

# UNDER THE DOME

February 6, 2017 | Volume 13, Issue 4

A Periodic Publication from the Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin and our government affairs team at The Kammer Group.

## LINKS

[State Legislature](#)

[MEUW Home Page](#)

[The Wheeler Report](#)

[WisPolitics](#)

## Budget Address, Assembly Set for February 8th

Governor Walker will lay out his two-year spending plan in an address before the legislature on Wednesday afternoon. The governor is expected to cover a number of major initiatives he has been unveiling in recent weeks, including funding for K-12 and the UW System, an expansion of the state's broadband grant program, increased funding for job training, welfare reforms, a UW tuition cut, and an increase in the earned income tax credit. The Assembly will be in session prior to the governor's budget address, with a maximum of one hour of debate set aside. The Assembly calendar includes proposed rules for the session, a joint resolution proclaiming February 2017 American Heart Month, and one bill which would modify a tax incremental district in the village of Oostburg in order to help Plymouth-based Masters Gallery Foods Inc. build a \$30 million packaging and distribution facility there.

## Lawmakers Seek Corrections Audit as Part of Larger Reform Package

GOP state Sen. Leah Vukmir promised to seek an audit of the Department of Corrections (DOC) as part of a package of bills she is authoring aimed at crime prevention. Vukmir, along with co-authors Rep. Joe Sanfelippo and Sen. Van Wanggaard, want the Legislative Audit Bureau to do an audit of the DOC in order to review their practices and their policies surrounding correction supervision, with a focus on the Milwaukee area. The other proposals they plan to introduce would strengthen penalties for crimes committed by violent offenders in a number of ways including expanding judges' ability to designate defendants as serious juvenile offenders, eliminating the three-year maximum for offenders staying at juvenile prisons, increasing the mandatory penalties for repeat violent offenses, and toughening penalties on certain violent offenders who illegally obtain a firearm. One of the bills would also require the DOC to recommend revoking probation for any offender charged with a new crime. Democrats, who have called for the closure of the DOC juvenile homes in northern Wisconsin, welcomed an audit of the agency, but were critical of the tough-on-crime approach the bills authors are taking, arguing its proven ineffective in the past.

## Lawmakers Request Cost Estimates Following DOT Audit

Assembly Republican leaders asked the Department of Transportation (DOT) to update its cost estimates for ongoing, future and completed highway projects after the recent release of an audit that found the agency significantly underestimated project costs. The audit found 19 completed projects exceeded estimates by \$772.5 million, or double what was projected, while cost estimates for 16 ongoing major highway projects were underestimated by a total of about \$3.1 billion. Auditors said the inconsistencies were due primarily to the DOT's failure to account for the extent to which inflation and unexpected expenses contribute to cost increases. Speaker Robin Vos said he is seeking further clarification in order for taxpayers to know how much roads cost before they are being built, while speculating the miscalculations by the DOT will likely show that the transportation fund is in bigger trouble than previously thought. A Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimate has put the transportation fund shortfall at nearly \$1 billion. The lawmakers are seeking a full review of cost estimates for ongoing mega and major highway projects planned or budgeted for the 2017-19 and 2019-21 budget years, a review of all projects not yet enumerated, and a "comprehensive report" on all projects since 2010 documenting estimated and actual costs.

## **Governor Unveils School Funding Proposal**

Governor Walker previewed a proposal he plans to include in his budget that would significantly increase funding for rural schools. Under his “Every Student Matters” plan, rural schools would see a boost in sparsity and transportation aid, in addition to a general funding increase that would impact all schools in the state. Walker also again highlighted his plan to bolster broadband expansion efforts in the state by \$35 million dollars, while promising to allocate funding to allow school districts to apply for TEACH grant funding for mobile wireless internet hot spots on school buses and for students to use at home. If approved by the legislature, the rural schools portion of the initiative would cost \$66.5 million in the upcoming biennium, while the total funding increase for K-12 has not yet been disclosed. Walker’s plan was well received by lawmakers and education groups, although some Democrats called for a larger increase to make up for previous education funding cuts handed down by Walker and the Republican-controlled legislature.

## **Sanctuary Cities Legislation Resurfaces Amid Debate Over Trump Immigration Order**

Republican state Rep. Janel Brandjten announced her intent to again propose legislation that would penalize municipalities for becoming so-called “sanctuary cities.” To do so, the bill would prohibit counties and municipalities from passing ordinances, resolutions or policies that bar employees from inquiring about immigration status, notifying the federal government about anyone living in the country illegally, or assisting with immigration enforcement. Cities in violation of the law would be subject to a loss of \$500 to \$5,000 a day in state funding. A similar proposal from Brandjten passed the Assembly last session, amid large demonstrations outside the Capitol, but was never taken up by the Senate. The new proposal is different in that it allows citizens to file lawsuits against municipalities for not complying with the law, while before only the Attorney General, District Attorneys or a Sheriff could file a complaint. The law comes amid national controversy over President Trump’s Executive Orders aimed at cracking down on illegal immigration and blocking immigrants from certain countries known to harbor terrorists from entering the U.S. Trump has also gone after “sanctuary cities”, promising to cut their funding, while putting forth a plan that would deputize state and local officials and encourage them to enforce federal immigration laws.

## **Zimmerman Appointed DVA Secretary**

Gov. Scott Walker has appointed Daniel Zimmerman to serve as the secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, effective yesterday. Zimmerman is a retired lieutenant colonel and military intelligence officer who most recently worked at the U.S. National Guard Bureau and the Department of Military Affairs. He replaces Kathy Marschman, who became acting secretary after the resignation of John Scocos late last year. One of Zimmerman’s first tasks will be to review operations at the state’s veteran’s homes, including the one in King, which has come under fire due to reports of alleged poor care there. The state Legislative Audit Bureau is currently conducting an audit, while the DVA has denied allegations of substandard care. Veterans groups responded with praise of Zimmerman’s appointment.

## **Legislature to Hire Legal Counsel to Defend Legislative Maps**

Republicans on the Assembly and Senate Organization Committees voted to authorize the Speaker and Majority Leader to hire law firms to represent the legislature’s interests in an ongoing court battle over GOP drawn legislative district maps. A three judge U.S. District Court panel ordered the state to produce, and have signed into law, new legislative maps prior to November 1st, 2017. This comes following their ruling late last year that GOP-led redistricting efforts in 2011 were an unconstitutional partisan gerrymander, and may not be used in future elections. The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to take up the case sometime this year, and Republican leaders have indicated they are confident the current maps, and the state’s redistricting process, will be upheld. Democrats and liberal watchdog groups were very critical of the process and action taken Thursday, arguing the vote was taken without sufficient public notice and held in a closed meeting. They have also called into question the decision to spend additional taxpayer dollars on outside legal counsel to defend maps they view as unconstitutional. Speaker Vos, on the other hand, argued the Republicans are exercising their right to retain counsel to defend a law that he views as constitutional when adopted and that meets every traditional principle of redistricting.