



## ***Wisconsin lacks leadership on water quality***

By State Rep. Mark Spreitzer (D-Beloit)

Wisconsin residents depend upon clean water for healthy communities. The crisis in Flint and recent news reports about water quality in Wisconsin have reminded us that we cannot take clean water for granted. We must actively guard this precious, shared resource.

For those living in Wisconsin's cities and villages, the responsibility for safe drinking water rests with local government. In rural areas, residents bear the responsibility for private wells and septic systems. In either instance, state government should take steps to ensure equal access to clean and contaminant-free drinking water.

Unfortunately, Wisconsin has a shockingly high number of wells that draw contaminated water. Water tests throughout Wisconsin have shown high levels of lead, nitrates, harmful bacteria and even arsenic. These contaminants can have serious health effects on our friends and neighbors. An increase in reports of contaminated wells throughout our state also comes at a time of a decreasing willingness by our leaders to hold polluters accountable. The nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau recently concluded that over the past 10 years, the DNR failed 94 percent of the time to take action against water polluters. Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency found 75 deficiencies in Wisconsin laws on water quality in 2011. Governor Walker has fixed only 4 of them.

Instead of demanding an answer for failures on ensuring water quality, we have only seen a consistent lack of leadership from Governor Walker and legislative Republicans. In fact, Governor Walker has publically applauded the decrease in consequences for polluters.

As Wisconsinites and the Natural Resources Board demand answers on the dereliction of duty on water quality, Governor Walker has hung his own DNR out to dry. The recent Republican biennial budget cut 90 positions from the DNR- staff that could have been monitoring water quality. Water affects us all: we drink it, our children drink it, we play in it, we grow our food with it, we even brew our beer with it. We must ensure that our water remains clean and abundant. Without clean water, Wisconsin's communities cannot continue to thrive.

Wisconsin can do better. We need to work together to protect our water and our families, and we need leadership to hold polluters accountable.

### **45<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT**

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