

# CAPITOL UPDATE

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## State Budget Includes Many WJC Priorities

The long-awaited 2007-09 state budget was signed into law by Governor Doyle on Friday October 26, 2007. It is the second longest budget delay in Wisconsin history, with only the 1971-73 budget taking longer (it passed the Legislature on October 27, 1971). On October 23, the budget passed the Assembly on a bipartisan 60-39 vote and the Senate on an 18-15 straight party line vote. Governor Doyle used his veto sparingly, which was as expected given that his administration was very involved in crafting the compromise between the Democratic-controlled Senate and the Republican-controlled Assembly.

As always, WJC closely monitored developments related to the state budget. Please see page 2 for a summary of some of our priority issues.

## Divestment Update: Sudan and Iran

The Wisconsin Jewish Conference supports legislation that would require the State's public employee retirement plans to divest assets that are currently invested (and prohibit future investments) in companies doing business in Sudan and in Iran. The effort is aimed at applying financial pressure on those countries to end behavior seen as violating international standards, such as the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan and support for terrorism by Iran.



Credit: International Rescue Committee

### Divestment in Wisconsin

Companion legislation has been introduced by Representative Fred Kessler (D-Milwaukee) and Senator Sheila Harsdorf (R-River Falls) in the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate that would require the State of Wisconsin Investment Board (SWIB) to divest assets in certain companies that do business in Sudan. The bill would affect companies that: 1) have business operations involving contracts with, or the provision of supplies or services to, the government of Sudan (not including the regional government of southern Sudan) or entities related to the government of Sudan if more than 10 percent of the company's revenues or assets linked to Sudan involve oil-related activities, mineral extraction activities, or power production activities; 2) is complicit in the Darfur genocide; or 3) supplies military equipment within Sudan.

Since its introduction in February, there has been little action. The Assembly Committee on Financial Institutions has not taken any action on

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## Senate Democrats Change Leadership

Senator Russ Decker (D-Weston) replaced Senator Judy Robson (D-Beloit) as Senate Majority Leader on the day after the Legislature passed the state budget. Decker said he has been considering the move for "several weeks."

Following the change in leadership, Decker appointed Senator Mark Miller (D-Monona) to Co-Chair of the Joint Finance Committee and replaced Senator Robert Jauch (D-Poplar) with Senator Robson on the committee. He also appointed Senator Julie Lassa (D-Stevens Point) to take his Finance seat. Senator Roger Breske (D-Eland) was then elected to replace Miller as Democratic Caucus Chair.



## WJC State Budget Priorities

The 2007-09 biennial budget highlights of particular interest to the Wisconsin Jewish Conference:

### Health Care

- Maintain Wisconsin's **Medical Assistance Program** without cuts in benefits, more stringent eligibility rules or higher recipient cost-sharing requirements.
- Approval of the Governor's statewide **Family Care expansion** initiative.
- **Family Care advocacy**—Provide funding for the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) to contract with an organization to provide ombudsman advocacy services to Family Care enrollees who are under age 60. Also, the Board on Aging and Long Term Care will add one ombudsman position to advocate for persons in Family Care who are age 60 or older.
- Approval of the Governor's **BadgerCare Plus** initiative.
- Require DHFS to request a federal waiver to provide **Medical Assistance to childless, non-disabled adults**.
- Continues to provide state funding for private **family planning** health centers and Medicaid providers; preserves the Medicaid Family Planning Waiver program, and expands income eligibility slightly, to 200 % of the poverty level (but does not include the proposal to extend it to men).
- A \$1.00 increase in the per pack **cigarette tax**.
- 1.5% increase in Medical Assistance reimbursement **rates for personal care and home health services** in the second budget year that begins on July 1, 2008. This is part of an increase of over \$17.6 million in state and federal funds for personal care and other non-institutional providers.

### Transportation

- Provide a 2.0% annual increase for **elderly and disabled transportation** aid to counties.

### Children and Families, Child Care and Education

- Create **new Department of Children and Families** to improve coordination of services for children. Several DWD and DHFS programs would be part of the new department.
- **Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program** funding is increased by \$65 million more than the Governor's original budget. The budget does not authorize waiting lists, and it does not change eligibility levels. Child care provider payment rates are frozen at 2006 levels. There are no statutory changes to the absence policy or family co-payments. A proposed cap on co-pay increases is removed.
- Increase **foster care rates** by 5 percent in January 2008 and an additional 5 percent in January 2009.
- Provide 8.1% increase in **special education** funding.
- Provide an increase of \$27 million for smaller class sizes in elementary schools through the **SAGE** program.
- \$21 million is added for a new aid appropriation for **high poverty school districts**.
- Provide **Milwaukee Public Schools** \$10 million per year for grants to improve pupil academic performance (beginning in 2008-09).
- Increase **school breakfast reimbursement** rates by 5 cents per breakfast.

