



Updates from the Capitol:

Bad Faith Bills

Dear Friends,

I've been a bit delayed in updating you about happenings at the Capitol. I had to be away the first week in March due to the death of my father, and I returned to Madison last Monday for a busy week of meetings, a committee hearing, and a floor session. Needless, to say, this has been an absolutely exhausting time, and yet, I remain energized to apply the social justice lessons I learned from my Dad to fight for the people of the 73rd .



Colleges and Universities Committee Public Hearing

The bills that came to the floor last Thursday were focused on legislation related to crime, some of which I supported, and much of which I did not. (To see all proposed legislation for this session, you can visit [this page](#); to focus just on the Assembly, go [here](#).) I'd like to dig into one of the bills that came before us last week and will use it

as an example of a piece of legislation that was clearly drafted for entirely political purposes.

AB-87 is described as a bill focused on “restitution orders following a conviction for human trafficking and restoration of the right to vote to a person barred from voting as a result of a felony conviction.” At first blush, this looks to be a law that is narrowly focused on people who have been convicted of human trafficking. A reasonable person might believe that when someone commits the most heinous of crimes, they should not have the right to participate in our democratic process until all restitution has been paid. The problem? Here is how the draft language is actually written:

1 **SECTION 1.** 304.078 (3) of the statutes is amended to read:
 2 304.078 (3) If a person is disqualified from voting under s. 6.03 (1) (b), his or
 3 her right to vote is restored when he or she completes the term of imprisonment or
 4 probation for the crime that led to the disqualification and has paid all fines, costs,
 5 fees, surcharges, and restitution, and has completed any court-ordered community
 6 service, imposed in connection with the crime. The department or, ~~if the person is~~
 7 ~~sentenced to a county jail or house of correction, the jailer~~ the elections commission
 8 shall inform the person in writing at the time his or her right to vote is restored
 9 under this subsection.
 10 **SECTION 2.** 973.20 (10) (a) of the statutes is amended to read:
 11 973.20 (10) (a) ~~The~~ If the defendant violated s. 940.302 (2) or 948.051, the
 12 court shall require that restitution be paid immediately and, if the defendant fails,
 13 the court shall issue an execution against the property of the defendant in the same
 14 mode as upon a judgment entered in the circuit court in civil actions. In other
 15 cases, the court may require that restitution be paid immediately, within a specified

As you can see clearly in the above text, AB-87 would change Wisconsin law in a significant way. Currently in our state, a person convicted of a felony, treason, or bribery is not allowed to vote until their period of imprisonment and any probation is complete. AB-87 would add the provision that all financial restitution would also have to be paid, and this would apply to anyone who has been convicted of any felony, not just those convicted of sex trafficking. To be clear, there are many low-level offenses that are felonies in our state, including second conviction for possession of marijuana in any amount and shoplifting when the value of the merchandise exceeds \$500.

The reason that this change is so consequential is that we know that incarceration exacerbates poverty: one study found that in their first year post-release, formerly incarcerated people had a median annual income of \$6,000. Another found that formerly incarcerated people experience significant difficulty finding work, even four years after being released. When people have a hard time keeping a roof of their

heads or caring for their children, it is no surprise that they will take years—likely decades—to pay off the restitution levied against them as a part of their crimes.

Denying someone the right to vote because they cannot pay their fines exacerbates the already unjust structures of the criminal justice system. It is also overt, class-based disenfranchisement. Wealthy people who commit crimes could afford to have their voting rights restored immediately after completing their sentence, while poor people would be denied the right to vote for decades, possibly even the rest of their lives. This is wrong, and it is why I voted no.

Were Republicans honest about what this law would do? No. Instead, they pretended that this bill would only apply to people convicted of sex-trafficking; one person argued on the floor of the Assembly that if we voted no on this bill, we'd be siding with sex traffickers.

Here's how I was referenced in a Facebook post by former 73rd Assembly Rep, Angie Sapik:



I can't say for certain whether Sapik read the actual bill or not—(I've been shocked how often people don't read the legislation that they vote for. In one recent committee

hearing, the author of a bill did not understand the very simple change that his own bill was seeking.)—but she certainly has enough experience to do the work required to find the bill draft and familiarize herself with its contents before going through the trouble of making a graphic about me. The reality is that even if she had read the bill, I don't think she would accurately represent its contents since the entire purpose of this proposal is to make Democrats look bad.

This sort of behavior is unsurprising, but it is profoundly disappointing. Making decisions about people's lives—decisions that will put them in prison, that will take away their right to vote, or that will otherwise subject to them hardship—is very, very serious business. This isn't a gotcha game for people who take joy in crafting political attacks. I treat the work of legislating with the solemnity that it deserves, and I cannot imagine putting people's rights at stake for political purposes or intentionally deceiving the public. I only wish everyone else shared my values.



My colleagues and I before a committee hearing

As a reminder, you can visit my [legislative page](#) to see how I have voted on bills. And if there is anything my office can help you with, or if you have concerns about pending legislation, please do be in touch.

Other happenings at the capitol:

- **State of the Tribes:** I'm excited to hear from Chairman Thomas Fowler during Wisconsin's annual State of the Tribes address! Tune in on March 18th on Wisconsin Eye at 11:00 AM
- **Knowles-Nelson Advocacy Day** was last week, and I had the great pleasure of meeting with folks (one of whom is a friend and constituent) who shared their dedication to public lands. I'm a huge supporter of Knowles-Nelson, as you can read about [here](#).
- **Town halls:** this is a great opportunity to learn about happenings at the capitol, to ask any questions you might have, and to raises any issues that you might need help with. Next week's schedule:
 - Sanborn Town Hall on Monday, March 24 from 6-7:30pm along with two candidates for Ashland School Board
 - Superior Public Library on Tuesday, March 25 from 5:30-7:00pm
 - White Winter Winery in Iron River on March 27 from 6:30-8:00pm
- **We have launched our new webpage** where you can find archived newsletters, links to helpful resources, a way to voice any concerns or opinions directly to my office, and a sign up for this newsletter.

Sincerely,

Angela



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