

Rep. Allen: Assembly votes to bolster economy

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The Wisconsin State Assembly today passed a flurry of legislation during the final floor session of 2017. In addition to bills protecting crime victims and preventing human trafficking, state representatives took up several bills on economic and workforce reforms.

“One of the ongoing themes throughout this legislative session has been expanding economic opportunity and improving outcomes in the workforce,” said Rep. Allen. “These measures will help make Wisconsin safer, stronger, and more prosperous for decades to come.”

Some of the bills passed by the Assembly include SB 119, which will permit farmers to once again grow and process industrial hemp. Up through the 1950’s, industrial hemp was used to produce rope, textiles, and paper. Rep. Allen stated, “Expanding products and opening markets through industrial hemp will be good for Wisconsin agriculture and manufacturing.”

Representatives also had a heated debate on SB 48/AB 78, which permits public utilities to provide financial assistance to customers to replace lead service lines. Increased amounts of lead especially affect children, and can result in poorer school outcomes and lower lifetime pay. Direct and indirect costs to the U.S. are estimated at \$43 billion yearly. “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” said Rep. Allen, “and investment now actually saves costs and improves outcomes in the future.” The bill was amended by the Assembly and messaged back to the Senate for concurrence.

The Assembly also voted to reduce the required apprentice-to-journeyman worker ratio to one-to-one, with AB 508. The bill removes an artificial, protectionist barrier to help get more apprentices into skilled trades. “It is sad that opponents, beholden to union bosses, would intentionally get in the way of economic opportunity for so many for purely political reasons,” said Rep. Allen.

In changes to land use and pollution, the Assembly concurred in SB 173 to eliminate barriers to brownfields redevelopment, which will increase property values and spur economic activity. Brownfields are former industrial lands that have some degree of contamination. The reforms brought by this bill were identified as consensus recommendations of the Wisconsin Brownfield Study Group. “I’m pleased that divergent groups can come together to advance good environmental and economic development policy such as the Brownfields Redevelopment Reform,” indicated Rep. Allen