



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update By Senator Howard Marklein April 24, 2015

Studying the Details and Making Decisions

Over the last two weeks, the legislature's Joint Finance Committee (JFC) has started voting on specific items in Governor Scott Walker's budget proposal. After months of study, public hearings and input from stakeholders and constituents, the JFC is crafting budget motions and making recommendations to fund, defund, delete and alter individual pieces of the state budget. The formal public hearings, local listening sessions and ongoing input from residents of the state are an important way for us to understand the realistic implications of the changes proposed in the budget. I appreciate all of the time, effort and input I have received from residents in the 17th Senate District. Thank you!

As a member of the JFC, I am honored to be in an influential position where I can make a big difference for the people of Wisconsin. I do not take this role lightly.

I carefully consider and weigh every issue and request before us against the full breadth of the state budget and realistic expectations for the way our government serves our people. As I have told many residents in the 17th District, the budget that the Governor signs in June will look a lot different than the budget he gave us in February.

During the last two weeks, we have started voting on specific issues in the budget. Many of the major items – such as K-12 education, the University System, transportation funding and stewardship will be some of the last issues we work on. We are eagerly awaiting new revenue numbers that should be delivered to us in early May. These numbers will give us a better understanding of the funds with which we have to work. My top priority is to dedicate more funding to K-12 education as these numbers become available and I am working with my colleagues to design plans to accomplish this goal.

However, there are some items that we are able to work on as we await new revenue projections. I will focus on a couple of these items in this column. Please visit my website to view a complete report on our progress.

On the first day of JFC Executive Session, April 15, 2015, we immediately removed 14 non-fiscal policy items from the budget. I supported this effort because I felt that changes to these areas should be brought in individual legislation, if they are worthy of change. Three significant items on this list included a change to property assessment policy and the roles of the Natural Resources Board and the Board of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. There will be no change to any of these items.

We also provided funding for a Railroad Safety Inspector and tripled the funding for Broadband Expansion Grants to provide reimbursement for equipment and construction expenses for underserved areas of the state.

On April 17, 2015, we delayed the elimination of the Local Property Insurance Fund by two years. This fund currently allows local government units to purchase property insurance through the State of Wisconsin. We are asking current customers to seek and plan for alternatives within two years.

The JFC added \$250,000 to assist county-level government to implement anti-fraud measures for entitlement programs. There is a federal match for these funds, making the full investment \$500,000 for the next biennium.

Most recently, I supported a motion to require the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to study the imbalances in the Fish & Wildlife account. This account is funded by license fees paid by hunters and fishermen, but it is operating at a \$3.5 million deficit due to declining numbers of hunters. We need to repair this deficit.

I also offered a motion to change the vehicle registration requirement for vintage and antique tractors so that they may travel on state highways to participate in parades and tractor club events. Many vintage tractors are retired from agricultural service, but continue to be a valuable historical attraction throughout our state. Current law makes it illegal to drive these tractors on state highways. This change in vehicle registration requirements protects owners of these vehicles from illegally operating on their way to share agricultural history.

We also addressed the funds that pay for Car-Deer roadkill in our state. The source of the funding was changed and the DNR is now required to report on the program's effectiveness and to offer recommendations moving forward. We discovered that in one county, the state spent \$10,000 to clean-up 19 deer last year. This is frivolous and unacceptable.

Again, this column highlights just a few of the changes we have already made to the state budget. I look forward to continuing to communicate with you about these important issues and welcome your input and ideas.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.