**Legislative Update:** Listening Sessions, March Floor Period (bills signed into law/Vetos), Federal COVID Money, Green Bay Election Issue, The Governor’s Budget, unemployment numbers

1. Listening Sessions TODAY:
   1. Several Listening session TODAY in the district.

**Manitowoc Listening Session with Rep. Tittl**

9:00 AM – 9:45 AM

UW- Green Bay, Manitowoc Campus, Lakeside Hall Theatre

705 Viebahn Street  
Manitowoc, WI 54220

**Hilbert Listening Session with Rep. Tittl**

11:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Hilbert Community Center

45 N 5th St.

Hilbert, WI 54129

**Plymouth Listening Session with Rep. Vorpagel**

12:30 PM – 1:00 PM

Plymouth City Hall, Room 303

128 Smith St.

Plymouth, WI 53073

**Sheboygan Listening Session with Reps. Vorpagel & Katsma**

1:30 PM – 2:15 PM

UW-Green Bay, Sheboygan Campus, University Theatre

1 University Drive  
Sheboygan, WI 53081

**Hingham Listening Session with Rep. Katsma**

2:45 PM - 3:15 PM

Hingham Hall

N2744 N. Main Street

Waldo, WI 53093

1. March Floor Period
   1. [Evers signs 15 more republican authored/bi-partisan bills](http://www.thewheelerreport.com/wheeler_docs/files/032621evers3.pdf)
      1. Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBM) legislation
         1. Helps lower the cost of prescription drugs
         2. Sets rules for drug companies and pharmacies to enhance transparency for the consumer which results in great competition and lower costs.
      2. Cocktails-to-go: helps our struggling hospitality industry safely realize another income stream.
   2. Evers Vetoed 2 bills
      1. [WIAA bill](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMTUsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMTAzMjYuMzc3OTY4ODEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL2NvbnRlbnQuZ292ZGVsaXZlcnkuY29tL2F0dGFjaG1lbnRzL1dJR09WLzIwMjEvMDMvMjYvZmlsZV9hdHRhY2htZW50cy8xNzM2NDExL1NpZ25lZCUyMFZldG8lMjBMZXR0ZXIucGRmIn0.qHneESlWW3WGTZOFHxozq_pGg4gdPpz0IVKP19-Q18w/s/575411952/br/100743654173-l) – would have allowed students in charter schools to participate in schools sports at their resident schools district
         1. This veto punishes kids and parents who choose a private school education.
         2. Empowers a quasi-governmental body (WIAA) to impose rules on kids who just want to play sports and get the quality education they choose.
      2. [State employee return to work](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/WIGOV/2021/03/26/file_attachments/1736409/Signed%20Veto%20Letter%2038.pdf) – this bill would have required a plan be set to get state employees back to work to serve people throughout our state.
         1. The Capitol is also still closed to the public despite the Legislative resolution to open it.
         2. My legislative office remains open and I am always accessibly by phone or email. My staff is in the office and ready to assist you with anything relating to state government.
   3. Truth in Spending Legislation passed this March Floor Period. (see below for details)
2. Federal COVID Relief
   1. Wisconsin’s total allocation is estimated at $5.7B. This includes state and local government.
      1. To put that into perspective, the total spending increase in our last 2-year budget was $4.26 billion. The new $5.5 billion one-time federal money could be in the hands of one person with no budget, no spending plan, and no state legislative input.
      2. The state is expected to receive $3.2B under the “relief” fund to respond to the pandemic and replace lost revenue.
      3. The state is also expected to receive $189M for capital projects.
         1. This money may be used for critical capital projects directly enabling work, education, and health monitoring, including remote options, in response to the public health emergency.
      4. Metro cities are expected to receive $788M.
         1. It has been reported that Milwaukee will receive over $400M.
      5. Other local units of government, not including counties, are expected to receive $399M.
      6. Counties are expected to receive $1.129B.
      7. Another $20B will be distributed to Tribal nations across the country.
      8. Funds for local units of government are distributed based on population.
   2. The most concerning provision of the bill, at this point, is the language inserted by Sen. Schumer (who happens to represent Brian’s home state….):
      1. [The language states that a state may not use the “relief” funds to directly or *indirectly* reduce taxes between March 3, 2021 and the last day of the fiscal year in](https://www.wsj.com/articles/democrats-to-states-no-new-tax-cuts-11615333751?reflink=desktopwebshare_twitter) which funds are spent or returned. My concern is how broadly the word “indirectly” applies in this situation. I have asked LC attorneys to look into this.
         1. The bill requires states and local units of government to periodically report on the use of funds, including any tax modifications.
            1. The bill gives the Dept. of Treasury the authority to recoup “relief” funds from states or local units of government if they do reduce taxes during the stated timeframe.
   3. **“Truth in Spending” Oversight bill:** 
