

UNDER THE DOME

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Legislative Update

This issue of *Under the Dome* provides an update on the current legislative session, the proposed biennial budget, an informational hearing on the Focus on Energy program and the launch of Fair Rates for Wisconsin's Dairyland.

2015-2016 Legislative Session Update

The primary focus at the Capitol this past week was [right-to-work](#) legislation, which prohibits membership in a labor organization or payments to a labor organization as a condition of employment. The legislation passed the Senate on Wednesday, amid rallies and protestors inside and outside of the Capitol, and heads to the Assembly for consideration the week of March 2.

Here is a quick recap of the issues MEUW is following:

- **[AB 32 - Prevailing Wage](#):** This bill, introduced by Rep. Hutton (R-13) and Sen. Vukmir (R-5), would eliminate the requirement that laborers, workers, mechanics and truck drivers employed on the site of a project of public works be paid the prevailing wage. MEUW has supported similar legislation in the past several legislative sessions as a means for our members to reduce the overall cost of infrastructure replacement. The bill has been referred to the Assembly Committee on Labor but has not been scheduled for a hearing. MEUW has registered in support of this legislation.
- **[AB 20 - Made in America Act](#):** This bill, introduced by Rep. Jorgensen (D-43) and Sen. Hansen (D-30), would require contractors to use materials made in America for all public works projects. The bill has been referred to the Assembly Committee on State Affairs and Government Operations but has not been scheduled for a hearing. MEUW has not taken a position on this bill.
- **[AB 66 - Wisconsin Renewable Energy Development Authority](#):** This bill, sponsored by Rep. Shankland (D-71) and Sen. Miller (D-16), creates an independent public entity, governed by an 11-member board, to steer and expand investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency in Wisconsin. The bill has been referred to the Assembly Committee on State Affairs and Government Operations but has not been scheduled for a hearing. MEUW has not taken a position on this bill.
- **[LRB 1446 - High-capacity Wells](#):** This bill, sponsored by Rep. Nerison (R-96) and Sen. Gudex (R-18), essentially eases regulation on high-capacity wells due to recent court cases that have changed the DNR's authority to oversee high capacity wells.

Biennial State Budget Update

As we reported in the Feb. 13 issue of *Under the Dome*, MEUW members were largely spared in the governor's budget proposal. We have identified a few proposed items and want to provide an update on those items.

Public Service Commission

The primary concern with the proposed budget's impact on the PSC is the proposed consolidation of the various state agencies' I.T. functions with the Department of Administration. The PSC has many custom I.T. processes related to its operations and the Focus on Energy program that are confidential in nature and require onsite support. MEUW is working with other utility groups to preserve the current I.T. practices at the PSC.

Office of the Commissioner of Insurance

The proposed budget includes elimination of the Local Government Property Insurance Fund. The program would be closed to new policies and existing policies would not be renewed. We have heard from many MEUW members that their utility and municipality would be impacted by this proposal. Comparable coverage and pricing does not appear to be available through private insurers. We are working with other stakeholders to raise awareness of this issue with the Joint Finance Committee.

Over the next four months, the legislature will be focused mainly on reviewing, revising and adopting Governor Walker's biennial budget bill. The legislature's budget-writing Joint Finance Committee will begin its work by hosting agency briefings next week to hear from each state agency about how the proposed budget will impact their agency. Following the agency briefings, the Joint Finance Committee will host a series of public hearings across the state to gather public input on the proposal. Those hearings are expected to be scheduled in late March. The committee will then begin voting on amendments to the bill during April and May. Once the committee's work is complete, the bill must be passed in identical form by both chambers of the legislature before moving on to the governor's desk for his signature.

Focus on Energy Informational Hearing

The Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy, chaired by Rob Cowles (R-2), held an informational hearing Feb. 19 to discuss the Focus on Energy program. The hearing began with testimony from Tamara Sondgeroth from Focus on Energy who provided details about the program and then fielded several questions related to oversubscribed programs, efficiency, administrative costs and FOE's role in reducing carbon emissions. The Cadmus Group testified next and provided information related to their role as the program's third-party evaluator. They fielded questions on participation, avoided construction of new power plants, and reviewed how Wisconsin is doing compared to other states. A number of other environmental groups, associations, and companies testified to the merits of Focus on Energy and the investments that have occurred due to their incentives.

Senator Cowles expressed disappointment several times that the PSC did not testify. At one point he questioned whether the PSC is supportive of the program given that they chose not to testify at the hearing. He continued to mention concern with building new power plants in the state and asked several speakers if they could quantify how many power plants the Focus on Energy program has saved from being built. Overall, the hearing provided Cowles the opportunity to tout the Focus on Energy program's successes and put it in a good light heading forward in this legislative session.

Fair Rates for Wisconsin's Dairyland (FRWD)

FRWD officially launched Feb. 23 and consists of labor groups and utilities. As we have reported in our various publications, MEUW is a founding member of this organization. FRWD's mission is to promote the significant value our current electric system delivers, champion equitable funding and join the discussion of integrating distributed generation into Wisconsin's electric infrastructure. Jim Brooks, a city of Evansville of council member, sits on FRWD's board of directors. Please visit FRWD's website at www.fairwisconsinrates.com to learn more.

The next issue of Under the Dome will be published March 13.