

UNDER THE DOME

May 22, 2017 | Volume 13, Issue 19

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](#)

UW System, Medicaid Budgets to be Considered

The Joint Finance Committee will review the UW System budget and medical assistance and Food Share programs when it meets this week. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have questioned the governor's proposed 5% tuition cut for UW students and are expected to nix the provision along with the \$35 million tied to it. The committee on Tuesday, will also consider the budgets of the Medical College of Wisconsin, economic support and child care in the Department of Children and Families, and transfers and facilities at the Department of Administration. On Thursday, they will take up the bulk of the Department of Health Services budget, including Medicaid and FoodShare programs, along with mental health and public health divisions. Finally, they will consider the proposed Capital Budget and Building Commission. The JFC is on pace to continue executive sessions into at least the beginning of June.

Sheriff Clark Headed to Trump Administration

Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clark announced he will leave office next month to take an appointment as an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Homeland Security. Clark will work in the department's Office of Partnership and Engagement as a liaison with state, local and tribal law enforcement and governments. A controversial, outspoken conservative, Clark was a strong supporter and surrogate for President Trump's campaign and has continued to defend him during the early months of his administration. Clark, serving his fourth term as sheriff, has come under fire from critics recently over his office's treatment of inmates at the county jail, including a spike in deaths there, the most recent being an inmate who died after water was shut off to his cell for a week. A grand jury this month recommended prosecutors file charges against jail staff but Clark has not been implicated. Governor Walker at a later date will appoint a successor to complete his term which ends in 2018.

State Unemployment Rate Continues to Fall

The state Department of Workforce Development released figures showing Wisconsin's unemployment rate in April stood at 3.2%, down 0.2% from March, and the lowest it's been since February of 2000. Between March and April, Wisconsin added more than 5,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector alone. The state's unemployment remained lower than the national rate, which held at 4.4% in April. Governor Scott Walker lauded the news, saying it is further evidence his administration is continuing to move Wisconsin forward while it continues to be a challenge finding people with the skills to fill jobs that employers have available. To address that, the state will continue pursuing an aggressive talent development agenda, DWD Secretary Ray Allen said in a release.

Upcoming Session Days

The next period available for session days is June 6th - June 30th.

Joint Finance Committee Recap

The third week of JFC budget voting wrapped up, with the committee again differing with the Walker administration on several proposals. The budget committee rejected Walker's proposed Technical College System tuition freeze, instead opting to increase financial aid by \$5 million, arguing they needed to target the dollars towards those with the most financial need. They also scrapped Walker's plan to change the performance funding formula at WTCS, opting for the current model. On taxes, the committee opted to slightly limit the homestead tax credit, while removing the governor's proposal to tie the tax credit to inflation. The JFC also shot down Walker's plan to eliminate the Labor and Industry Review Commission, which handles unemployment, worker's comp and civil rights cases. Finally, the committee approved the plan for the state to take over the Circus World Museum in Baraboo from the private foundation currently operating it, at a cost of \$1.2 million. The committee approved funding to maintain 21 positions at the Elections Commission, five more than the governor proposed. Federal dollars, available since 2002 to help fund agency operations, will run out over the 2017-19 biennium, requiring a new state commitment starting at \$2.9 million in the second year of the biennium. Another related motion adopted would cut in half the per diems for members of the Elections and Ethics commissions, in comparison to the 90% reduction proposed by the governor. Finally, they passed a motion that would change how sexually violent offenders are released back into the community, providing counties more flexibility in finding housing for them while also cutting off the option of sending them to other counties.

Walker Signals Run at GOP Convention, Majority of Activists Support Vukmir for U.S. Senate

Republican Party activists and elected officials gathered for their annual convention in Wisconsin Dells. Governor Walker told attendees that he's ready to run for a third term in 2018, however a final decision will not be announced until after the budget passes. On the eve of the convention, Walker announced the hiring of longtime aide, and former Republican Party of Wisconsin Executive Director, Joe Fadness, as campaign manager, while touting his grassroots army of volunteers as being crucial to his success. A spokesperson for the Democratic Party in response said Walker will not be able to convince Wisconsinites he's earned a third term, slamming the governor's record, arguing it has only helped wealthy special interests. Meanwhile, a straw poll conducted at convention by WisPolitics.com found 47% of respondents preferred state Senator Leah Vukmir as their pick for U.S. Senate in 2018 against incumbent Democrat Tammy Baldwin, followed by 14% for Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald and 12% for businessman Eric Hovde, both of whom were unable to attend the convention. Those polled also strongly back President Donald Trump, with 56% strongly approving and 35% approving. State GOP officials said roughly 800 delegates, alternates, and guests had registered for the convention. Other elected officials speaking included House Speaker Paul Ryan, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, Senate President Roger Roth, Treasurer Matt Adamczyk, Attorney General Brad Schimel, and Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch.

Democrats Circulate Health Care Protection Package

In response to efforts on federal health care reform by Republicans in Congress, a package of legislation was unveiled by Democratic lawmakers Sen. Jon Erpenbach and Rep. Daniel Riemer to provide the state with authority to maintain consumer protections they believe are in jeopardy at the federal level. Dubbed the Health Care Protection Package, the bills would prohibit lifetime and annual limits under health insurance plans, prohibit excessive rate setting by insurers based on preexisting conditions, require coverage for preventive services under health plans, along with coverage of certain essential health benefits, and would maintain access to reimbursements to family planning providers in the state's MA program. Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling praised the bills while calling out Governor Walker for following President Trump's lead on health care, instead accusing him of supporting efforts to limit access to care. Walker initially told reporters he would consider using the authority under the federal legislation, pending in the Senate currently, allowing states to opt out of some of the Affordable Care Act coverage requirements for people with preexisting conditions, but has since clarified he is committed to ensure coverage is maintained.

WEDC Audit Released

The Legislative Audit Bureau released a new audit of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) showing the agency is making improvements with its handling of state dollars but is still failing to adequately track the jobs it creates and retains. The report found the WEDC didn't contractually require grant and loan recipients to submit information that would allow it to determine those figures accurately. The WEDC's uncollectable loan balance has also increased, according to the audit, from \$1.3 million in December of 2014 to December of 2016. GOP Senator Rob Cowles, co-chair of the Joint Audit Committee, released a statement saying a cloud will remain over the agency until they can accurately verify data being received from award recipients, while acknowledging they've made progress on other fronts. The agency has implemented all of the previous audit recommendations relating to how it administers its 34 different grant, loan and tax credit programs. WEDC CEO Mark Hogan said he welcomed the most recent recommendations and looks forward to implementing them.

AG Files Brief on Redistricting Lawsuit

Attorney General Brad Schimel filed a brief with the U.S. Supreme Court arguing against a three-judge panel decision handed down last year that overturned state Assembly district maps they found to be unconstitutional. Schimel is arguing the plaintiff's core argument that redistricting should be based on an efficiency gap, and the percentage of Republican and Democratic voters in each district should be a primary consideration, would lead to a hodgepodge of social science measures and result in chaos as maps across the country are challenged by the minority party based on differing results and different metrics. Earlier this year, Republican lawmakers hired law firms to represent the legislature's interests in the ongoing court battle over the legislative district maps drawn by the GOP in 2011. The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to take up the case sometime later this year.