize the Assembly and make it easier for people who have special needs to participate in the process. We have tried to instill more Congressional-style rules, one example being debate times. As you've likely heard from colleagues or members of the media, the debate times have been a very positive addition that have resulted in almost no overnight floor sessions, which, in the past, were extremely common. I know that overnight debate - while not always possible to avoid - has been of particular concern to you. You may also be aware that the US Congress does not allow members to call in to public hearings.

In light of these facts, I hope you find these two accommodations satisfactory.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin J. Vos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robin" being the most prominent part.

Robin J. Vos
Assembly Speaker