



## Wisconsin State Legislature

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
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### **Legislature Approves Proposed Constitutional Amendment**

Does Wisconsin need an elected State Treasurer? That is a question voters will get to answer next year when a proposed constitutional amendment to eliminate the Office of the State Treasurer is on the spring ballot. Earlier this month, both the State Senate and the State Assembly approved 2017 Senate Joint Resolution 3, putting the question of eliminating the State Treasurer's position to the voters. Any change to the constitution requires the legislature to pass identical bills in two consecutive sessions of the legislature before the question is brought before voters for final approval. An identical resolution, Senate Joint Resolution 7, was approved in the 2015 legislative session.

The first State Treasurer took office in 1848. While the state constitution creates the position of the Treasurer, it does not assign specific responsibilities to this office, unlike the office of the Secretary of State. It allows the legislature to decide what role the Treasurer will play in state government (article 6, section 3). In the first legislative session of 1848, the State Treasurer was tasked with receiving all money and tax collections and paying out only what was authorized by the legislature. Today, the State Treasurer participates in the promotion of the state's unclaimed property program and serves on the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands.

Things have changed since 1848. Today, the Department of Revenue receives money and collects tax and the Department of Administration oversees the payments of expenses as approved by the legislature. In recent years, the responsibilities of the State Treasurer have been transferred to other state agencies to improve government efficiency. The 2013-15 budget transferred the management of the Unclaimed Property Program from the State Treasurer to the

Department of Revenue. Its budget was reduced to about \$1 million in the 2013-15 budget and further reduced to \$346,000 in the 2015-17 biennial budget. The 2017-19 biennial budget proposal includes \$227,000 for the state treasurer, fully \$9,495,200 less than the office received in the 2011-13 biennial budget.

Today, the primary responsibility of the State Treasurer is to serve as a member of the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL). Under the resolutions approved by the legislature in the past two sessions, this responsibility would be transferred to the Lieutenant Governor. For many who supported this legislation, myself included, the office of the State Treasurer is a relic of the past, much like the historic safe in the State Capitol that the State Treasurer used 100 years ago. Neither have a real purpose today.

Opponents of the proposal to eliminate the Office of the State Treasurer have expressed concern that eliminating this office, and particularly its position on the BCPL, consolidates power in the executive branch. Established in the state constitution, the BCPL manages a fund that benefits public schools and libraries. In addition to the State Treasurer, the Secretary of State and the Attorney General serve on this commission. Opponents also argue that the State Treasurer is an individually elected state official who could provide additional oversight of state finances, if the legislature authorizes that responsibility.

Changing the constitution is a serious decision. Next spring, voters will make the final call on whether or not to eliminate the Office of the State Treasurer.

*If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at: [Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us](mailto:Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us). You can also sign up for our newsletter at our website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen14/news/index.htm>.*