

CAPITOL UPDATE

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 1

SPRING 2007

2007 Marks 20th Anniversary of WJC

For twenty years, the Wisconsin Jewish Conference has been protecting and advancing the interests of our statewide Jewish community. Sixteen communities have united through advocacy, community liaison, education and coalition building, to become a powerful legislative influence in Wisconsin.

In 1987, the WJC helped to create Wisconsin's hate crimes statute, significantly increasing the penalty for crimes motivated by racism or bigotry. Wisconsin's hate crimes statute was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court and upheld unanimously--this pioneering new statute provided the basis for all hate crime statutes nationwide from that point forward.

Just last year, WJC helped to defeat the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) and legislation allowing the concealed carrying of weapons. WJC fought for mental health parity and long term care. The WJC also worked to pass legislation prohibiting religious discrimination in public education.

The Wisconsin Jewish Conference has been successfully safeguarding the interests of our statewide community—for the last 20 years and for many years to come!

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It's Budget Time Again in Wisconsin



The process for enacting the state 2-year budget officially began on February 13 with the release of Governor Doyle's proposed budget. Doyle's proposal for the 2007-09 budget would spend \$57.7 billion in total dollars over the biennium, a 7.6% increase over the current budget. It would provide approximately \$1.8 billion to expand Medicaid, a \$450 million increase in school aids, \$225 million more for higher education, and a \$405 million increase for highway construction and maintenance. It also cuts \$80 million in other government spending.

The budget includes a new hospital tax (\$418 million), cigarette tax increase (\$550 million) and a new tax on oil companies (\$270 million). It also raises driver license fees by \$10 (from \$24 to \$34) and the annual vehicle registration fee by \$20 (from \$55 to \$75). There are also over \$51 million in new tax cuts.

Note: The 2007-09 biennium includes fiscal year (FY) 2008, which runs from July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008 and FY 2009, which runs from July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009.

WJC Monitoring State Budget

The Wisconsin Jewish Conference is closely monitoring many items in the Governor's proposed 2007-2009 state budget. The following list includes just a few of the specific proposals in Governor Doyle's budget that may be of interest to WJC members.

Budget Items of Interest to WJC

Health Care

Family Care Expansion: The Governor recommends increasing funding to expand the Family Care program beyond its current scope by increasing the number of aging and disability resource centers (ADRCs) and care management organizations (CMOs) in the state. The Governor proposes funding for additional ADRCs so that the percentage of state residents who have access would increase from 40% to 75% by the end of the biennium. Additional funding for CMOs is projected to increase FamilyCare enrollees from 10,300 to 27,200 over the two-year period.



Medicaid Expansion for Childless Adults: The Governor recommends expanding Medicaid coverage to childless adults who are otherwise ineligible for the program, as allowed by new federal laws and policies.

BadgerCare: The Governor recommends expanding the BadgerCare program to make coverage available to all Wisconsin children.

Health Care Trust Fund: The Governor recommends creating a health care quality trust fund with revenues from tobacco tax increases, hospital assessments, interest income from the permanent endowment fund and a one-time transfer of \$175 million from the injured patients and families compensation fund. The health care quality trust fund will assist in funding a variety of health care quality improvement activities, including E-Health activities, hospital provider rate increases, noninstitutional provider rate increases, tobacco control activities, BadgerCare Plus expansion for childless adults and other Medicaid costs.

Cigarette and Tobacco Tax Increase: The Governor recommends increasing the tax on cigarettes by \$1.25 per pack and increasing the tax on tobacco products by 40.6 percentage points to fund smoking cessation programs and health care initiatives.

Managed Care Pilots for Children's Long-Term Care: The Governor recommends providing funding to support activities to develop managed long-term care pilot programs serving children with disabilities.

Community Aids: The Governor approved the DHFS recommendation to increase funding for community aids at \$135,500 in each budget year. Essentially, Community Aids is receiving flat funding and will maintain the base 2006 level of funding.

Mental Health Parity

Coverage for Mental Health and Substance Abuse: The Governor recommends increasing the minimum annual amount of insurance coverage that is provided for inpatient, outpatient and transitional treatment of mental health and substance abuse problems. The minimum would increase to \$20,250 for inpatient treatment, \$3,450 for outpatient treatment and \$5,200 for transitional treatment. In addition, the WJC continues to work in coalition to develop a legislative proposal this session to require full parity between standard medical benefits and mental health/substance abuse benefits in private health insurance policies.

