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Wisconsin voters to decide on three constitutional amendments Nov. 3. Here's what to know:

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UWRF Political Science Professor Neil Kraus speaks about the constitutional amendments on Wednesday night at the Unitarian Universalist Society of River Falls. Photo: Jack White/Star-Observer.

Wisconsin residents voting in the midterms will decide on three amendments to the state's constitution that affect the governor's office, places of worship and public sector discrimination.

The Republican-controlled Legislature put the questions on the ballot after approving each in two consecutive sessions, mostly along party lines.

Here are summaries of each one:

Editor's note: This guide summarizes arguments made by Republicans and Democrats on each amendment, though some members of both parties have broken ranks on these questions. The summaries reflect each side's views and are not those of the Star-Observer or its staff.

Amendment No. 1: Partial veto

Verbatim: “Partial veto. Shall section 10 (1) (c) of article V of the constitution be amended to prohibit the governor, in exercising his or her partial veto authority, from creating or increasing or authorizing the creation or increase of any tax or fee?”

Plain English: Should the governor no longer have the authority to partially veto when it comes to raising taxes or fees? A partial veto is when the governor can strike words or numbers from spending legislation before signing it into law.

Background: In 2023, Gov. Tony Evers partially vetoed a budget provision that let school districts raise \$325 more per pupil in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years. Without adding any words or numbers, he struck a “20” and a hyphen, turning the range into “2023-2425” and extending the annual \$325 per-pupil revenue increases for another 400 years. Passing the amendment would not change this budget provision.

What Democrats are saying: Vote no. After the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld his veto in April 2025, Evers said he used the same line-item veto authority as decades of governors before him, including his predecessor, Republican Scott Walker. The veto stood because the Legislature did not have the votes to override it. The amendment would weaken the governor’s ability to step in when the state struggles to fund services like public schools.

What Republicans are saying: Vote yes. Evers overstepped with the partial veto, signing a provision that looked drastically different from what passed both chambers. Whether the amendment receives majority approval or not, the governor would still have partial veto authority if doing so resulted in taxes or fees lowering. But voters should decide to take away the governor’s pen when it comes to raising taxes or fees through a partial veto.

In other states: New Mexico voters will decide Nov. 3 whether bills should automatically become law if the governor neither signs nor vetoes them in time, ending the “pocket veto,” in which a governor kills a bill by not acting on it. The amendment would also require governors to explain their vetoes. Kentucky voters will consider barring the governor from issuing pardons or commuting sentences in the period around a gubernatorial election. Iowa voters will decide whether raising individual or corporate income tax rates should require a two-thirds vote of both legislative chambers.

Amendment No. 2: Religious venues

Verbatim: “Freedom to gather in places of worship during an emergency. Shall section 18 of article I of the constitution, which deals with religious liberty, be amended to prohibit the state or a political subdivision of the state from ordering the closure of, or forbidding gatherings in, places of worship in response to a state of emergency, including a public health emergency?”

Plain English: Should the government be barred from closing places of worship or banning gatherings in them during a declared emergency?

Background: Wisconsin governors declare states of emergency regularly for disasters like floods and storms. Statewide restrictions on religious gatherings have been much less common. In 1918, the state health officer ordered local boards of health to close public gatherings during the flu pandemic, which shut churches for weeks. In 2020, Gov. Tony Evers’ Safer at Home order classified churches as essential but limited gatherings to fewer than 10 people per room. A declaration alone does not close places of worship.

What Republicans are saying: Vote yes. Places like churches should stay open no matter the emergency, and the community loses an important lifeline when these institutions close. The government should not be telling these institutions what to do.

What Democrats are saying: Vote no. Because the amendment applies to any declared emergency, including floods, fires and public health crises, it could lead to preventable illness and death. Existing constitutional protections already cover religious freedom.

In other states: Related to religion, Alabama has an amendment about student-led prayer in public schools. A past one more related to Wisconsin’s: Texas constitutional amendment from 2021 that barred any limit on religious services at any time. Wisconsin’s applies only to closures or gathering bans “in response to a state of emergency.”

Amendment No. 3: Preferential treatment

Verbatim: “Governmental entity discrimination prohibited. Shall section 27 of article I of the constitution be created to prohibit governmental entities in the state from discriminating against, or granting preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in public employment, public education, public contracting, or public administration?”

Plain English: Should public institutions such as state government and colleges be barred from discriminating against or giving preferential treatment to anyone based on race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin?

Background: The amendment follows years of debate over diversity, equity and inclusion programs at public institutions. DEI positions at the University of Wisconsin were cut in a 2023 deal, and the U.S. Supreme Court ended race-conscious college admissions that same year. State and federal law already prohibit discrimination; the amendment would also bar preferential treatment.

What Democrats are saying: Vote no. The amendment is unnecessary because state and federal law already prohibit discrimination. It does not define “preferential treatment” and could end programs meant to address longstanding disparities, such as contracts for minority-owned businesses, the state’s Supplier Diversity Program, initiatives for women in the workplace and University of Wisconsin scholarship and admissions efforts.

What Republicans are saying: Vote yes. The government should treat everyone the same regardless of race or sex, and people should be judged on qualifications rather than group identity. The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, a conservative legal group, says it would end discriminatory DEI programs across the state.

In other states: Arizona, which adopted a similar ban in 2010, will vote Nov. 3 on expanding it. Vermont voters will decide an equal protection amendment that takes a different approach: It bars the state from denying equal treatment based on race, sex and other traits, but states it cannot be used to block “measures intended to provide equality of treatment and opportunity for members of groups that have historically been subject to discrimination.”

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