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HAND DELIVERED

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Representative Andy Jorgensen
113 North
Wisconsin State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Representative Jorgensen:

Thank you for contacting my office regarding 2013 Wisconsin Act 154 and 2013 Wisconsin Act 146. I appreciate the concerns you have voiced over both bills. As a member of the Legislature, I am sure you are aware that both of these measures received full debate in both houses before being presented to me for signature.

2013 Wisconsin Act 154 largely does two things. First, it requires attorneys for plaintiffs to disclose each personal injury claim they have filed or reasonably anticipate filing against an asbestos trust. Second, if the Court determines that a claim against the trust should be filed, instead of against the defendant, the Court shall stay the claim against the defendant.

This law is about transparency and aims to prevent trial lawyers from double-dipping into asbestos trust funds and also suing solvent Wisconsin employers for the same injury for which they have already paid into these trust funds. By requiring transparency and reducing double dipping, the trust funds will last longer and be available to compensate the injured, both now and in the future.

Some opponents of this law have claimed this could delay cases or prevent injured victims from being compensated. As originally drafted, this legislation had mandatory delays. Those delays were removed from the bill and the law as enacted has no mandatory delays. Regarding compensation, injured plaintiffs continue to be compensated; they may just be compensated from an asbestos trust established for this very purpose instead of from a different defendant.

Some other opponents of Act 154 have claimed that this is a veteran's issue. Veterans who are plaintiffs are treated the same as any other plaintiff under Act 154. It should be noted, veterans who have a service-connected injury related to asbestos exposure can file a disability claim with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This is not impacted in any way by Act 154.

The state Department of Veterans Affairs did not take a position on this bill because they did not deem it to be a veteran's issue.

The AMVETS Department of Wisconsin supported Act 154 because it protects the asbestos trust funds from double dipping so future victims, veterans included, can be compensated for their injuries. In fact, this act will assist in protecting the solvency of the asbestos trust funds for the injured in the future and keep solvent Wisconsin employers, many of whom employ our veterans, from being sued unnecessarily.

I have always been and will continue to be an ardent supporter of our men and women who have served in the Armed Forces. If I thought Act 154 would adversely impact them or their families in any way, I would not have signed it into law.

Your letter also references 2013 Wisconsin Act 146, which establishes uniform hours for early in-person absentee voting across the state. This act ensures that one area of the state is not treated differently from another. I issued a partial veto of the bill that passed in order to allow for up to 110 hours of in-person absentee voting, not including the time available for absentee voting by mail. This partial veto is part of my administration's effort to ensure safeguards we enact around the voting process do not infringe on access to voting.

As Governor, I take election integrity seriously and will always observe my duty to protect the votes of all Wisconsin citizens while ensuring access to the polls is not hindered.

Thank you again for taking the time to voice your concerns over these two laws. Though I understand and appreciate both sides of the debate on these issues, I ultimately decided to sign these bills into law. I look forward to continuing to move Wisconsin forward.

Sincerely,



Scott Walker
Governor