

UNDER THE DOME

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Assembly, Senate to Meet

The state Assembly will convene March 7th and 9th to consider a number of high-profile bills, while the Senate plans to meet on March 9th. The Assembly's proposed calendar includes a bill that would increase access to cannabidiol (CBD) oil, used to treat children suffering from seizures, and "Right-to-Try" legislation allowing terminally ill patients access to treatments that have not yet received full FDA approval. The Assembly will vote on a bill to ban local governments from requiring project labor agreements on public projects. A Joint Resolution to eliminate the State Treasurer's office will be considered by both houses. The Senate will also take-up legislation requiring juvenile corrections officers to report child abuse they witness to state or local law enforcement.

Hovde to Decide on Senate Bid This Fall

Madison businessman Eric Hovde said he is seriously considering another bid for U.S. Senate in 2018 but won't make a final decision until sometime this fall. Hovde is considered to be a top-tier candidate having run for U.S. Senate in Wisconsin before and with the personal wealth to help finance a campaign. He finished second to former Governor Tommy Thompson in the 2012 GOP primary for the seat. The eventual winner, Democrat Tammy Baldwin, is now up for reelection in a race that many expect to attract a great deal of national attention and spending. State Sen. Leah Vukmir is also eyeing a run and has been touring the state in recent months meeting with local party officials. Hovde said he'd likely make his decision known in August.

Upcoming Session Days

The Senate and Assembly will meet on Tuesday, March 7th.

The Assembly will be in session Tuesday, March 7th and Thursday, March 9th.

Walker Conversations at Federal Level Continue

Governor Walker recently told President Trump and some of the nation's other top leaders look to Wisconsin as a model as they tackle some of the country's largest issues. Walker was in Washington, D.C. for a series of events, including CPAC, an annual gathering of conservatives, and a National Governors Association meeting. He also had lunch with President Trump and met with Vice President Pence and DHHS Secretary Price during that visit. Walker returned to D.C. to address the House GOP Conference and meet with individual lawmakers, in part to share his story of the reforms he championed in the face of great opposition from organized labor. Walker told lawmakers they should keep that in mind as they face opposition to reforms currently underway. Walker also highlighted Wisconsin's approach to Medicaid reform, saying it can serve as a national model for repealing and replacing the ACA. Walker touted the state's rejection of a Medicaid expansion while maintaining high rates of coverage.

Bill Eliminating State Treasurer Advances

A constitutional amendment to eliminate the Office of State Treasurer was approved by Assembly and Senate committees. The amendment, proposed in Joint Resolution by Sen. Dan Feyen and Rep. Mike Schraa, passed both chambers last session, and is now up for second consideration. Once the legislature approves, it will go to statewide referendum in the April 2018 general election. The position would then be disposed of in December of 2018. Under the resolution, the Treasurer's sole remaining duty, serving on the Board of Commissioners of Public Land, would be transferred to the Lt. Governor. In addition to the bill's authors, State Treasurer Matt Adamczyk testified in support of eliminating his position, while former treasurer Jack Voight and former BCPL Executive Director Tia Nelson testified in opposition. Voight argued responsibilities of the treasure should be restored to ensure wise spending of taxpayer dollars. Nelson raised constitutional concerns as the state office was one of six included in the Wisconsin Constitution, while arguing the Treasurer was intentionally placed on the BCPL instead of the Lt. Governor in order to avoid concentrating power in the Executive Branch. The measure is expected to clear both the Senate and Assembly.

Governor Signals Support for Right to Try

Governor Walker said he's open to Right to Try legislation which would allow patients with terminal illnesses to try experimental medications that have cleared phase one medical trials but not yet received FDA approval. Authored by Rep. Pat Snyder, the bill cleared committee on a 10-2 vote and will be taken up by the full body when they meet next. Its prospects on the Senate side are less clear - the bill has not yet been heard and Senate Health Committee Chair Leah Vukmir has expressed reservations in the past. U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson is also attempting to address the issue at the federal level where he has introduced a similar bill. Speaking to reporters, Walker used the issue as an example of why people are upset with federal government bureaucracy. Walker said he's hopeful the Trump Administration will act on it as well.

Utility Profits Questioned by Lawmakers

Rates charged and profits made by the state's largest utility could be reduced under legislation unveiled by a group of Republican lawmakers. Should it pass, it could affect the profits of We Energies, Madison Gas & Electric and WPPI Energy. The bill would allow the PSC to review rates for the Oak Creek and Port Washington generation facilities and give the agency the ability to lower them under certain circumstances. They are currently exempt from rate review cases. The bill sponsors include Sens. Duey Stroebel and Rob Cowles, along with Reps. Jim Ott and Adam Nelyon. A spokesperson for WE responded by saying the proposal would violate a contract in place between the power companies and the state which assures them a 12.7% profit margin for 25-30 years, in exchange for them investing \$3 billion into the facilities amid an energy crisis in the late 1990s. Proponents of the bill say regulatory favoritism exists, arguing the rates associated with the plant should be treated the same as others and that PSC review is needed to ensure residential and commercial payers aren't over billed.

Assembly Democrats Call for Tax Hike on the Rich

A group of Assembly Democrats held a press conference announcing a new tax plan they say would shift tax relief from the wealthy to the middle class. Under legislation being circulated by Reps. Chris Taylor and Lisa Subeck, the state's manufacturing and agricultural tax credits would be repealed, while a new additional tax bracket would be created for the wealthy - those making over \$500,000 - who would face an 8.25% rate. The revenue generated from the two increases would be used to bolster income tax exemptions for middle income earners.