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Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos says changes to sprinkler laws unlikely after Milwaukee fire

Vos says lawmakers should be careful not to create more requirements that could affect housing prices

BY **ANYA VAN WAGTENDONK** • MAY 13, 2025 • UPDATED MAY 14, 2025 at 10:06 AM

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Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, right, awaits Gov. Tony Evers' State of the State address Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2025, at the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison, Wis. *Angela Major/WPR*

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when considering changes to building codes.

The fire, which **left five people dead and about 100 displaced**, took place Sunday in a 1968 building that did not have a sprinkler system. Those have been required in buildings **taller than 60 feet** since 1974, but older buildings were grandfathered in under the law.

Vos said retrofitting old buildings could lead to increased housing costs.

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“I think we really have to think about that and what the potential ramifications are before we just pass a mandate that might feel good for the moment, but make people homeless, drive up costs and certainly not have the intended effect,” he told reporters Tuesday.

Asked if he would support requiring all grandfathered buildings to be updated with fire safety systems like sprinklers, Vos said it could worsen the state's housing crisis.

“The last thing that we want to do is to make it even more expensive to own a home or to rent an apartment,” he said. “Obviously, if you add on additional costs, landlords aren't going to eat that. That would be passed along in higher rents.”

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the lack of a sprinkler system let the fire spread faster.

According to Lipski, **more than two-thirds** of Milwaukee high-rise buildings lack those systems.

Asked about Vos' remarks Tuesday afternoon, Lipski said he thought policymakers should give deference to the learned experience of fire officials.

"I think what he's against is an overcorrection," Lipski said of Vos. "That being said, I'm the fire chief, and sprinklers save lives."

Milwaukee Alder Bob Bauman told reporters that the cost of retrofitting hundreds of buildings in Milwaukee would be substantial, and it could raise rents in a community already struggling with high rent costs.

"So those are factors that need to be considered," Bauman said. "But the preservation of life, I think, should be paramount."

Editor's note: WPR's Evan Casey contributed reporting.

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