

UNDER THE DOME

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Joint Finance Committee Announces Budget Procedures

The co-chairs of the legislature's Joint Finance Committee announced they will work from the governor's recommendations on all agencies except the Department of Transportation as they review and modify agency budgets in executive sessions, set to start the first week of May. Republican leaders, particularly those in the Assembly, have for months said they were considering starting from a base budget for each agency, something the governor, and some Senate Republicans, have pushed back on. For the DOT, the Committee will entertain motions to amend the adjusted base rather than the recommendations of the governor, however, those recommendations will be offered to the Committee as a policy alternative.

JFC to Remove Non-Fiscal Policy in Governor's Budget

The co-chairs also announced their plans to remove non-fiscal policy items, 83 in all, that the Legislative Fiscal Bureau identified in the budget. In a press release, Sen. Alberta Darling and Rep. John Nygren said the items would instead be considered as standalone legislation. Noteworthy items that are set to be removed include Building Commission project contracting threshold changes, a report on occupational regulations and creation of an Occupational License Review Council, the elimination of 11 different boards and councils overseeing health professionals, various changes to school choice programs, and a proposal to eliminate a requirement for hours of instruction in public schools. The committee also plans to remove a proposed repeal of prevailing wage requirements and project labor agreements. Legislation is currently making its way through the legislative process to accomplish both. To see the JFC memo listing the 83 policy items, click [here](#).

Upcoming Session Days

The next floor period available for session days is May 2nd - May 11th.

Senate Approves Broadband Funding, High-Capacity Well Legislation

The state Senate approved legislation increasing broadband grant funding. The bill first passed on Tuesday, April 4th however, the Democrats objected to third reading and forced the chamber to take it up again the next morning. The majority party surprised many by approving a Democratic amendment that would limit the information that telecommunication providers are allowed to collect from customers. The Assembly will now review the amended bill, with the speaker saying they hope to take it up on the floor at a later date. The Senate also voted along party lines to approve a controversial bill that would ease the state's high-capacity well regulations. Democrats contend the bill will allow for the privatization of the state's water resources, while Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, one of the bill's co-authors, called the legislation measured and pro-agriculture. Fitzgerald also said the reforms were needed to reflect changes in an industry that has grown in size of operation, and to give farmers certainty.

HOPE Agenda Bills Clear Assembly

A series of bills aimed at addressing the state's heroin and opioid epidemic were approved by the state Assembly during a special session. Part of the HOPE Agenda, led by state Rep. John Nygren, the bills seek to expand access to opioid antagonists, bolster treatment and diversion programs, create new positions to fight drug trafficking, create a recovery charter school for high schoolers, and allocate additional funding for mental health programs in schools. The state Assembly was also in regular session that day, approving legislation that would make cheese the state's official dairy product, expand the settings in which dental hygienists can practice, and allow for the development of community paramedic programs in which Emergency Medical Services can operate in a non-emergency setting, under the medical direction of a physician, to provide treatment outside of a hospital. Another proposal to ease the process for Towns in Dane County to opt-out of county zoning requirements was considered as well, however, the Democrats used a procedural move to delay a final vote. The Assembly then reconvened and approved the measure after nearly two hours of debate.

Evers Cruises to Third Term as Schools Superintendent

State Superintendent Tony Evers easily defeated challenger Lowell Holtz in the spring election, garnering 70% of the vote and securing a third term. The win means Evers, a public school advocate and opponent of school choice expansion, will remain the only Democrat in meaningful statewide office. As State Superintendent, Evers leads the state Department of Public Instruction, which administers K-12 education policy, curriculum and programs, as well as state and federal aid for all of Wisconsin's 424 public school districts. Challenger Holtz had the support of many conservatives, in part for his strong support of choice expansion and opposition to common core standards, however, his campaign was never able to gain any real traction throughout the race. Speaking to reporters after his win, Evers pledged to stand up for what he called progressive issues, like keeping guns out of classrooms and supporting transgender rights, while continuing to work with Republican's on areas they are in agreement. Meanwhile, the majority of local school referendums placed before voters passed, with 40 approved and 25 rejected. Supreme Court Justice Annette Ziegler was also on the ballot and won a 10-year term on the state's highest court, running unopposed. Statewide turnout for the election was nearly 16%.

GOP Lawmakers Seek School Referendum Limits

A series of legislation is currently circulating that would limit school districts ability to go to referendum asking voters for increased funding. Under the proposals, referendums would need to be held during regular spring or fall elections, could only be sought by a district every five years, school districts could only vote to go to referendum at their annual meeting, and a general school aid penalty of 20% would be put in place for a school district that increases its revenue limit by referendum, while allowing a school board to rescind revenue limit increases approved by referendum. Another bill would require a school board to include in the referendum question the total amount of debt to be issued, the total amount of interest and related debt service costs to be incurred, the sum of the principal, interest and related debt service costs in a resolution adopted by the board. Proponents of the measures say they are needed to hold the line on property taxes and increase transparency, arguing referendums are being purposely scheduled during low turnout elections. Lawmakers have also argued the timing is right to limit referendums considering Governor Walker's proposed increase of more than \$600 million in his budget. Opponents argue the bills limit local control and would make it harder for schools to keep up with rising costs and address classroom needs. Voters have approved a record number of referendums in recent years, including 40 of the 65 that were on the ballot in last Tuesday's election.

Blue Lives Matter Legislation Debated

An Assembly committee on took testimony on proposed "Blue Lives Matter" legislation that would expand the definition of hate crime victims to include police officers. Currently, there are seven other categories under which hate crime protections are in place, including race, religion, color, gender and disability. Bill author state Rep. Dave Steffen said he legislation was needed to show support and protect law enforcement. Democrats on the committee questioned whether it would unfairly elevate an occupation and worsen relations between police and the community.