



Wisconsin State Assembly
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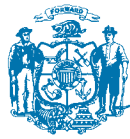
- Chair, Assembly Democratic Caucus
- State Affairs (Ranking Member)
- Criminal Justice
- Assembly Rules
- Assembly Organization

State Representative

Robert Turner

Helpful State Government Numbers:

Aging & Long Term Care	Prescription Drug
Medigap Helpline 1-800-242-1060	Resource Helpline 1-800-537-6390
Business Helpline 1-800-435-7287	Revenue, Processing and
Consumer Protection 1-800-422-7128	Customer Service 1-608-266-2772
Crime Victim Services. 1-800-446-6564	SeniorCare Customer
Driver Licensing & Vehicle	Service Hotline 1-800-657-2038
Registration 1-800-924-3570	Tourist Information. 1-800-432-8747
Low Income Housing	Vehicle Emission Testing
Loans (WHEDA) 1-800-334-6873	Information 1-800-242-7510
Nursing Home Complaints . . . 1-414-227-4563	Veterans' Loans & Grants 1-800-947-8387



Dear Friend:

Spring 2004

I hope this message finds you in good health and good spirits. As the Legislature wraps up its 2003-2004 session, I would like to take this opportunity to update you on some of the issues we have addressed. Among the legislative proposals I have promoted are continued funding of the successful SeniorCare program, a ban on mandatory overtime for health care workers, creation of the Wisconsin Clean Elections Fund, elimination of the qualified economic offer (QEO) law for teachers in public schools, increasing the minimum wage, restoring the office of Public Intervenor and banning the use of cyanide in metallic mining.

At the beginning of this session, I was elected by my Democratic colleagues to the post of Assembly Democratic Caucus Chair. In my new leadership position I preside over the Democratic Caucus's discussion of each day's agenda of bills scheduled for debate in the Assembly. It has been a fulfilling and rewarding experience, and I have learned even more about the intricacies of the legislative process.

This legislative session has been one of the most challenging ever. We began working on Governor Jim Doyle's state budget last Spring, facing a \$3.2 billion dollar deficit. The Governor's budget proposal balanced a \$3.2 billion deficit without raising taxes, and protected key priorities like education, health care, the environment, and vital local services. In mid-June, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee passed its version of the \$49 billion budget and referred it to the Senate and Assembly. Both houses of the Legislature debated dozens of amendments before the budget ultimately passed on June 20, 2003. Governor Doyle signed the 2003-2005 budget bill into law on July 24, 2003, after making 131 partial vetoes.

Although many of the bills I supported and co-authored did not pass the Republican-controlled Assembly and Senate, I worked hard to keep the issues important to working families at the top of the Democratic agenda. I was disappointed that the Legislature wasted too much time debating legislation that discriminates against certain members of our society and not enough time on the issues that most people are concerned about. To me, those issues are maintaining our high quality public education system, creating increased opportunities for affordable health care, keeping our environment clean and protected, and encouraging economic well being and a strong workforce.

As always, I want to thank all of you who supported me and contacted me with your concerns and opinions during my seventh term as your State Representative. I am honored to serve you, and look forward to continued success in representing you in the State Assembly. I appreciate and depend on your guidance on issues that affect us here in Racine, as well as all around our beautiful state.

Sincerely,

ROBERT L. TURNER
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
61st Assembly District

Representative Turner

Budget Deficit Requires Tough Decisions

Two years ago the state of Wisconsin found itself facing a \$3.2 billion budget deficit. Today, the economic outlook for the state's economy and the fiscal condition of state government is much more optimistic. Through the economic boom of the 1990s, Wisconsin spent more money than it was taking in, which resulted in the state carrying a structural deficit from year to year.

