

Pritzker's Executive Orders Unchecked As Lawmakers Return Home Until January

by Greg Bishop

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SPRINGFIELD – It's been more than 20 months since Gov. J.B. Pritzker began managing the state's response to COVID-19 through executive order and the Democrat-controlled legislature remains hands-off.

Pritzker's first orders, with accompanying emergency declarations, were in March 2020. The orders concerning COVID-19 have evolved since then and range from a stay-at-home order that lasted more than ten weeks, business closures with varying degrees of capacity and threats of sending state police to enforce, school closures, mask mandates and most recently vaccine mandates for a variety of sectors.

Lawmakers left the capitol after the end of the veto session Thursday and won't be back until Jan. 4. While they passed 23 bills out of both chambers in the past week, none were the Republicans' measure to require the legislature to approve consecutive 30-day executive orders.

During debate over changes to the state's Health Care Right of Conscience Act, Republican state Sen. Neil Anderson, R-Andalusia, said they just want to have a debate.

"We've been asking for public hearings," Anderson said. "Let's talk about the science that you're making these decisions on. We filed Senate Bill 103 to say 'hey, after the initial 30-days, let have a say.'"

Earlier in the day, State Sen. Jason Barickman, R-Bloomington, urged Senate President Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, to have a hearing on the Republicans' bill requiring legislative approval of any consecutive 30-day executive orders.

"There are many steps to the legislative process," Harmon said. "One of them is to get the bill assigned to a committee. I don't think there's a majority will to do that at this point."

Opposing unchecked, open-ended emergency declarations, Barickman said he'd like to see that vote count to see who and who is not willing to limit the governor's powers. He said having the legislature more involved gets the public more involved.

"I would think that you want the public to participate in this process so that they might have their voices heard and as a result they might be willing to comply with those orders, we call those laws when they come through the legislative process," Barickman said.

Pritzker's most recent 30-day reissue of a slew of executive orders expires Nov. 13.

Anderson said opponents of open-ended emergency powers have a right to be concerned.

“The people that question government, they're not ignorant, they're not stupid,” Anderson said. “They’re the ones that paid attention in history class.”