



For Immediate Release
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Rep. Shankland: Statement on Attorney General Opinion

Madison – Assistant Assembly Democratic Leader Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) released the following statement responding to Attorney General Brad Schimel’s opinion regarding the Department of Natural Resources’ authority to regulate high capacity wells:

“While I am deeply disappointed by the opinion issued by the attorney general, I’m just as displeased with the process. Republican Speaker Robin Vos quietly requested this opinion by using the little-known Assembly Committee on Organization. There was no public hearing, no public input, and not even a public vote - the votes were cast in private through paper ballot. I was proud to vote against this request for an opinion, as it was a politically-charged act that bypassed the public and the full legislature.

"The stakes in the groundwater debate couldn't be higher -- that's why everyone should have a seat at the table, including the people of this great state. If we want our property values to stay high, if we want a thriving tourism and recreation economy, if we want every industry to succeed, then we need to have a commonsense solution that works for everyone. That means setting aside rhetoric and drawing on science and evidence-based policy for solutions.

"This opinion could have great consequences to our water resources for years to come, and it contradicts a unanimous 2011 Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling on the issue. It will likely invite more court challenges and questions regarding the role of the DNR. And further, it will only delay meaningful action on an issue we desperately need to resolve. Perhaps the most striking part of Attorney General Schimel’s opinion is that it seems to place 2011 Act 21 above our state’s constitution. Our state’s constitution includes a cornerstone provision known as the Public Trust Doctrine. This doctrine states that Wisconsin’s lakes and rivers shall forever be public resources for all Wisconsin citizens to freely enjoy.

"It's clear to me that the people of the Central Sands are counting on the Public Trust Doctrine to protect their water rights. I'm hopeful that future legislatures are more careful and less flippant with our right to water than the current one. In the meantime, I'll continue advocating for fair water policy that works for everyone."

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