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Rep. Jill Billings & Sen. Brad Pfaff Column: Prioritizing State Response to PFAS

Nobody should lose sleep wondering if the water coming out of their tap is safe for their family.

Over the last few years, news reports have highlighted the presence of a dangerous group of “forever” chemicals known as PFAS. This contamination has been found in communities across the state and the country. What are PFAS, and how did they get here? PFAS are a group of human-made chemicals used in many products such as food packaging, stain and water repellent fabrics, and nonstick items. These chemicals stay present in the environment and can accumulate over time. There is evidence that exposure to PFAS can lead to negative adverse health effects.

One of the most significant sources of PFAS is fire-fighting foam. Firefighters use these foams to put out some of the most hazardous fires, such as when flammable liquids are involved. For instance, airports use them to respond to crashes and to train for these scenarios. Although manufacturers of these products have suspected their health risks for years, public knowledge and government regulation of their use has just come into prominence recently.

Wisconsin has seen several PFAS contamination instances, and some are right here in western Wisconsin. Over 100 private wells near the airport on French Island have tested positive for PFAS contamination. The impacted families now face two major public health crises: the risk of illness from COVID-19 and unsafe water.

Thankfully, Governor Evers has made fighting PFAS contamination a priority in his Biennial Budget proposal. He puts forward \$1.6 million for the Department of Natural Resources to develop a PFAS Action Plan, allocates \$2.1 million for PFAS testing, establishes a \$20 million grant program to help local governments remediate PFAS, and creates new environmental regulatory standards.

At the federal level, Congressman Ron Kind announced last week that he would work to secure funding to help our community with PFAS testing, which would begin to provide us with a better understanding of the problem at hand. Senator Tammy Baldwin is also working to provide federal resources for PFAS testing and urge the EPA to set meaningful standards to protect Wisconsinites from exposure.

PFAS is a problem with more questions than answers. We don’t know the extent of contamination that forever chemicals have on our groundwater supplies. Exploring these problems now could save millions of dollars in future healthcare and quality assurance costs.

Jill Billings

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
95TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT



Brad Pfaff

STATE SENATOR
32ND SENATE DISTRICT

It's time for us to step up, put our heads together, and solve this issue as a community, as we have always done so well. We strongly support the Governor's Budget proposal to help combat PFAS contamination in Wisconsin because every family deserves access to safe drinking water.

But his proposal is only the first step. If you want to make your voice heard, we encourage you to reach out to the Joint Committee on Finance and ask them to keep critical funding for PFAS remediation in the biennial budget. You can register your comment by visiting <https://bit.ly/3cgdCCA>.

We are here for you. Our offices will continue working diligently with local stakeholders to find long-term solutions to these issues.

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Senator Brad Pfaff represents the 32nd Senate District, which includes La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford, and southern Monroe County.

Representative Jill Billings represents the 95th Assembly District, which includes all of the city of La Crosse, the town of Campbell, and a portion of the town of Shelby.