

Capitol flag flap in Wisconsin over gay pride rainbow

MADISON (AP) — Flying a gay pride rainbow flag over the Wisconsin state Capitol for the first time Friday drew backlash from conservatives, including a pair of state lawmakers, while Democrats hailed it as a sign of inclusivity.

The flag flap erupted after Democratic Gov. Tony Evers ordered the raising of the flag to recognize June as "Pride Month." The move drew a fast rebuke from state Rep. Scott Allen of Waukesha, who tweeted, "Is this any more appropriate than erecting the Christian flag over the Capitol?"

Allen, who describes himself on Twitter as "Child of God/Family Man," said in a follow-up message to The Associated Press that the rainbow flag "advocates a behavior or lifestyle that some Wisconsin residents may not condone. Therefore, it is divisive."

Democrats praised the raising of the flag, including Democratic state Sen. Tim Carpenter of Milwaukee, one of five openly gay

state lawmakers.

"This is a very welcoming sign to many of us and it signifies a new direction for Wisconsin," Carpenter said in a statement thanking Evers. "We are showing that we are a welcoming and inclusive state and that means a great deal."

Republican state Sen. David Craig of Big Bend joined Allen in criticizing the move.

"The U.S. and Wisconsin flags are flown over us as unifying symbols for all Wisconsinites," Craig

tweeted. "The governor's action today is in no doubt a statement to advance a cause. The only cause that the Capitol flags should represent is fifty states united in one republic."

Wisconsin Family Action, a conservative group that worked to ban gay marriage in the state before courts overturned the prohibition, called the raising of the flag "a flagrant abuse of gubernatorial power."

Julaine Appling, the group's president, said Evers was proclaiming one



Associated Press

Clay Thomas, left, and Yosh Mayans, supporters of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) community, converse outside the Wisconsin State Capitol after a rainbow flag observing Pride Month was raised over the east wing of the building in Madison on Friday. The display, endorsed by Democratic Gov. Tony Evers, drew backlash from conservative Republican lawmakers who said it was divisive, while Democrats hailed it as a sign of inclusivity.

group over another.

"Would the Governor authorize the Christian flag to be flown over the capitol or a Nazi flag or any number of other flags representing all sorts of Wisconsin citizens and their beliefs?" Appling said in a statement. "Singling out one group that has inordinate political power is wrong and is disrespectful to, at a minimum, those

who take exception to the LGBT agenda."

Evers, who defeated conservative Gov. Scott Walker in November, said in an executive order that the rainbow flag has become an important symbol for the LGBTQ community and publicly displaying it "sends a clear and unequivocal message" that in Wisconsin "everyone can live without fear of prosecu-

tion, judgment, or discrimination."

The flag was flying above where the governor's office is located in the Capitol. Evers also authorizes other state government buildings and any jurisdiction of the state to fly the flag in June.

The governor has the sole authority to decide what flags fly over the Capitol, said Evers spokeswoman Melissa Baldauff.