



February 5, 2016

Rural Wisconsin Initiative

On Thursday, the Assembly Committee on Mining and Rural Development had a public hearing on several pieces of legislation from the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. There are eight bills in total, and I am the author of four of them. The bills, which aim to improve health care, educational, workforce, and technological opportunities in rural Wisconsin, was met with broad support from legislators, community organizations, and industry professionals.



The eight pieces of legislation boost funding for broadband expansion grants, increase available resources for youth apprenticeship grants and tuition reimbursement grants for apprenticeships, create rural opportunity zones, expand a student loan repayment program for rural teachers, encourage STEM education in rural school districts, bolster funding for the Wisconsin Rural Physician Residency Assistance Program (WRPRAP), and create a Broadband Forward! community certification.

The four bills I authored include:

- One of the biggest issues facing rural Wisconsin is declining population and its impact on the workforce in rural Wisconsin. It is important that rural Wisconsin be able to attract young workers - in a global economy that can be difficult. A concept that has been adopted in both Kansas and Oklahoma is the creation of rural opportunity zones. The program provides an incentive to young people looking to relocate after finishing college or other post-secondary education. This program has been working in Kansas for four years now, and has attracted more than 2,000 applicants.

In our vision of the program, under [Assembly Bill 794](#), Wisconsin would repay up to \$25,000 or 40% of a new resident's student loans, provided the new resident maintained a full time job, avoided public assistance, had attained a post-secondary degree, and settled in a county that fit the Federal OMB's definition of rural.

- If rural Wisconsin is to grow and be economically competitive, it is also important that students have the opportunity to study subject areas that will prepare them to pursue high wage, high demand careers of the 21st Century. STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education programs play a critical role in this opportunity as many of the high demand careers of the near future will require STEM education.

[Assembly Bill 799](#) will help small school districts in rural Wisconsin to start, expand, and maintain STEM education programs. It would allocate \$1 million per year for the Rural STEM Grant program. The grant maximum would be \$20,000 and applicants would be required to provide a 10% match.

- Access to quality healthcare is also an important issue to rural Wisconsin. The baby boom generation will be retiring soon and this access will only become more important. With this in mind, the Wisconsin Rural Physician Residency Assistance Program was created in 2010. This program funds residency opportunities in rural Wisconsin, with the understanding that the physician would be more likely to practice medicine in a setting similar to the one where they received their training.

Our bill, [Assembly Bill 797](#), would increase the program funding by \$250,000. This would allow the program to maintain its current service base and expand opportunity for doctors pursuing specialty areas of medicine.

- Finally, as many of you know, high speed internet access has become a necessity for many people. Students and educators rely on access to complete assignments, businesses need it to connect with consumers, and many tourists require access to keep up with their day-to-day activities. Wisconsin currently has a broadband expansion program to help bring high speed internet to many underserved areas of the state. In total, \$6 million is available, and \$1.5 million is allowed to be allocated each year.

Under [Assembly Bill 798](#), \$10 million would be available for broadband expansion - enabling more projects to be undertaken.

JFC Committee

Yesterday, the Joint Finance Committee also met to vote on several pieces of legislation. I wanted to share a few of them that I voted for:

The first was Assembly Bill 657 which was authored by Representative Nygren and would provide more funding for treatment and diversion programs - or TAD programs. TAD programs provide an opportunity for non-violent individuals who are suffering from substance abuse the ability to avoid jail or prison confinement. More often than not, this can be the deciding factor as to if an individual returns to confinement. TAD programs are an effective way of treating addiction while at the same time saving bed space and taxpayer dollars. It is truly a win-win situation for the Wisconsin taxpayer.

According to a University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute study, for every dollar invested in TAD programs, the state saves \$1.96 in correction costs. Additionally, the same study found a TAD graduate is nine times less likely to return to state prison than other offenders. While we have taken significant steps to expand TAD programs statewide, the current levels of funding were not sufficient to meet the demand of TAD programs. A total of eight TAD projects were denied due to a lack of funding. By passing this legislation, we are one step closer to alleviating that problem.