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## WJC Joins Jewish Advocates from Across the Nation in Washington



In October, WJC Executive Director Michael Blumenfeld, along with Assistant Director of the Milwaukee Jewish Council for Community Relations Barbara Beckert participated in the United Jewish Communities' 2007 Government Affairs Institute in Washington, D.C. The agenda included visits to legislators' offices to lobby on the following priority issues.

**Americans with Disabilities Restoration Act of 2007:** In the 17 years since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) there has been a lot of progress for people with disabilities. However, due to several Supreme Court decisions that narrow the ADA's scope and have eroded its protections, problems remain, especially in employment. This legislation seeks to reverse several court decisions in this area.

**State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP):** Created in 1997, SCHIP currently provides health insurance for 6.6 low-income children who are not eligible for Medicaid. Wisconsin's program is called BadgerCare. This session, Congress passed a SCHIP reauthorization bill that would expand the program to approximately 4 million additional children, as well as providing dental coverage and adding mental health parity. However, President Bush vetoed the legislation. The advocates lobbied for an override of the President's veto.

**Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act of 2007:** This legislation seeks to meet the needs of millions of Americans with long-term care needs by creating a voluntary program to prevent people from being prematurely placed into institutions and spending-down into poverty to pay for long-term care. Funded through voluntary payroll deductions, CLASS would provide voucher payments to recipients to spend on long-term care. The payments are designed to empower consumers by enabling them to control what services they get, how, where, and from whom. The amount is based on the level of impairment of the recipient.

**The Public Good IRA Rollover Act of 2007:** This proposal would extend and expand current law regarding charitable giving through IRA rollovers.

**Mental Health Parity:** Currently there are two bills in Congress that would establish national requirements for parity for mental health and substance abuse benefits in health insurance policies. With the best chance of such legislation passing in years, we emphasized parity's importance to Wisconsin's Jewish community.

## WJC Budget Priorities

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### Courts and Legal Services

- Provide increased funding for state reimbursement to counties for **court interpreter services**. Modify statutory language to require that a court, in all criminal and civil proceedings, provide an interpreter for a party or witness who has limited English proficiency, regardless of indigence.
- Provide \$1 million in a first time appropriation for grants to programs that provide **civil legal services** to low income Wisconsin residents.

### Items Not Included in the Final Budget

- The Senate's "Healthy Wisconsin" comprehensive health care reform plan to provide universal coverage.
- Assessment on hospitals' gross revenue.
- Provide a cost-of-living increase in limits on health insurance benefits for mental health services.
- Provide cash assistance under the W-2 program to unmarried pregnant women who cannot work due to an at-risk pregnancy.



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Adrian Cohen  
Robert Friebert  
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## Twenty-Fifth Annual Jerusalem Conference of Mayors in Jerusalem, Israel



From October 14-17, 2007, Wisconsin Mayors Dave Cieslewicz of Madison and James Schmitt of Green Bay attended the 25th Annual Jerusalem Conference of Mayors, in Jerusalem, Israel. Mr. Cieslewicz and Mr. Schmitt were two of only six other mayors from the United States attending the conference. The gathering brought together over 60 mayors from the United States and other countries to exchange views and experiences relating to significant urban problems.

The 25th Conference of Mayors was co-sponsored by U.S. Conference of Mayors and the American Jewish Congress Council for World Jewry and conducted with the cooperation and support of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

## Sudan and Iran Divestment Efforts

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the Assembly version (Assembly Bill 124), while the Senate Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, Biotechnology and Financial Institutions held a hearing on the Senate companion (Senate Bill 57) but has not voted to send it on for a vote on the Senate floor.

Regarding Iran, no bill has been introduced yet. However, the WJC is working to have a bill introduced this session.

### Divestment Nationally

Congress is considering separate bills dealing with divestment in Sudan and Iran. However, the Sudan effort is opposed by the Bush administration which sees it as interfering with presidential foreign policy.

Meanwhile, 21 states have initiated some form of divestment from companies who do business with, or in, Sudan. In early November, Massachusetts became the 21st state to do so and will divest \$54 million in eight companies said to support Sudan.

In mid-October, California joined Illinois and Florida in prohibiting their pension funds from investing in companies with active business in Iran. A dozen other states are considering the adoption of such policies. Opposition to the Iran-related measures is stronger due to the larger amounts of holdings involved.

### THE WISCONSIN JEWISH CONFERENCE:

- Serves as a clearinghouse to address important public policy issues
- Actively continues efforts to preserve the separation of church and state
- Works with local communities to respond to acts of discrimination and anti-Semitic incidents
- Monitors legislative activity and engage in coalition building