



State Representative

SCOTT R. JENSEN

98th District State Assembly

**Jensen Update - May 13, 2005****The Largest Stewardship Purchase in State History**

From my perspective, developing a balanced budget and reforming the operations of state agencies should go hand in hand. On Thursday, the Joint Finance Committee approved my amendment to fundamentally reform the activities of the state's oldest agency – the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL). As a result, we will be making the largest stewardship purchase in state history. In fact, it is larger than the three previous record purchases combined.

By way of background, the BCPL was created in 1848 for the express purpose of selling the 10 million acres of land that the state received from the federal government at the time of statehood. The proceeds from the sale of these lands were to be used to establish public schools, colleges and libraries. Presently, the BCPL still owns 77,755 acres of land in 34 Wisconsin counties. These land holdings are exempt from local property taxes.

The budget amendment I authored directs the BCPL to fulfill its Constitutional duties by selling the remaining land it holds to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) at the land's appraised value. In turn, the DNR would purchase the lands using Stewardship funds. Any BCPL lands deemed to not be in the long-term interests of the Stewardship Program could be sold, with the sale proceeds being used to reduce the state's Stewardship Program debt payments.

While protecting environmentally sensitive lands in perpetuity for the enjoyment of future generations was the goal of this amendment, there are many other positive outcomes. The sale of the BCPL's remaining lands will increase funds available for public libraries. When the now property tax exempt BCPL lands are sold to the DNR, the DNR will be required to make payments in lieu of taxes to local governments where the land is located. This will provide much needed property tax relief, particularly in Northern Wisconsin where the vast majority of BCPL lands are located.

My amendment streamlines state government, protects the environment, increases library aids and provides local property tax relief. Despite the initial skepticism of his spokesperson, I intend to work with the Doyle Administration to make sure this provision is included in the final budget.

Ending an Unfunded Mandate

One of the biggest complaints I hear from my local elected officials is the number of unfunded mandates imposed by the state on local governments. I am sympathetic to their concerns because the lack of state funding manifests itself through either reduced services or higher local property taxes. The problem of unfunded mandates has also become a larger issue as a result of legislative efforts to impose temporary and/or permanent restraints on state and local government spending.

This week, the Finance Committee voted to end the state's land use planning mandate commonly referred to as "Smart Growth." Under the state's Smart Growth law, local units of government must develop and adopt a comprehensive land use plan, based on state guidelines, for their community by January 1, 2010. Once approved, all local zoning decisions must reflect the adopted land use plan. To assist local communities in their land use planning, the state provides a small amount of funding through comprehensive planning grants. Not surprisingly, the costs to local governments greatly exceed the value of the state grants and number of grants requested exceeds the number of grants awarded leaving many communities to fund their land use planning through local property tax revenues.

I voted to end this unfunded state mandate because I believe that land use planning is a decision best made at the local level. Our actions will restore this function to the local units of government and free up approximately \$4 million in taxpayer funding that can be better spent on tax relief, our local schools or health care for the state's most vulnerable citizens.

Governor Doyle Endorses "Fake ID" Bill

Sadly, our worst fears about voter fraud in the City of Milwaukee in last November's elections appear to be true. This week, United States Attorney Steven Biskupic and Milwaukee District Attorney E. Michael McCann announced the preliminary results of their election fraud investigation. The lowlights included: more than 100 individual instances of suspected double-voting, voting in names of persons who likely did not vote, and/or voting in names believed to be fake; more than 200 felons cast illegal ballots; and the number of votes counted in the City of Milwaukee exceeded the number of persons recorded as voting by more than 4,500.

Once again, legislative Republicans used this information as evidence for the need of the Photo ID bill. This week, the state Senate, led by Senators Joe Leibham (R-Sheboygan) and Mary Lazich (R-New Berlin) approved the Photo ID bill with an amendment to stop felons from voting. The bill was approved on a bi-partisan 21-12 vote. I expect the state Assembly to adopt the improved Photo ID bill in the coming weeks.

Unfortunately, Governor Doyle has decided to ignore the improved Photo ID bill, and instead endorsed the "Fake ID" bill backed by Senate Democrat Leader Judy Robson (D-Beloit). Under the "Fake ID" bill, showing a Photo ID at the polls would be optional and a voter could show up on Election Day and vouch for themselves, as opposed to current law which requires a known elector to vouch for another elector.

I firmly believe that as more information about the "Fake ID" bill comes out, the honest law-abiding voters of Wisconsin will see this proposal for what it is -- a disingenuous effort to confuse and muddle the issue. Rest assured, we will continue to pressure Governor Doyle to do the right thing -- sign the Photo ID bill into law.

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