We also passed several bills to address Alzheimer's and dementia. This included funding for two studies - including a study to analyze blood samples

from middle-aged, adult children of patients with Alzheimer's. These adult children are at an increased risk of developing the disease and analysis of their blood samples may allow them to identify new abnormal proteins that could be the cause of Alzheimer's. Discovery of such novel proteins could attract large grants from NIH (National Institutes of Health) and other federal agencies, and lead to new potential treatments and prevention approaches for AD.

Another bill would provide \$1 million in additional funding for respite care under the Alzheimer's Family and Caregiver Support Program (AFCSP) for fiscal year 2016-17. AFCSP was formed as part of the 1985-87 annual budget and is currently allocated \$1.5 million in calendar year 2015. The bill also allows tribes to participate in the AFCSP. Since the inception of the program, tribes have not been able to utilize the AFCSP. Currently, an individual or their family member must have an annual income of no more than \$40,000 to participate in the AFCSP. We have bumped that up to \$48,000, which is 300% of the federal poverty line.

There were also bills to hire additional Dementia Care Specialists and to establish mobile crisis teams to serve individuals with dementia. The four additional Dementia Care Specialists would be hired in counties with a population under 150,000. These specialists have been very helpful in communities and provide a service to those living with Alzheimer's or other dementias and their caregivers. The crisis teams act in a similar fashion - providing assistance to individuals and caregivers in times of great need.

Gov. Walker Bill Signing

On Thursday, Governor Walker signed several bills into law.

One of the bills Governor Walker signed into law was Assembly Bill 372. This bill allows municipal governments to have more flexibility to choose who can serve on a Lake District board. Current law inadvertently disqualifies some municipal officials from being able to represent their municipalities on a Lake District Board. I authored this bill with Representative Rob Swearingen. I'd like to thank Sue Holloway for bringing this issue to our attention and Mike Engleson from Wisconsin Lakes for his support. The bill passed the Assembly on a voice vote and was concurred by the Senate on a voice vote. It is Act 140.



If you'd like more information on other bills signed by Governor Walker, please click [here](#).

District Administrators Meeting

Today, I met with district administrators from several school districts across the 12th Senate District.

It was a constructive meeting with district administrators and we had a good conversation on school funding and regulatory concerns with teacher licensure. I'd sincerely like to thank everyone for attending and for the invitation.



Calendar of Events

Upcoming Events

Start Date		Location
February 5 - 7	<u>Labatt Blue US Adult Pond Hockey Championship</u>	Eagle River
February 6-7	<u>41st Annual Red Arrow Fish A Ree</u>	Townsend
February 6	<u>2nd Annual Outhouse Races</u>	Athelstane
February 7	<u>Manitowish Waters Sno-Skeeter Breakfast</u>	Manitowish Waters
February 12 - 13	<u>St. Germain Radar Run</u>	St. Germain
February 13	<u>Manitowish Waters Sno-Skeeter Winterfest Rendezvous</u>	Manitowish Waters
February 13	<u>Northwoods Blizzard Blast</u>	Conover
February 13	<u>Great Northern Jerk-Off</u>	Conover
February 13	<u>Flannel Face Off</u>	Rhineland
February 13	<u>Ride with the Champs</u>	St. Germain
February 13	<u>St. Anthony School's Annual Ice Fishing Derby</u>	Oconto Falls
February 13	<u>White Lake Fishing Derby</u>	White Lake
February 13	<u>Winter Experience Ice Oval Racing</u>	Gleason
February 13	<u>Winterfest Rendezvous</u>	Manitowish Waters
February 20	<u>Annual Post Lake Ice Fishing Jamboree</u>	Elcho
February 20	<u>Candlelight Ski/Hike</u>	Crivitz

February 20	Frozen Tozen Winter Fest	Boulder Junction
February 27	Ho-Drags on Ice	Rhinelanders
February 27	Love Me Tender in Merrill	Merrill

As always, if you have any comments or thoughts regarding the subjects of this e-update, please feel free to contact me.

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