      1. I authored legislation to provide oversight over this incredible amount of money with Speaker Vos. We are calling it the “Truth in Spending Act” because we want to give the people of Wisconsin the entire truth about where their tax dollars are being spent.
      2. The Bill passed the legislature and is now in the hands of Governor Evers to either sign of veto.
      3. Under current law, the Governor can receive and direct fed funds sent to the state.
      4. Our oversight legislation increases the Legislature’s role in the expenditure of the latest COVID-19 relief funds by requiring the Governor to simply submit a plan to the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) for passive review.
      5. We’re simply asking the Governor to include others in the decision-making process. We want more input, not less. More sunshine, less darkness.
      6. The legislation is modeled closely after the language that Democrats approved to allow JFC to provide oversight in the distribution of funds from the 2009 federal Stimulus Package.
      7. Other states have also pursued similar measures or already have oversight laws in place. West Virginia, Arkansas, Colorado and Kansas have recently passed or pursued legislation that gives some legislative oversight over COVID relief funds.
      8. In 12 states, the executive branch may receive but cannot spend unanticipated federal funds without prior authorization or subsequent legislative approval. In six states, the executive and legislative branch sit together on a board to share decision-making on unanticipated federal funds. Additionally, there have been other states that may not have been required to, but chose to include the legislature. These states include Alaska, Idaho, Maine, Mississippi and Tennessee.
3. We are still waiting on the Supreme Court to rule on the Governor’s unconstitional Emergency Order
   1. Their session ends in June, but we hope they give a definitive ruling soon
   2. The current Emergency Order ends on April 5th. We are hopeful the court ends this abuse of power before Gov. Evers can issue another illegal order.
4. Election Integrity Issues
   1. [EXLPOSIVE REPORT: Green Bay election was infiltrated by outside activist](https://wisconsinspotlight.com/special-investigation-infiltrating-the-election/)
      1. Facebook election group gave money to GB with strings attached $1.6 million
      2. Former Dem operative gains access to GB elections process
      3. City of Green Bay clerk resigned due to pressures from GB Mayor Eric Genrich
      4. The absentee ballot were kept in a lock room. 4 of the 5 keys were held by democrat operatives.
      5. [State legislators have called on the GB mayor to resign](https://wtaq.com/2021/03/09/state-senator-calls-for-genrich-to-resign-as-questions-brew-over-november-election-handling/) – Roth, Jacque, Bernier,
      6. [We have bills introduced which would have prevented what happened in GB](https://empowerwisconsin.org/bill-would-address-some-issues-in-green-bay-election-scandal/)
         1. Legislation: requires private donations to go to WEC, not the municipality.
      7. Madison, Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Green Bay all took “Zuckerberg money”
   2. The Senate caucus is committed to addressing election integrity issues this spring – that includes exploring the possibility of a comprehensive package of bills to strengthen the integrity of our elections.
   3. There are 2 important components necessary in regards to our elections:
      1. **1.** That our election laws are followed to the letter.
      2. **And 2.** Voters have full faith and confidence in our state’s voting integrity.
      3. **Unfortunately, I don’t think we accomplished either in this most recent election.**
         1. There were several guidance opinions issued by WEC that appears to be inconsistent with our clear state election laws.
         2. Also, it’s clear that the electorate wants an audit and further investigation into election integrity issues.
         3. We plan to further clarify our laws to prevent them from being misinterpreted in the future and audit the past election so we don’t repeat any mistakes in future elections.
   4. There’s evidence of clear violations of statute that we brought to light in our joint election hearing.
   5. We authorized an audit of our election system.
      1. We have done audits of our election systems in the past
      2. We conduct routine audits of state programs all the time to ensure both process and fiscal soundness. An audit of our election system would help to identify problems and possible reform opportunities.
      3. We can use this audit to restore the electorate’s faith in the process.
5. April Floor Period
   1. Protections of Vaccine mandates from state and local officials
   2. Protection against closures of place of worship
   3. Election Integrity Bills
6. Recent Bi-partisan Bills get signed into law
   1. TAX CODE UPDATE:
      1. The Senate Passed (and the Governor signed – Act 1) 2021 AB 2 – the adoption of the federal tax code changes including an almost $500 Million tax cut for struggling businesses who received PPP loans.