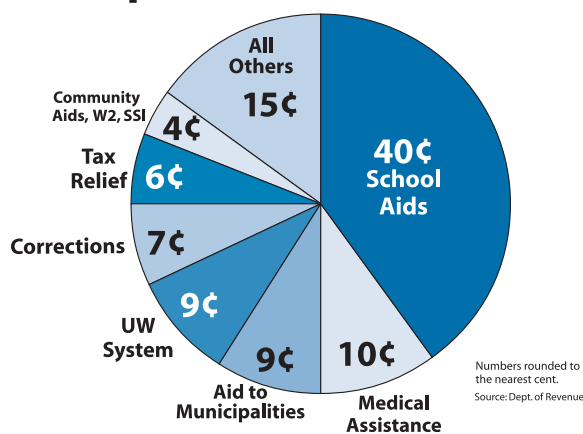
The theme of the 2003-05 biennial state budget was fiscal responsibility. For too long the Wisconsin state budget was known as a Christmas tree with presents and give-a-ways for special interests. Governor Doyle put an end to that practice. His budget focused on making government more efficient and responsible.



Members of the Wisconsin State Patrol discuss a bill to allow Wisconsin citizens to carry a concealed weapon with Rep. Turner outside the Assembly Chambers.

Given the size of the state budget deficit, it was expected that the governor would have to propose significant cuts to many popular programs. Unlike his predecessor, Governor Doyle did not propose eliminating the shared revenue program. Instead, he pursued efficiencies within state agencies to ensure that the government operates in a cost effective manner. The result: a balanced budget, moderate reductions in shared revenue payments and a solid foundation for future cost savings. Wisconsin is in a far better position entering the 2005-07 biennium.

How a Tax Dollar is Spent in Wisconsin



Unlike past budgets when the state created new programs and new spending, the 2003-05 budget will be known for what wasn't cut or eliminated. Some of the budget cuts will have a dramatic impact on service delivery, while others were welcome efficiency measures.

Department of Electronic Government - This short-lived, redundant agency was eliminated in the budget. The net effect of merging this agency with the Department of Administration will save \$1.5 million and eliminate 22 positions.

Bureaucracy Reduction - The budget reduces the state workforce by 2300 positions, reduces funding to state agencies by an average of 10% and reduces state government spending by \$1.5 billion.

Two-Thirds Funding for K-12 Education - The budget eliminates the requirement that the state fund two-thirds of partial school revenues. This change will put added pressure on local school districts to cut services, create efficiencies or raise taxes.

In spite of the sizable budget deficit, Wisconsin was able to protect funding for several vital services, as follow:

Education

- The budget provides a general school aid increase of \$189 million over the biennium. This increase will help school districts hold the line on property taxes and maintain programs.
- The budget protects early childhood education by preserving funding for the SAGE program which promotes smaller class sizes in grades K-3 and maintains funding for four-year-old kindergarten programs.
- The budget provides an additional \$24 million for need-based financial aid programs for University of Wisconsin students. This is the largest increase in state history.

Health Care

- The budget aims to make prescription drugs more affordable by preserving the SeniorCare drug program for the elderly and by instituting a drug purchasing pool that will save money for public and private employers and individuals.



Rep. Turner gets ready to escort Governor Jim Doyle to the State of the State Address.

- The budget maintains services offered through the BadgerCare program for low-income, working families.
- The budget protects Medical Assistance eligibility, benefits and services for the elderly, disabled and low-income families.

Economic Development

- The budget enhances economic development by providing a \$77 million increase in the highway construction and rehabilitation budget.
- The budget sets aside \$1 million to help fund economic development initiatives in communities affected by plant closings.
- The budget improves Wisconsin's tax status relative to other states by holding the line on income, sales and excise taxes.



Rep. Turner, cosponsor of 2003 Assembly Bill 869, looks on as Governor Doyle signs the bill. Assembly Bill 869 provides an exemption from nonresident tuition at the University of Wisconsin System for certain veterans.

For most Wisconsin residents, their greatest concern is finding a good job with health insurance they can afford for their family. As your State Representative, I have been working hard to find creative ways to reduce the cost of health care for more Wisconsin citizens.

Fighting for Small Business Health Care

Health care costs are a growing threat to the viability of Wisconsin's small businesses, farmers and self-employed workers. Many small businesses simply do not offer health insurance, and those that do often have to cut wages in order to keep overall costs down.

There are 125,710 small businesses in the state, employing over 626,000 Wisconsin residents. I believe those people have waited long enough for affordable health care.

In the 2003-2005 state budget bill, the Governor offered a plan to make quality health insurance affordable for the employees and owners of small businesses. When Republicans in the Legislature eliminated funding and blocked this

opportunity to reduce costs for 626,000 citizens, I voted no.

