Dear Neighbor,

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to represent you and our neighbors in the Wisconsin State Senate! I am here to serve you, so please feel free to contact me with your opinions and concerns pertaining to our community and state government.

Our beloved state continues to face a number of challenges. This includes getting our neighbors back to work by creating jobs, restoring funding to our local K-12 schools which faced drastic cuts in the last two budgets, and increasing access to health care by accepting federal health care dollars. The current 2013-2014 Legislative Session is slated to end in April. These concerns can always be addressed in a special session if they are not remedied during the regular session.

I put together this newsletter to update you on my involvement in our community, some of the important things that happened this session, and how we can address the challenges facing our state. As always, I would like to hear your thoughts on these issues. I have opened a community office with dedicated staff to better directly serve you. Further, to hear the perspective of neighbors, I have held 41 town halls, hosted 13 coffee listening sessions, and offered 14 surveys and petitions.

If you would like updates on community and state news as well as neighborhood events, please visit www.SenatorChrisLarson.com and subscribe to my free, weekly newsletter, the Larson Report. For more information about me and to get real-time updates on issues affecting our community, follow me on Twitter @SenChrisLarson and connect with me on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SenatorChrisLarson.

See You in the Neighborhood,

Chris Larson
State Senator, District 7
Our children only have one shot at early education and developing the skills they need to succeed in a 21st century economy. Our state's future economic prosperity is also dictated by their educational successes or failures. Therefore, education was one of my top priorities this session.

To get a better picture of the educational opportunities available to the children in our communities, I made 36 classroom visits to local elementary, middle, and high schools. I also held town halls, coffees, and distributed surveys. Below are some of the reforms I championed this session to improve our children's educational opportunities based on suggestions from parents, students, educators, and community members:

- **Restore the $1.6 billion cut from local public schools in recent budgets.** As our Minnesota neighbors proved earlier this year, it is possible to restore funds raided from education and still have a budget surplus. We simply have to prioritize our values correctly.

- **Adopt common sense accountability and transparency measures in the voucher program statewide to ensure our tax dollars are being spent wisely and as promised.** In Milwaukee County, we know expanding this unaccountable system can damage our children, property taxes, and communities. Policies I supported to address accountability and transparency concerns include: require teacher licensure by the Department of Public Instruction, conduct background checks on teachers and staff, employ special education teachers or therapists, and comply with open records laws.

- **Fix existing education system flaws.** This starts with adopting the “Agenda 2017” and “Fair Funding for Our Future” plans, which raise graduation rates, close gaps, increase career and college readiness, and fix funding flaws for greater equity between low- and high-poverty areas.

If Wisconsin is going to be a pro-business state, it must also be pro-education. We have common sense solutions in front of us and we should embrace them. I am optimistic we can work together to provide our children with a brighter future.
Insuring More Wisconsinites for Less Money is Common Sense

We know that access to affordable health care brings economic security for workers and economic opportunity to businesses. Therefore, I support strengthening our BadgerCare program by accepting federal funding.

This session, Wisconsin was given the option, under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), to use federal funds to fill coverage gaps by strengthening BadgerCare. In fact, the federal government offers states 100% of the funding to fill their coverage gaps for the first three years and at least 90% in subsequent years. On behalf of our community, I fought to accept this funding because paying less money to cover more Wisconsinites is both smart and the right thing to do. In February 2013, however, the decision was made to reject the ACA’s recommended path to pursue implementation of the governor’s plan.

According to the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, strengthening BadgerCare would expand health care coverage to 85,000 more Wisconsinites, save taxpayers $119 million over the biennium, and create over 10,000 Wisconsin jobs. The governor’s plan, on the other hand, will cause some Wisconsinites to lose BadgerCare coverage and push them into an insurance market place that is not designed for their income level.

In December 2013, the Assembly and Senate passed special session legislation to delay the BadgerCare budget changes, such as cutting eligibility limits for the program. This special session legislation pitted Wisconsinites against each other. A vote for this plan would result in 83,000 childless adults who would have received health care coverage on January 1, 2014, being denied coverage until after March 31, 2014, while a “no” vote would kick off 74,000 parents and caretakers who currently have BadgerCare three months earlier than expected. Under this scenario, Wisconsinites lose either way. Ultimately, the bill passed and was signed by the governor.

Despite past legislative action, there is still a third option that remains available to Wisconsin that would ensure all these individuals could receive BadgerCare coverage at no additional cost to taxpayers. All that is required of Wisconsin to forge this new path is to accept federal funding to strengthen BadgerCare for our family, friends, and neighbors. It is not too late to move Wisconsin forward by adopting this fiscally responsible, compassionate solution to close the coverage gap.
As your local legislator, my role is to listen to the thoughts and perspectives of our family, friends, and neighbors to pursue issues of the utmost importance to them. Below are a couple proposals I co-sponsored in response to ideas and requests put forth by fellow Wisconsinites.