Budget Items of Interest to WJC

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Transportation

Elderly and Disabled Transportation Aids: The Governor recommends increasing funding for elderly and disabled transportation aids to by two percent in each budget year.



Education

SAGE: The Governor recommends increasing funding for the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) class-size reduction program. The additional funding will be used to fully fund the estimated cost of the SAGE program at a higher reimbursement level. The Governor further recommends increasing funding to allow five more schools to join the SAGE program in fiscal year 2009.

School Breakfast: The Governor recommends increasing funding to support an increase in the school breakfast reimbursement rate and to fully fund anticipated participation in the program. The rate will increase from 10 cents to 15 cents per breakfast served by public and private schools participating in the school breakfast program and will eliminate the proration of payments to schools.

Milwaukee School Choice Auditor: The Governor recommends providing funding and position authority for an additional auditor position for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program to ensure that participating schools comply with state statutes and rules, and to address the increased work load associated with increasing enrollment in the program. The new position will be funded by assessing a fee on all schools participating in the program.

Court Interpreters

The Governor recommends increasing state reimbursement to counties for court interpreter services. Also, the proposal expands interpreter services by requiring that a court always provide an interpreter for anyone with limited English proficiency, regardless of indigence. Under current law, interpreters are only provided to indigent persons in certain types of cases.

Children and Families

Creation of a New Department of Children and Families: The Governor recommends creating the Department of Children and Families to focus a cabinet-level agency exclusively on the safety, economic and social well-being of children and families.

Child Care/Wisconsin Shares: The Governor fills some of the deficit and recommends the following cost containment strategies for the under funded Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program:

- Attendance-based provider reimbursement for recipients who use less than 50 percent of their authorized child care hours.
- Decrease initial eligibility levels to 175 percent of the federal poverty level, with continuing eligibility for enrolled recipients up to 190 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Increase copayments by ten percent.
- Authorize the department to implement a child care waiting list in order to stay within its child care budget.

Social Service Grants for Milwaukee Organizations: The Governor recommends funding grants to Milwaukee organizations that provide gender-responsive mental health treatment and drug and alcohol abuse treatment to women with children, and to organizations that aid youth in making the transition from foster care to independent living. The proposal would provide \$300,000 in fiscal year 2009 for this initiative.

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Budget Items of Interest to WJC

Children and Families

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W-2 Contracts: Funding for the 2008-09 W-2 contracts include the following initiatives:

- Implement a Real Work Real Pay pilot project in three W-2 geographical areas, one of which will be in Milwaukee County.
- Extend the amount of time that parents can stay at home with their newborn children from 12 to 26 weeks.
- Provide a monthly cash benefit to pregnant women, with no other children, who are in the third trimester of a pregnancy and are not able to work because of a medically verified, at-risk pregnancy.

Joint Finance Sets Hearing Schedule

The Joint Finance Committee, which is responsible for amending the Governor's budget proposal and sending to the full Legislature, has released its schedule of public hearings on the budget.

Milwaukee 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
 Tuesday, March 20.
 UWM Student Union -- Wisconsin Room
 (2nd Floor)
 2200 East Kenwood Boulevard
 Milwaukee, WI 53201

De Forest Area 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
 Wednesday, March 21.
 Arlington Agricultural Research Station
 Public Events Facility
 N695 Hopkins Road
 Arlington, WI 53911

Chippewa Falls 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 Tuesday, March 27.
 Chippewa Falls County Courthouse
 Assembly Room (Lwr Level - Rms 1 & 3)
 711 North Bridge Street
 Chippewa Falls, WI 54729

Prairie du Chien 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 Wednesday, April 4.
 Prairie du Chien High School
 Auditorium
 800 E. Crawford Street
 Prairie du Chien, WI 53821

Rhineland 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 Wednesday, April 11.
 Nicolet College
 Learning Resource Center -- Theatre
 5634 College Drive (Off of County Hwy. G)
 Rhineland, WI 54501

Green Bay 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
 Thursday, April 12.
 National Railroad Museum
 Lenfestey Center
 2285 South Broadway



Chair: Joel Pittelman
 Co-Chair: Mark Laufman

Past Chairs:
 Doris Chortek
 Daniel Chudnow
 Adrian Cohen
 Robert Friebert
 James Fromstein
 Mark Laufman
 Tom Schneider

Executive Director:
 Michael Blumenfeld

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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*