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November 21, 2008
For Immediate Release

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Carpenter Announces Legislation to Limit County Executive Veto Power

Madison — State Senator Tim Carpenter (D-Milwaukee) announced today that that he is drafting legislation to limit the ability of county executives to use “creative” vetoes to create entirely new budget appropriations. Carpenter’s proposed legislation would limit a county executive’s veto authority to those powers granted by the state constitution to the governor.

Senator Carpenter was the lead Senate author of legislation last session that successfully placed on the state-wide ballot a referendum to change the constitution to limit the governor’s ability to stitch together words from two or more sentences to create new law, also known as the “Frankenstein veto” (2007 SJR 5). This change was approved by 71% of the voters in April of 2008. Senator Carpenter also previously voted for eliminating the governor’s use of the “Vanna White veto” (grabbing letters like the famed game show hostess from a budget appropriation to form new words).

Senator Carpenter announced this new legislation after Milwaukee county executive, Scott Walker, brazenly used such veto tactics on the latest county budget. “The voters of Milwaukee County, along with the voters of Wisconsin, have consistently expressed their displeasure at using vetoes to create entire new words and phrases that were not included in budget language. The people do not believe this is an appropriate use of executive budgetary authority” said Carpenter.

“I have consistently voted to limit both types of partial vetoes, under both Democratic and Republican administrations. This is not a partisan issue – it is a question of good government, and accountability to voters. An executive should not be able to suture together letters and words from a budget to create laws never considered by the people’s budget-writing representatives, whether such representatives sit in the state legislature or on a county board,” said Carpenter.

“I am particularly amazed that a county executive in Milwaukee would attempt such vetoes,” said Carpenter. “Milwaukee County voters have consistently expressed their distrust of the excesses of partial veto abuse. Asked on state-wide referendums to limit the Wisconsin governor’s veto powers, 65% of Milwaukee County voted to eliminate the Vanna White Veto and 66% voted to eliminate the Frankenstein Veto,” added Carpenter.

Senator Carpenter pointed out that prior to eliminating the Vanna White and Frankenstein veto, the veto powers of the governor and the county executives were equivalent. “My proposed legislation will return the harmony between the veto powers of governor and county chief executives. Additionally, it will ensure for the future that if the people of the state of Wisconsin change the veto powers of the governor that such power will once again be applicable to county executives.

Senator Carpenter will introduce the resolution to make the necessary changes to the state constitution when the legislature convenes early next year. In order to change the constitution, the resolution must pass two consecutive sessions of the legislature, and then be passed by a majority of the voters in a state-wide referendum