      2. The Governor’s administration determined those funds would be taxable – a surprise determination that businesses had not planned for.
      3. The Senate led to fix this issue and provide those struggling businesses with badly-needed relief from further taxation as they fight for survival.
      4. The loans were designed to keep payroll up-to-date so employees could keep their jobs during period of decline revenues.
      5. Many jobs were saved and many people were able to avoid the UI disaster.
      6. We couldn’t let these employers (who saved employees) hit with a surprise tax.
      7. We’re glad to have this bill pass with broad bi-partisan support and to have the Governor change his course and sign our bill.
      8. First bill the Governor signed since the COVID relief bill in April of 2020
   2. UI Reform Bill – Special Session ([2021 Wisconsin Act 4](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2021/related/lcactmemo/act004.pdf))
      1. The bill directs the Governor to use existing funds and resources to upgrades the State’s trouble UI system – something he had the authority and resources to fix years ago.
      2. The bill also include critical **Liability Protections** for churches, schools, non-profits, small employers – so important for safely re-opening our state.
      3. The Assembly will pass the bill this week and the Governor has already signaled he’d sign it.
   3. HUGE bi-partisan wins that show our state we can work together on our shared priorities and come together to meet the needs of the people of Wisconsin.
7. The Governor’s Budget
   1. Talking Points:
      1. Republicans spent the last 10 years passing responsible budgets
         1. No rainy day fund to $1B in reserves
         2. Budget surplus ($2.1B)
         3. Held the line on taxes
      2. Two years ago, the Governor put forward a bad budget.
      3. Do you know what we did? We fixed it. And he signed it.
      4. We funded our state’s core priorities while respecting taxpayers
   2. Fiscal numbers:
      1. **Total spending-** All Funds: About $8 B over the biennium
      2. **Percent increase** - All Funds: Nearly 10% “Double
      3. **Total Tax increases**: $1B in tax increases. MAC and cap gains roll backs
         1. \*\**Could be over $2 billion if municipal sales tax increase used to fullest*
      4. **Government job** increase (new FTE): 363.95 GPR
      5. **Structural Deficit**: $938.3M deficit at the end of FY23
      6. **Projected $1.338B deficit** at the end of the 2023-25 budget (next budget out).
   3. Non-Fiscal Policy
      1. Repeals most of Act 10 ($14 billion in saving since 2011)
      2. Requires Forced Unionization (repeals Right to Work)
      3. Raises prices on construction projects (repeals Prevailing Wage)
      4. Grows taxes on small employers – including farmers (MAC, Cap Gains)
      5. Allow hikes in sales taxes (local authority to raise sales tax)
      6. Increases electricity bills for Biz and families (Focus on Energy)
      7. Move us towards government-run healthcare (MA expansion)
      8. Legalizes marijuana (dangerous, unstable funding source, political)
         1. Colorado did a study that showed the social costs far outweighed any supposed tax benefits.
         2. This should go through the normal legislative process.
         3. The budget is not the place to have this policy discussion.
         4. It’s still illegal at the federal level.
      9. Expands Welfare (MA, TANF, DCF, 4K)
      10. Keeps schools closed (doesn’t open schools incentivize in-person learning)
          1. We have kids losing an entire year of education and we have a governor that has put smoking pot above getting our kids back in schools.
          2. CDC says it’s safe to re-open schools.
8. Surpluses in our state
   1. BUDGET SURPLUS: projected $1.76 Billion surplus to end this fiscal year.
   2. DHS submitted a report on the [condition of the Medicaid budget](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/jfc/200_reports/2021_01_04_health_services_overall_condition_of_medicaid_benefits.pdf). DHS now predicts the fund will end 2019-21 budget with a $614.8M GPR surplus. In September, DHS predicted a surplus of $289M GPR.
   3. Rainy Day Fund:
      1. Projected to transfer $231 Million in 2020-21 FY
      2. TOTAL in Rainy Day Fund: $993.9 Million
         1. **Almost $1 Billion** in the Rainy Day Fund, the largest in state history.
   4. Reasons for surplus/strong numbers
      1. Prudent budgeting. Republicans passed a responsible budget (that Evers signed) and that set us on strong footing. Now we’ve realized the benefits of responsible budgeting
      2. Being quick to challenge the Shutdown Orders in May
         1. If our economy had been locked down for an extended period of time like other states, we’d see much less favorable numbers.
      3. Thanks to nearly a decade of Republican reforms and a responsible budget passed by Legislative Republicans, we’re in a much better spot than anticipated a few months ago
      4. People are still struggling
      5. Our Next budget must be responsible as well
   5. Republican know we must continue to budget responsibly to keep our state on strong fiscal footing.
   6. Republicans will fund core priorities and respect taxpayers.

