

# Sens. Bewley and Hansen: GOP passes on chance to protect taxpayers and fully address opioid crisis

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Contact:

Sen. Janet Bewley, [608-266-3510](tel:608-266-3510)

Sen. Dave Hansen, [608-266-5670](tel:608-266-5670)

MADISON – Republican leaders of the Wisconsin State Senate rejected an amendment that could have held pharmaceutical companies answerable for their role in the opioid epidemic that has ravaged Wisconsin families and communities.

State Senators Janet Bewley (D-Delta) and Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) put forward an amendment to Special Session Assembly Bill 5 calling on Attorney General Schimel to report to the Senate on the viability of joining at least two other states in bringing action against pharmaceutical companies that may have knowingly sold drugs without regard to their addictive qualities or impact on user's self-control.

“Wisconsin taxpayers are facing skyrocketing costs for opioid addiction treatment and prevention. If pharmaceutical companies minimized the addiction risks associated with their drugs, they should be held accountable.” Sen. Bewley said. “Taxpayers shouldn't be the only ones called on to bear the costs.”

The Senators noted that several states have brought action against major drug companies for downplaying the significant dangers of prescription opioids by marketing the drug as rarely addictive and a safe substitute for non-addictive pain medications.

“The owners of Purdue Pharmaceuticals are one of the 20 richest families in America and are worth over \$14 billion with much of that wealth coming from the sale of OxyContin. They should help pay to fix the damage their drug has caused in our state rather than expecting taxpayers to foot the bill,” said Hansen. “They certainly can afford it.”

The Republican Attorney General of Ohio and his Democratic counterpart in Mississippi, along with communities in Illinois, New York, and Washington State have joined efforts to hold manufacturers to account for their role in the opioid scourge. The Democratic amendment rejected today would have asked Wisconsin’s Attorney General to look into joining them. Senators Bewley and Hansen noted that their proposal was wholly permissive and would have called on the state’s legal counsel to report his expert legal opinion on whether these manufacturers should be pursued on behalf of Wisconsin taxpayers.

“This amendment would have put us on record that we will truly leave no stone unturned in our fight against opioid addiction,” Senator Bewley and Hansen said, noting that Purdue, just one of many manufacturers, settled a similar case filed by the state of Kentucky for \$24 million.

Special Session AB 5 allows authorities to indefinitely confine and require treatment for people who have demonstrated they are not able to control themselves as a result of habitual drug use. The bill passed the Senate today without inclusion of the amendment.