Making Prescription Medicine Affordable

There are still 1.1 million Wisconsin citizens without insurance to cover their medication costs—people with disabilities on Medicare, low-income working adults, the uninsured and underinsured, children, farmers, seniors and families. Americans who are able to buy their prescription drugs in Canada receive a savings of up to 45%.

We could save Wisconsin taxpayers tens of millions of dollars and reduce prescription drug costs for the state and for private citizens by purchasing lower-priced drugs from licensed Canadian pharmacies. I am working with the Governor and our members of Congress to authorize reimportation of FDA-approved prescription drugs from Canada.

In February of this year, Governor Doyle set up a website to offer Wisconsin citizens access to purchase maintenance prescription drugs from three pharmacies

in Calgary, Vancouver and Winnipeg, Canada. The website is located at: www.drugsavings.wi.gov. Although the federal Food and Drug Administration has denounced this practice as illegal, importing drugs from Canada has broad public support. I will continue to work to help lower the costs of prescription drugs in Wisconsin.

Protecting Health Care Benefits for Seniors, Low-Income Families & the Disabled

Despite facing the largest budget deficit in state history, the Legislature was able to maintain eligibility and benefits for BadgerCare, SeniorCare and Medical Assistance to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens receive the health care they need.

At a time when many other states around the country were cutting off hundreds of thousands of people—including low-income children—from health care coverage, we ensured that Wisconsin will continue to provide health care to those who need it most.

Kindergarten Through College, Keeping Our Schools #1 Is Top Priority

Students and Teachers

Once again, Wisconsin's K-12 schools are tops in the nation, thanks to the commitment of parents, students, teachers, school officials and the state. Wisconsin is often a national leader in public education, and 2003 was no exception.

- Third grade reading scores showed dramatic improvement as a result of more schools offering early childhood education programs like four year-old kindergarten and the SAGE program, which lowers the teacher-student ratio to 1:15 in grades K-3 for schools with high poverty rates.
- Our fourth and eighth graders beat the national average on standardized math and reading tests.

- For the seventh year in a row, Wisconsin high school students posted the top ranking in the nation on the ACT college admissions exams.

This remarkable record of success is not surprising, because Wisconsin teachers also rank as the best in the United States. In 2003, we learned that our state has once again set the standard for teacher quality, ranking #1 in highly qualified teachers by the federal government. An additional 70 Wisconsin teachers earned national certification in 2003, the profession's top honor.

Higher Education

Students continuing their education at a college, university or technical college in Wisconsin can receive a world-class education at a cost that is fairly low compared to other states.

Even so, many students and their parents struggle with the costs of higher education. That is why I voted to pass the largest need-based financial aid increase in Wisconsin's history, over \$20 million in total funding for the Wisconsin Higher Education Grant.

While University of Wisconsin System tuition remains among the most affordable in the nation, state-based grant aid has not

kept up with tuition increases over the past 20 years. This long-overdue increase will allow more families to send their children to a UW-System school, while limiting the debt load that proves to be a barrier for many potential students.

The Wisconsin Technical College System

The Wisconsin Technical College System is key to building an educated workforce that will attract and retain high wage industries. One out of every nine adults in Wisconsin receives education from one of our state's 16 technical colleges.

These institutions are the primary provider of customized training and technical assistance to Wisconsin industries, and they are central to efforts to alleviate the dangerous shortage of health care workers in Wisconsin.

During budget deliberations in 2003, Republicans voted to cut funding for the technical college system by \$15 million, and also deleted a plan to train more vitally needed health care workers.

I believe technical colleges are essential to training the workforce of the future, and I was successful in helping to reverse this Republican-endorsed budget cut.



Former State Rep. Peter Barca and Rep. Turner testify before the Assembly Education Committee about Rep. Turner's bill to create new foreign language programs for Wisconsin school districts.

Bills Authored By Rep. Turner Reflect Diverse Constituency

During the 2003-2005 legislative session, Representative Turner authored the following bills:

- **Assembly Bill 56**, requiring the employment of a Legislative Council Staff Attorney who is fluent in speaking, reading and writing the Spanish language. Legislative Council Attorneys assist the Legislature by serving as legal counsel for the standing committees, and also as researchers for legal questions arising from constituent inquiries. Representative Turner's bill would have required that at least one of these attorneys be fluent in Spanish. This bill was referred to the Assembly Committee on Government Operations and Spending Limitations. The Chair of this Committee, Rep. Frank Lasee, chose not to hold a vote on this bill.



