

# Jon Erpenbach: Seasonal unemployment changes hurting businesses and communities

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One thing you can always count on in Wisconsin is winter. Winter will come and with it for some businesses and employees a time when work simply cannot be done because of the weather. Recognizing that seasonal unemployment is different than getting fired from a job, Wisconsin law has allowed businesses to place a “winter hold” on their employees when the weather makes working impossible.

This hold means not only that businesses can keep the people that they have trained, but is also keeps employees from having to take a job they don't need just because they are required to accept a job or lose unemployment insurance. I am proposing a fix with colleagues that I hope will receive overwhelming support in the Legislature.

This issue came to my office through a listening session and played out in the real world a bit differently than I would have expected. A constituent from New Glarus works outside construction so every year he is seasonally unemployed. To keep busy and help his community, he volunteers significantly more in winter with the local fire and rescue which is an all-volunteer force. This gives a break to everyone else who puts their lives on hold to save the lives of their neighbors. Turns out he is not alone.

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Finding people willing to get up in the middle of the night to pull a neighbor from a

burning house, or a car accident, or suffering from a stroke is more and more difficult. The incentives for volunteer fire departments just are not there, and with an aging rural population this is truly an emergency care crisis. Last summer a Legislative Council Study committee worked to address this crisis and has proposed a set of bills to help rural Wisconsin. I will support each and every one of them and I hope my colleagues will too.

Missing from that list unfortunately is this bill, which I believe should have been included.

This issue is not just about volunteer emergency crews in rural Wisconsin, it is also about each and every business in rural and urban Wisconsin that wants to keep their employees they have trained and invested in. The change to prohibit a “winter hold” on employees was not made by the Legislature; it was made by the Department of Workforce Development and the Governor Walker administration. In 2015 this rule changed and we have heard from businesses and employers ever since how bad it is for business in Wisconsin.

Despite our advocacy to have the rule changed and outrage at the unemployment advisory council, the administration has failed to change this rule. That means we will have to try a law change again this year. I am hopeful other Legislators that represent rural areas will step up and cross party lines to support their local businesses and communities and support this change. Contact your state Legislators and ask them to support allowing a “winter hold” on employees to help your community and the businesses that keep it working.

For more information on seasonal unemployment changes and what they have meant for businesses, employees and emergency medical services contact my office at 608-266-6670 or 888-549-0027 or [sen.erpenbach@legis.wi.gov](mailto:sen.erpenbach@legis.wi.gov)

— *Erpenbach, D-Middleton, represents the 27th Senate District.*