

January 22, 2016

Office Flood

On Monday, a pipe froze and burst in the ceiling of my legislative office at the state capitol in Madison. There was quite a bit of water that flooded the office and displaced my office staff until Tuesday afternoon. If you tried to contact my office during this time, I apologize that we were not able to respond.

I know you are all worried about him, but the office bear is okay!



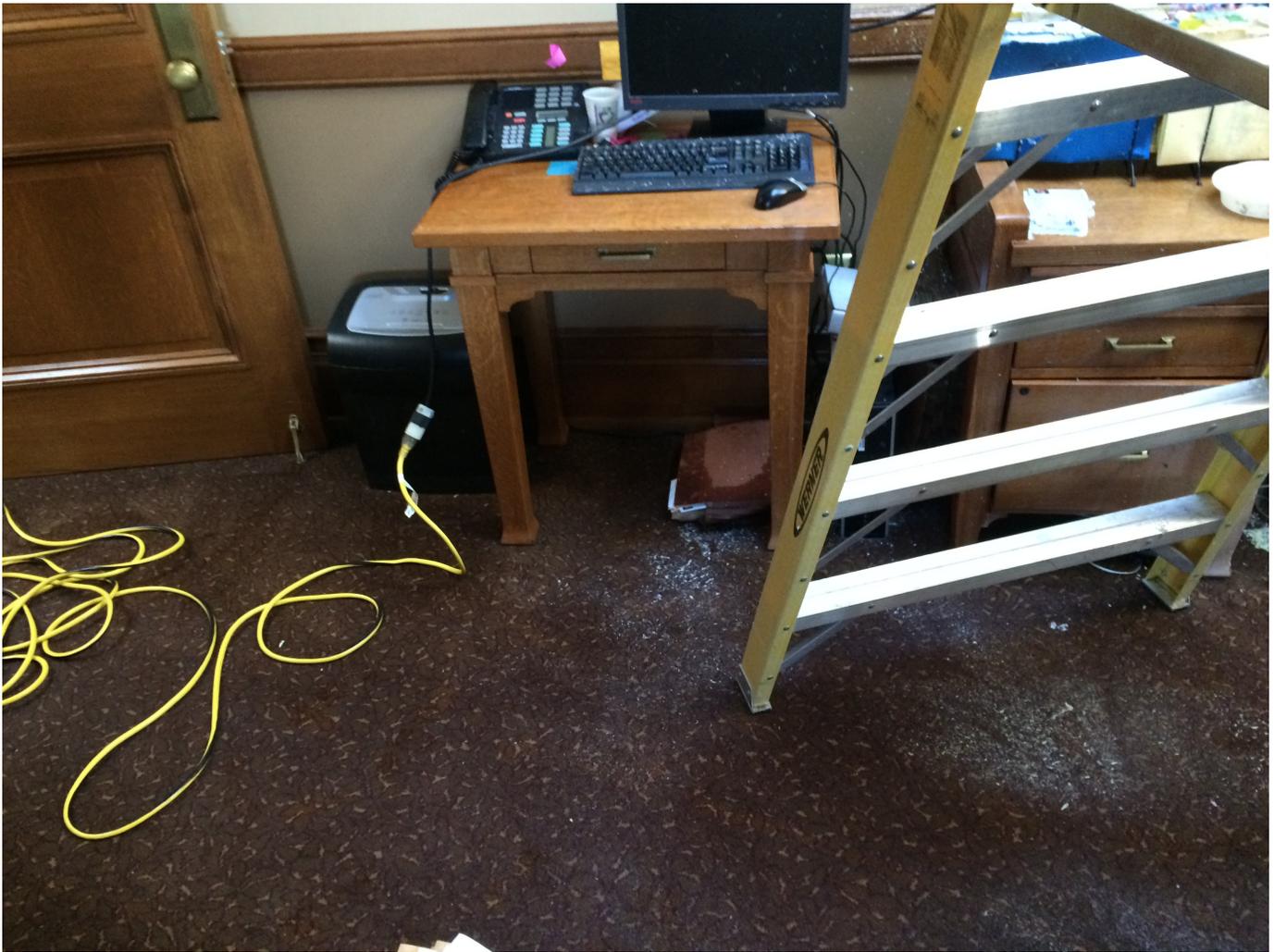
While the office dries out, my staff has taken up residence in a nearby hearing room. Phone and email access have been restored and my staff is working hard to catch up on constituent outreach.

More pictures:









State of the State

On Tuesday, Governor Walker delivered his State of the State address. The theme of the speech was *The Wisconsin Comeback is Real*.

During his speech, Governor Walker highlighted the fact that more people are working and fewer people are unemployed. Our unemployment rate is at 4.2 percent - the lowest it's been since March of 2001 - and last year we saw the largest monthly jobs gain since April 1992. He also highlighted the labor force participation rate is at 67.8 percent which is 5.3 points better than the national rate. Our economy is growing as new business formations were up 3.6 percent last year and he even touched on the fact that tourism's economic impact increased 5.5 percent according to the most recent numbers.

He then moved on to talk about Wisconsin's fiscal situation. The Governor noted that Wisconsin finished the fiscal year with a \$135.6 million budget surplus and tax relief in the last few years has totaled \$4.7 billion. Property taxes are lower on a typical home now than they were in 2010. In fact, a median valued home in Wisconsin saw a reduction of \$116 this past year when compared to rates in 2010. Wisconsin's Rainy Day Fund is also the largest in its history and our pension system is only one of two states that is fully funded. Our per capita debt is among the lowest in the nation and overall new bonding levels are the lowest in 20 years.