Rep. Turner welcomes students from Gateway Technical College's English as a Second Language Program during their visit to the State Capitol.

- **Assembly Bill 158**, relating to certifying foreign language interpreters. This bill creates a certification for foreign language interpreters in the state Department of Regulation and Licensing. A public hearing was held on this bill in the Assembly Labor Committee in July,

2003. However, Labor Committee Chairperson Steve Nass chose not to bring this bill up for a vote.

- **Assembly Bill 302**, relating to grants for new foreign language programs. This bill permits 3 school boards in Wisconsin to apply for a \$25,000 grant with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to develop and implement a plan to teach a foreign language not currently taught in that school district. The first three school boards to apply and have their plans approved by the DPI would each receive one of these grants. A public hearing was held on this legislation in the Assembly Education Committee. Representative Luther Olsen, chair of the Committee, did not allow the bill to come up for a vote.
- **Senate Bill 342**, requiring the President and Chancellors of the University of Wisconsin System to obtain state Ethics Board approval before accepting corporate board compensation. Representative Turner co-authored this legislation with Senator Dave Hansen of Green Bay. The bill received no action once it was referred to the Senate Committee on Education, Ethics and Elections.
- **Assembly Bill 817**, relating to the release of information pertaining to a veteran. This bill creates a fine of not more than \$1,000 for the improper release of veterans' military records to unauthorized persons. Assembly Bill 817 passed the Assembly on a voice vote, but was not considered in the State Senate.
- **Assembly Bill 879**, relating to requiring the State Audit Bureau to conduct a



Rep. Turner joins Alderman Mike Shields, Alderman Phyllis Dresen, Racine Co. Sheriff Bill McReynolds, Alderman Lorna George and Alderman Cheri Cape in delivering remarks at Racine's National Night Out in August, 2003.

study of all economic development programs in this state. The purpose of this legislation is to get rid of economic development programs that are not working or no longer apply to today's economic climate, and in doing so, create more available funding for current successful programs as well as new ones. Assembly Bill 879 was introduced on February 23, 2004, and referred to the Assembly Committee on Budget Review. The Chairperson of the Budget Review Committee, Rep. Samantha Kerkman, never scheduled this legislation for a public hearing. Subsequently, the Legislature's Audit Committee voted to conduct this important study.



Rep. Turner congratulates Racine's Julia Burney on receiving the Wisconsin State Assembly's "Hometown Hero" award for her role in starting the Cops 'N Kids Reading program.

Environmental Report: Stewardship Fund Needs Protection

As its name suggests, the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship program has a long and successful tradition of bipartisan support. Named after a Republican Governor and a Democratic one, Stewardship ensures that our children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy clean lakes, air and forests.



Rep. Turner confers with Democratic Leader Jim Kreuser during a break in the Caucus proceedings.

This program's bonding authority allows the state to purchase, preserve and enhance environmentally sensitive lands throughout Wisconsin. These lands remain open to the public for hunting, fishing, camping and other recreational opportunities. Since it was established in 1989, Stewardship has preserved more than 250,000 acres in 71 of Wisconsin's 72 counties.

Stewardship has been so popular that it was a shock when Republicans voted to drastically diminish our investment in this land conservation program in the 2003 state budget bill. They voted to slash the Stewardship Fund by 80% over the next two years, meaning countless once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to preserve unique lands would have been lost.

I opposed cutting Stewardship and voted to fully restore the conservation program. The people of Wisconsin appreciate the success of Stewardship, because we love to fish and hunt and ride snowmobiles, and we appreciate having public land to do it on. World-class natural resources are one of the reasons why Wisconsin is such a great place to live, work and play. The Stewardship Fund is our best hope for preserving these resources for future generations.

Thankfully, Governor Doyle agreed with those of us who fought to protect this bipartisan achievement. He vetoed every attempt to endanger our longstanding commitment to Stewardship, allowing us to preserve this historic investment for our children and grandchildren.