

## **Why I voted ‘YES’ on the Brewers Bill**

*Senator Cory Tomczyk*

I’ll be completely honest – throughout the session, even up until two weeks ago, I was a hard ‘NO’ on the Brewers bills. I hardly had any meetings about it because there was no way I was going to move from my stance. Well, I changed my mind and I want to tell you why.

I take the role we play here in the State Senate very seriously and for many months I believed that voting ‘No’ was the right move. However, in the past few weeks, I did my homework and educated myself further. I had several meetings with stakeholders in Madison, traveled to Milwaukee to tour American Family Field, and spoke with constituents. After getting an in-depth tour of the stadium, it became obvious that the building infrastructure is in need of repairs. You can’t tell if you are driving by on I-94 or even sitting in your seat attending a game, but the inner workings of the stadium completed in 2001 are showing their age. Following over 20 years of use, it is clear that American Family Field has been well cared for, but it is in need of major updates in order to continue to reliably and safely use it.

Throughout this process, my colleagues and I have heard many comments in response to misconceptions about this bill. There are actually two Brewers bills, Assembly Bills 438 and 439. One lays out the policy and one details the funding. I’d like to address some of those misconceptions and clear up some confusion; things that led me to support the legislation.

The most important thing to understand is that the Brewers are not the majority owners of American Family Field. The majority is owned by the Southeast Wisconsin Professional Baseball Park District, which is an arm of the state that operates like a local unit of government. In short, the state is the majority owner of American Family Field. Beginning in 1996, the district enacted a 0.1% sales tax for five counties in Southeast Wisconsin to fund the construction of the stadium. That tax was in place for 24 years, ending in 2020. The current lease ends in 2030, which would leave the Brewers without a home if no action is taken. After this bill is signed into law, the Brewers lease will extend to 2050, allowing the next generation of Wisconsinites to root for their hometown Milwaukee Brewers into the future.

Another misconception is that the state is handing cash to the Brewers, or to the team’s ‘millionaire owners’. This is simply not true. Back in February, Governor Evers proposed spending \$290 million in cash to keep the team in Wisconsin. That was a nonstarter for me. I am grateful we instead got a better deal for the taxpayers. Conversely, our legislation takes the income taxes generated from Brewers players and visiting team players and investing those dollars into American Family Field. Be sure to remind your friends who are Cubs fans that their players are chipping in to maintain our stadium!

The legislation we passed means that we will invest \$365.8 million generated from player income taxes back into the stadium. If the Brewers were to leave, that revenue would be lost in addition to tens of millions of dollars of sales tax revenue from things like parking, hotel stays, and concession sales. The legislation also doubles the Brewers’ rent, meaning they will contribute around \$150 million. Milwaukee County and the City of Milwaukee will also contribute a combined \$135 million as part of the deal. Making sure that Milwaukee has some skin in the game (no pun

intended) is essential to making this a good deal and one part of the legislation that I was adamant about. Ensuring the Brewers stay in Wisconsin is good for the state, but even better for the Milwaukee area. I appreciate them putting their money where their mouth is.

Another piece of this plan is the winterization of American Family Field. The stadium was designed and built to be a baseball stadium for use between April and October – mainly warmer months in Southern Wisconsin. Over the past two decades, the stadium has hosted concerts, but only during the summer because it cannot currently be heated in the winter. The plan we passed includes \$25 million to winterize the stadium, making it available to host concerts and other events, generating income and tax revenue in the winter months when it would otherwise sit empty. The deal also adds a ticket surcharge to those events to increase revenue, estimated at \$20.7 million, thus decreasing the state's contribution from the original plan.

Finally, the legislation requires a biennial audit of the finances of the stadium district. I believe that if we are taking money out of the state coffers, taxpayers deserve to know how it is being spent. The audit component of this legislation ensures that will happen.

I talked to a lot of people about this legislation and my vote on it. I attended two meetings in Taylor and Marathon Counties where there was a combined 100 people present. After explaining the bill in front of me and the facts surrounding it, I asked for a show of hands. 97 hands raised supporting the plan, two were unsure, and one said 'no'. Last week I was on a local radio show where we took calls from listeners. The response from the callers was overwhelmingly in favor of the legislation. I am grateful for those conversations. I tell people all the time to get involved and be heard by your elected officials – the good ones will listen to you.

At the end of the day, the process of these bills getting through the Legislature and now to the Governor's desk has taught me a lot – which is important for a rookie Senator like myself. I am proud of my vote and that we found a way to keep professional baseball in Wisconsin. I hope that even if you still disagree with my decision, you at least understand why I voted the way I did. If you have any comments or further questions on this bill or anything else we are working on in Madison, please call my office – my staff and I are here to serve you!

-Cory

*Senator Cory Tomczyk (R-Mosinee) represents the 29<sup>th</sup> Senate District, which consists of all or parts of Wood, Marathon, Taylor, Sawyer, and Rusk Counties. His Madison office can be reached at 608-266-2502.*