A large portion of Governor Walker's speech focused on helping to make sure that everyone who wants a job can find a job. To do this, the Governor emphasized the need to continue to invest in our workforce and education systems, as well as working with students to get them career-ready sooner and making college more affordable.

Governor Walker announced an additional \$3 million for dual enrollment programs through the Wisconsin Fast Forward Program which will allow school districts to partner with local tech colleges to help students get a head start on their career plans. He also highlighted his recently announced college affordability package which builds off the historic four-year tuition freeze for the UW system. According to the Governor, this package helps students afford their higher education path by:

- **Deducting All Student Loan Interest** – Legislation will eliminate any cap on the tax deduction for student loan interest, which would save student loan debt payers \$5.2 million annually when it is fully phased in. This tax deduction would be the most generous of any state in the Midwest with an income tax and benefits roughly 32,000 Wisconsin taxpayers paying off student loans. This deduction also directly benefits middle class Wisconsinites with an average benefit of more than \$200 annually for those making between \$30,000 and \$70,000;
- **Increasing Wisconsin Grants for Technical Colleges** – This proposal would increase needs-based Wisconsin Grants by \$1 million for technical college students in the biennium or \$500,000 annually. This would benefit over 1,000 students throughout the state;
- **Creating Grants for Students in Emergency Financial Need** – This legislation would provide \$130,000 to UW System colleges and \$320,000 to technical colleges to provide emergency grants to students. This approach has been credited with increasing the likelihood a student finishes his or her degree in these unfortunate situations by increasing student retention;
- **Increasing Internships** – These proposals would enhance internships, creating more pathways to employment by funding two positions within the Office of Skills Development at the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), as well as additional UW System positions. These new positions would work with employers and institutions throughout the state to build and grow relationships between higher education institutions and employers, so students can gain job skills, which will assist in filling open positions and connecting our graduating students to employers in Wisconsin;
- **Helping Students and Families to Make Informed Decisions** – This legislation would require all state institutions of higher education to provide financial literacy to their students within the first semester of their instruction. It would also require all institutions of higher education offering an associate's degree or higher to annually mail cost, loan, and other financial information to students. This is modeled after an Indiana law that has been credited with reducing the amount of loans taken out by students.

Finally, the Governor also announced his 2020 Vision Project which will take him to every part of the state to hold listening sessions. The Governor would like to hear from a diverse mix of people from across the state about what makes Wisconsin great, where we want our state to be in the next two decades, and how we should measure success.

If you'd like to watch the Governor's State of the State address, you can find it [here](#)

State Senate Back in Action

On Wednesday, the Wisconsin State Senate was back on the floor to debate and pass several pieces of legislation.

Many of these bills were passed with an unanimous vote. One of the bills, Senate Bill 455, was passed to toughen state laws against repeat drunk drivers. Specifically, this bill increases penalties for multiple offenders and makes the fourth offense a felony. The bill aligns state law with surrounding states in how individuals with multiple drunk driving offenses are penalized.

Four more bills passed by the Senate were part of Representative John Nygren's HOPE Agenda. The HOPE Agenda

is an initiative to help fight drug abuse - focusing on heroin and opioid users. The bills will help fight drug addiction by combating the misuse and abuse of prescription opioids. Two of the proposals make modifications to the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, and two of the bills focus on gathering information from pain clinics and methadone clinics.

A more controversial bill taken up was Civil Service Reform. The legislation we passed in the Senate modernizes the state's hiring practices and will help fill vacancies more quickly. It will also hold state employees accountable to the people they serve. It is important that Wisconsin's state government be able to attract talented individuals, but it is also important that poor performers are able to be properly disciplined. As the baby boomer generation starts to retire, the state must be able to fill vacancies in a timely manner. The bill will also allow layoffs to be based on job performance, extend probationary times for new hires, and outlines specific offences that would cause an employee to be fired.

We also passed Assembly Bill 310 and Senate Bill 238. Assembly Bill 310 redirects federal Title X funds away from organizations that provide abortions and towards other qualified health centers in the state. This includes state, county, and local health departments and clinics. Senate Bill 238 would allow family planning clinics to only bill Medicaid for the actual acquisition cost plus a dispensing fee for prescription drugs obtained through Medicaid's 340B program. This bill will help prevent the state and taxpayers from over paying for reimbursement.

Eagle River Snowmobile Derby

It was nice to see everyone who showed up last weekend to see the World Championship Snowmobile Derby in Eagle River. Congratulations to the winners!



Calendar of Events

Upcoming Events

Start Date		Location
January 23	<u>Great Northern Ice Fishing Tournament</u>	Phelps
January 23	<u>Merrill Winterfest Sled Dog Race</u>	Merrill
January 23	<u>Chilly Chili Challenge</u>	Minocqua
January 23	<u>Annual Tea Party</u>	Eagle River
January 29 - 31	<u>Women on Snow Weekend & Tour</u>	Eagle River
January 30	<u>Blindfold Snowmobile Races</u>	Phelps
January 30	<u>Fibber's Annual Ice Fishing Tournament</u>	St. Germain
January 30	<u>Ice Cold Beer Fest</u>	Minocqua
January 30	<u>Langlade County-Wide Snowmobile Ride</u>	White Lake
February 3 - 4	<u>Annual Groomer Show</u>	St. Germain
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 7	<u>Manitowish Waters Sno-Skeeter Breakfast</u>	Manitowish Waters
February 13	<u>Manitowish Waters Sno-Skeeter Winterfest Rendezvous</u>	Manitowish Waters

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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