

# Under the Dome

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A Periodic Publication from the Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin

This issue of *Under the Dome* provides an update on the biennial budget process, prevailing wage law and legislation MEUW is currently following.

## Legislative Update

### BIENNIAL BUDGET UPDATE

After completing their work on July 2, the Joint Finance Committee delivered the budget to the Legislature. As is customary in the budget process, the Joint Finance Committee completed its work by passing Motion #999, the Omnibus Motion, which included 67 provisions. A few of the provisions affect MEUW members, including:

1. **Open Records Law** – several provisions were included that would have weakened the state’s open records law. Reaction from both sides of the aisle was swift over the weekend with legislative leaders and the Governor indicating they will abandon these proposed changes in the final budget.
2. **Item 43 – Self-Insurance for School Districts and Local Units of Government** – allows school districts and municipalities to work together to reach the 100 employee threshold for providing health insurance on a self-insured basis.
3. **Item 54 – PSC-Designation of Chairperson of the Commission** - Specifies that the chairperson of the PSC is a distinct appointment, and is different from that of a Commissioner. Upon expiration of the two-year term as chairperson, the individual would resume his or her remaining term as a Commissioner.
4. **Item 66 – Extension of Water or Sewer Service Between Municipalities** – Authorizes a municipality to request the extension of water or sewer service from another municipality that owns and operates a water or sewer utility if the request for service is for an area that does not receive water or sewer service from any public utility or municipality on the date of the request, and the municipality requesting the service contains an area that receives water or sewer service from the water or sewer utility owned and operated by the other municipality on the date of the request. According to the League of Municipalities, this motion was intended to be narrowly focused on the City of Kenosha and the Town of Somers, but that language was not included in the motion. The League, Wisconsin Rural Water Association and Municipal Environmental Group – Water Division have communicated their opposition to this provision and have asked for its removal from the budget.

The Senate will consider the budget today and the Assembly is expected to consider the budget on Wednesday.

### PREVAILING WAGE (AB 32/SB 49)

It was announced early last week that repeal of prevailing wage and financing for a new Milwaukee Bucks arena would be taken out of the budget to ease passage. We learned late yesterday that the Senate will consider a plan offered by Senator Frank Lasee as part of its budget considerations today. The Lasee plan would repeal the prevailing wage law for all local government projects, including municipal utility projects, school districts and technical colleges; but keep in place current cost thresholds for state work. Senate leaders are optimistic they can get the votes needed to pass the proposal, but passage in the Assembly remains unclear.

### LINKS

[State Legislature](#)

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[MEUW is Lobbying](#)

[The Wheeler Report](#)

[WisPolitics](#)

## LEGISLATION MEUW IS CURRENTLY FOLLOWING

There were no bills introduced since the June 22 edition of *Under the Dome* that impact MEUW members. Updates to previously introduced legislation are italicized and bolded:

- [\*\*AB 251/SB 168\*\*](#) – **Administrative Rules:** This bill, introduced by Sen. LeMahieu (R-9) and Rep. Neylon (R-98), makes various changes to administrative rule promulgation process including legislative approval of rules with a cost impact exceeding \$10 million. MEUW is concerned about this bill because the threshold is sure to affect future promulgation of rules to comply with the final EPA Clean Power Plan. ***We have worked with WUA and WECA to voice our concerns to the bill's authors and have been told they are comfortable with an exemption for Federal rules.*** The bill has been referred to the Assembly Committee on State Affairs but has not been scheduled for a hearing. MEUW has not taken a position on this bill.
- [\*\*AB 269\*\*](#) – **Funding Postretirement Health Care Benefits:** This bill, introduced by Rep. Thiesfeldt (R-52) and Sen. Vukmir (R-5), would require funding, on an actuarial basis, postretirement health care benefits of local government employees hired after January 1, 2016. The bill has been referred to the Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs but has not been scheduled for a hearing. MEUW has not taken a position on this bill.
- [\*\*AB 122/SB 80\*\*](#) – **Road Access for Utility Trucks in Emergencies:** This bill, introduced by Sen. Jerry Petrowski (R-29) and Rep. Mary Czaja (R-35), exempts public utility vehicles from special or seasonal weight limits on class B highways in order to allow these vehicles to operate legally to restore service outages. The bill was approved by the Assembly on April 14 and the Senate on April 21. ***The bill was signed into law by the Governor on June 30 and became 2015 Wisconsin Act 44.***
- [\*\*AB 156/SB 134\*\*](#) – **Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS):** This bill, introduced by Rep. Thiesfeldt (R-52) and Sen. Petrowski (R-29), provides municipalities interested in participating in the WRS the option to join incrementally by applying the benefit to only newly hired employees while allowing current employees to finish their careers under their existing retirement plan. The Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs unanimously approved this bill on May 5. The bill has been referred to the Joint Survey Committee on Retirement Systems where a study will be completed to assess the potential impact on the WRS. MEUW has registered in support of this bill.
- [\*\*AB 20/SB 176\*\*](#) – **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.
- [\*\*AB 105/SB 72\*\*](#) – **High-Capacity Wells:** This bill, introduced by Sen. Mark Miller (D-16) and Rep. Cory Mason (D-66), establishes standards and a process for designating areas of the state as groundwater management areas, to ensure sustainable use of surface and ground water. The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy but has not been scheduled for a hearing. MEUW has not taken a position on this bill.

*The next issue of Under the Dome will be published July 20.*