Positive Unemployment News:

1. February unemployment rates (BLS) were recently announced. Wisconsin’s rate is falling and is currently at 3.8% ([February 2021](https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/press/unemployment/2021/210325-february-state.pdf)) **(that’s down from 5.5% in December)**
   1. While other states saw a measurable dip, Wisconsin held steady over the end of the year.
   2. We’re still ahead of the Federal rate – 6.7%
   3. Neighboring states: Iowa – 3.1%; Minnesota – 4.4%; Michigan – 7.5%; Illinois – 7.6%
2. [Local rates](https://jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/wits_info/downloads/Publications/PressRelease/local.pdf) rose slightly as well: (most recent numbers as of 3/17/2021)
   1. Manitowoc County: 4.3% 🡪 4.9%
   2. Sheboygan County: 3.9% 🡪 4.2%
   3. Calumet County: 3.3% 🡪 3.7%
3. UI Backlog
   1. Many people are still stuck in the adjudication process.
   2. We’re working to prod the Evers Administration to focus more resources on addressing this important issue facing so many of our friends and neighbors.
   3. If you’re dealing with delays with your DWD claim, please email my office at [Sen.LeMahieu@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Sen.LeMahieu@legis.wi.gov). My office will assist you with expediting your contact with the agency.

Reminder: Support Local Businesses

* Please remember to support your local businesses during this challenging time. Observe CDC guidelines, be respectful of others, and make the extra effort to safely shop local whenever possible.

Reminder: If you’d like to receive a vaccine, please check the DHS website and search “COVID-19 vaccine” to get information or call your primary health care provider. If you’re still having trouble, please feel free to contact my office for assistance.

Thank you for having me!

# Contact Me

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