

# Dan Knodl: Keeping the Brewers in Wisconsin

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There has been a lot of back and forth in state government recently about how to fund American Family Field's maintenance. I am definitely in favor of keeping the Brewers in Wisconsin for as long as possible. However, there is a fiscally responsible way of accomplishing this task and maximizing the state's return on investment.

Currently, the State of Wisconsin is one of the principal owners of the stadium through the Southeast Wisconsin Professional Baseball Park District. A default on the Brewers' lease obligations would be detrimental to the state, as the Brewers are American Family Field's only tenant. The Brewers generate large amounts of revenue for the state—so much revenue that losing the Brewers would be a massive hit on not only southeastern Wisconsin but the state as a whole—an estimated \$666.5 million over the next 27 years. Now, I am not suggesting the state bails them out, but I am suggesting that we give them a deal that has the necessary strings attached to protect taxpayers.

The current proposal, which is authored by Senator Dan Feyen (R - Fond du Lac) and Representative Rob Brooks (R - Saukville), extends the Brewers' lease in Milwaukee by 27 years until 2050. It uses funds from state and local government as well as the Brewers themselves to pay for the upkeep, maintenance, and rehab of American Family Field. This proposal is still making its way through the legislative process, and it will probably look different by the time it is ready to be signed into law.

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First and foremost, I believe that any funds provided to the stadium must be less than the amount of income tax revenue generated by the team. According to the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, the state's net revenue under the proposal would be roughly \$242.9 million in income tax collections from the Brewers alone across the 27-year lease.

Another provision that would lift the burden off of taxpayers would be charging a "seat fee" for all events at American Family Field. This would ensure that those actually using the stadium would directly provide the needed revenue for upkeep and relieve some of the burden of taxpayers who do not attend events at the stadium. I would fully support including this requirement.

A third provision I would support would be requiring an audit of the Southeast Wisconsin Professional Baseball Park District's finances. It has recently been reported that tens of millions of dollars may be missing from their maintenance fund. This District was established in 1995 to oversee the construction of a new stadium and has been charged with overseeing the planning, financing, designing, constructing, commissioning, operating, and maintaining of American Family Field. Requiring an audit would be consistent with requirements we included for Lambeau Field's renovations.

I believe keeping the Brewers in Wisconsin is extremely important, not only because the organization has a rich history and millions of loyal fans, but also because the revenue that the team brings in benefits our wonderful state and economy. For that reason, any plan to finance infrastructure improvements must also be respectful of Wisconsin's taxpayers.

*-Knodl, R-Germantown, represents the 8th Senate District. He is chair of the Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections and Consumer Protection.*