

Sen. Cowles: Four Cowles' bills for NE Wisconsin pass Senate

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MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after four bills he authored after hearing from constituents and area businesses passed the State Senate during today's floor period.

The first bill, [2021 Senate Bill 692](#), makes updates to [Wisconsin's Property Assessed Clean Energy \(PACE\)](#) program to allow for more projects to be funded, including electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, resiliency improvements to prepare for floods, energy reliability improvements such as battery storage or microgrids, and stormwater control measures – along with making other clarifications to the statutes. This legislation, authored with Representative Jeremy Thiesfeldt (R-Fond du Lac), was introduced based on stakeholder experiences from previously-financed projects, including many projects in Northeast Wisconsin. The companion to SB 692, [Assembly Bill 719](#), was voted out of committee and is available for action before the full Assembly.

“Local governments are constantly trying to find ways to partner with local businesses to promote economic development in their region, but few ways can be as effective as PACE and even fewer ways can happen without putting the taxpayers at risk. With the changes in Senate Bill 692, we can help to attach private financing for more beneficial projects to the property, not the person, helping to close more financing gaps and promote more cost-saving energy efficiency and alternative energy improvements, better preparation for severe weather events, and more EV charging station infrastructure which can drive consumers to local establishments.”

The second bill, [2021 Senate Bill 573](#), clarifies that those who own or lease and operate EV charging stations are not considered a public utility under Wisconsin law, which authorizes those entities to sell electricity to the public through charging stations under specified conditions. This legislation, authored with Representative Nancy VanderMeer (R-Tomah), was introduced after hearing from local businesses about their desires to meet customers' needs by installing EV charging stations at their establishments. The companion to SB 573, [Assembly Bill 588](#), was voted out of committee and is available for action before the full Assembly.

“EVs have been dramatically rising in popularity over the past several years, and while they still constitute only a small portion of vehicle registrations, the lack of public-facing EV charging stations throughout the state is impeding further growth of EV ownership and tourism by EV drivers in Wisconsin. A big reason for this lack of EV infrastructure is due to an outdated legal structure that prevents third-parties like gas stations, restaurants, and retail establishments from selling electricity to members of the public through an EV charging station.”

“Senate Bill 573 aims to provide the necessary legal structure for private industry to have confidence investing in EV infrastructure and increase the number of public-facing EV charging stations in Wisconsin. As a result of passing this legislation, we can spur more economic growth both through more EV sales and through more tourism from in-state and out-of-state EV drivers by eliminating range anxiety among EV owners.”

The third bill, [2021 Senate Bill 561](#), requires that condominium associations disclose financial records and certain other records to unit owners upon request. This legislation, authored with Representative Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay), was introduced after learning of the troubles of some residents in Northeast Wisconsin were having with their condo association and builds on the success of [2019 Wisconsin Act 168](#) which established a dispute resolution process between condo associations and unit owners. The companion to SB 561, [Assembly Bill 570](#), was voted out of committee and is available for action before the full Assembly.

“While many unit owners and condominium associations have strong and mutually-

beneficial relationships, unfortunately some of these relationships have soured, leading to frustration, mistrust, and even hardship for unit owners. Senate Bill 561 establishes the right of condo owners to access records about the financial standing of their condo association – an organization which they fund. By providing this ability, we can help to resolve disputes before they even arise by providing more accountability and transparency in association decisions and ensuring that Wisconsin condo owners have their basic property rights protected.”

The fourth bill, [2021 Senate Bill 703](#), specifies that companies requiring their contracted independent semi-truck drivers to have safety and technology upgrades does not result in that driver being classified as an employee of the company. This legislation, authored with Representative John Spiros (R-Marshfield), was introduced after some states began making employer-employee classifications over safety and technology upgrades, interrupting a large portion of the cargo movement capacity in those states as stakeholders worked to restore the status quo and clarify that these are not employer-employee relationships. The companion to SB 703, [Assembly Bill 691](#), was voted out of committee and is available for action before the full Assembly.

“Safety upgrades to semi-trucks are becoming common, but some states have experienced hiccups as companies that require contracted independent operators to have these upgrades have been deemed to have ‘employer-like controls’, leaving those companies on the hook for costs associated with employment and removing the flexibilities and freedoms that independent semi drivers choose and enjoy. By clarifying in Senate Bill 703 that these safety technologies do not make independent operators an employee, we can help to preserve this important professional relationship that allows thousands of independent operators to continue moving goods around the state and throughout the country while still improving safety for the motoring public.”