



Chris Danou's Capitol Report

Public Hearings and Executive Sessions are Part of the Legislative Process

It's a true privilege serving the roughly 57,000 people who live in the 92nd Assembly District. As your State Representative, I represent almost all of Buffalo and Trempealeau counties along with the western half of Jackson County in the State Assembly. The district is very scenic and is one of the most rural districts in the State that includes Black River Falls as its largest municipality.

From my home in Trempealeau, it takes about an hour to get to several places in the district so I'm pretty used to the two and a half hour drive to and from Madison. I don't commute back and forth every day, but every week requires me to spend at least one night in a hotel. Those are the days in which I have committee meetings or the Assembly is in session and all 99 members are present.

Last week was a pretty typical week in Madison. I needed to be there on Tuesday and Wednesday for meetings of the Assembly Committee on Transportation and Natural Resources & Sporting Heritage. These are two of the five committees I serve on this session and both required committee members to meet for public hearings and executive sessions on potential legislation. Every bill that's introduced needs to be referred to a committee where it can sit with no action, or it can work its way through the legislative process by having a necessary public hearing and executive session.

A public hearing must be posted at least 24 hours ahead of time and is the first required meeting for bills to go through the legislative process. It gives members of the public, legislators and other stakeholders the chance to weigh in and ask questions, register or testify in support or opposition, as well as the chance to discuss the bill. This is an important part of the democratic process because this is typically when issues or unintended consequences come to light and can be addressed with committee members submitting amendments to make necessary changes.

After the public and everyone else has had a chance to weigh in on a bill, it then comes back to the committee for an executive session. This is when committee members have the chance to ask any last minute questions and offer any amendments before a final vote is taken. If a bill is approved by the committee, it then goes on to the full Assembly for a floor vote.

Every committee is a reflection of which party has majority control. That means the majority party gets to have more of their members on a committee as well as the powerful position of committee chair. The chair works with their leadership team and determines what bills "move" and which ones "die" in committee. In other words, if many members on both sides of the aisle like a particular bill, but the committee chair doesn't, that person can single-handedly stop a bill from becoming law.

While some bills gain more public attention than others, it's important for me to hear from constituents, stakeholders and other members of the public. Hearing from you and knowing what's on your mind helps me be a better voice for you in Madison. Please don't hesitate to contact my office to voice any support and concerns or ask any questions about any bill making its way through the legislative process.

