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 Politics

State job-stimulus bill advances

By [Patrick Marley](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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Madison — A powerful legislative committee Thursday approved a package to increase angel investing tax credits and better connect businesses with university research, forwarding the measure to the full Senate.

The Democratic measure - dubbed the CORE Jobs bill, for Connecting Opportunity, Research and Entrepreneurship - passed the Joint Finance Committee unanimously. Republicans said they supported the plan but that it did not go far enough.

The committee also approved a plan to increase funding to hire public defenders starting next year and quashed a proposal - for now - to urge local governments to ban candy-flavored tobacco.

The jobs bill would take several steps that supporters say will help spark the economy, including increasing tax credits for investors in early-stage companies by \$3 million through mid-2011.

"It is very much focused on creating new business in Wisconsin - new business, not just keeping the ones we have," said Sen. Mark Miller (D-Monona), co-chairman of the committee. "We need to make sure we're doing all we can to create new business."

But Republicans said legislators need to do more to boost the economy.

"Getting new business is important, but I'm very concerned about the state of Wisconsin and the predicament of existing businesses," said Sen. Luther Olsen (R-Ripon). "Those are jobs we have right now.     I hope that this isn't all the state does as far as business."

Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle has said he supports the plan.

The bill would also:

-  Spend \$2 million to forge more research commercialization partnerships between small and midsize businesses and state academic research institutions.
-  Start a \$500,000 program to provide loans of \$1,000 to \$25,000 to new small businesses in areas of high unemployment.
-  Establish an ombudsman in the state Commerce Department who would help businesses with permits and approvals, and have the authority to force state agencies to discuss issues with business.
-  Provide \$2 million for incentives to reopen shuttered factories for renewable energy production or manufacturing.

• Establish an Emerging Technology Center at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with \$400,000 to spur research commercialization.

In other action Thursday:

Public defenders: The committee sent a bill to the full Legislature that would increase funding for public defenders by about \$4 million a year starting in July 2011.

The measure was included in the state budget passed last summer, but Doyle vetoed it. Supporters say the plan would save counties about \$2 million a year because judges often appoint private attorneys to represent poor people who don't qualify for public defenders; counties, rather than the state, pay those expenses.

The committee approved the bill 13-1, with Rep. Phil Montgomery (R-Ashwaubenon) opposed because of budget considerations.

Smokeless tobacco: Committee members voted down a plan by the state Department of Health Services to lobby local governments to ban candy- and fruit-flavored smokeless tobacco products that opponents say are marketed to kids.

Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Madison), a committee co-chairman, said lawmakers rejected the plan because administration officials weren't able to provide them answers and because the department hasn't yet heard whether it will get a grant to implement the plan from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

If it gets the grant, the department can come back with its plan on smokeless tobacco, Pocan said.

Montgomery had vowed to fight the plan, saying regulating the products should be left to the federal government.

Unemployment insurance: The committee told the Department of Workforce Development to submit quarterly reports on the administration of unemployment insurance claims, including the number of calls received, answered and dropped.



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