**Equal Paychecks Help Middle-Class Families (SB 143)**

While the gender pay gap has narrowed somewhat since the 1970s, progress has recently stalled. According to the American Association of University Women, men working full-time in Wisconsin earned $46,214 on average compared to women doing equal work, who earned just $35,890 on average. This means that Wisconsin women earn $10,000 less than men annually. As most Wisconsin women are primary or co-breadwinners, the fight for equal paychecks is not just a fight for women, but a fight for the health of Wisconsin’s middle-class families.

Last session, the Legislature approved legislation to roll back equal protection laws for working women. To correct this mistake, my colleagues and I introduced Senate Bill 143, which would provide women greater access to equal pay for equal work.

**Providing Wisconsinites Real Debt Relief (SB 376)**

I recently featured a higher education affordability survey on my Web site. In total, 91% of respondents felt not enough was being done to make higher education affordable. In response to these concerns, my colleagues and I introduced the Higher Ed, Lower Debt bill, legislation to provide real financial relief to Wisconsinites graduating with student loan debt.

The student debt crisis is very real in Wisconsin. The U.S. Federal Reserve System estimates there are 753,000 Wisconsin residents with federal student loan debt. These Wisconsinites end up paying an average of $388 per month for about 18.7 years. Passing the Higher Ed, Lower Debt bill would do the following for Wisconsin student loan borrowers:

- Allow them to deduct loan payments from their income taxes, resulting in annual tax savings of as much as $392
- Enable them to refinance loans at lower interest rates, putting potentially hundreds of dollars back in their pockets and our economy annually
- Provide them and their parents with detailed loan information and counseling
- Collect and track data about student loan debt to help policymakers and the public better understand Wisconsin’s debt crisis
Wisconsinites overwhelmingly support good government accountability and transparency measures. Such sunshine policies allow citizens to serve as watchdogs over their tax dollars. Unfortunately, this session we saw what happens when accountability and transparency are sacrificed in Wisconsin.

We need only look at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to see what happens when a government agency is given great authority over tax dollars, but lacks safeguard measures that should accompany this obligation. In the case of WEDC, hastily created by Governor Walker in 2011, we saw this public-private agency:

- Circumvent laws and our fair bidding process
- Lose track of over $50 million in loans
- Provide awards to ineligible recipients for ineligible projects and amounts
- Fail to properly track agency credit card use resulting in purchases of iTunes gift cards, Badger tickets, and alcohol purchases with taxpayer dollars

As WEDC’s problems are likely impeding much-needed job growth, I co-sponsored legislation to put our job creation agency on the right track. I will continue working towards this goal on behalf of Wisconsin taxpayers, like you. These common sense proposals would make the following reforms at WEDC:

- Describe each program, the overall cost, and how many companies will participate
- Establish clear program goals, including the number of jobs to be created and provide benchmark indicators of success
- Review each out-of-compliance contract, the action taken, and the justification
- Offer a comprehensive report on all jobs created since WEDC’s creation

Unfortunately, none of these safeguards were put in place as of the printing of this newsletter.
Did you know that you can request the following printed materials from my office free of charge? Please check off the item(s) you would like to receive.

- State Highway Map
- Wisconsin Events Guide
- Veteran Resources Information

Printed on Recycled Paper

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Senate District 7 Neighbor Survey

1. Our schools recently experienced some of the largest cuts to public education in Wisconsin’s history. I ________ restoring the $1.6 billion that was cut from local schools across the state.
   - Oppose
   - Support
   - Unsure/No Opinion

2. On several occasions Wisconsin has rejected federal health care funding to strengthen our BadgerCare program. I ________ accepting the federal funds provided through the Affordable Care Act that could expand coverage to 85,000 more Wisconsinites, create over 10,000 new jobs, and save taxpayers $109 million over the next biennium.
   - Oppose
   - Support
   - Unsure/No Opinion

3. I believe the accountability and transparency measures at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) are ________ to ensure that the agency is able to effectively create jobs statewide and improve Wisconsin’s economy.
   - Insufficient
   - Sufficient
   - Unsure/No Opinion

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Also available online at SenatorChrisLarson.com

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I support ________ of the initiatives that are part of the Middle-Class Jobs Now package, aimed at increasing job creation and economic development in Wisconsin.

- All
- None
- Some
- Unsure/No Opinion

Would you or someone you know benefit from passing the Higher Ed, Lower Debt bill in Wisconsin to allow for student loan refinancing and the deduction of student loan payments from their income taxes?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/No Opinion