

# CAPITOL UPDATE

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1  
SPRING, 2008



## 2007-2008 Legislative Session Comes to an End

The 2007-08 Wisconsin legislative session concluded on May 28, 2008. Bills that were not passed by both the Assembly and Senate and sent to the Governor are considered “dead” for this session. Any bill may be introduced again next session which begins in January 2009.

Although the session is now over, a special or extraordinary session may still be called at any time. For example, in March the Governor called the Legislature into special session to work on a budget repair bill to fill a \$652 million shortfall caused by lower than expected tax revenue thanks to the downturn in the economy. Each house passed their own bills to fill the shortfall, and legislative leadership and the Governor met to work out a compromise. The following page discusses the budget repair deal in more detail. In addition, there were special sessions on campaign finance reform and the Great Lakes Compact that have also been adjourned. The Compact passed the Legislature, but there was no action on campaign finance reform.

## Bill Specifying Human Trafficking as a Crime Signed into Law

Governor Doyle has signed into law a proposal introduced by Representative Suzanne Jeskewitz (R-Menomonee Falls) and Senator Spencer Coggs (D-Milwaukee) that specifies human trafficking and trafficking of a child as crimes in Wisconsin.

For the human trafficking offense, “trafficking” is defined as recruiting, enticing, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining an individual without the consent of the individual. Trafficking, or knowingly benefiting from trafficking, is a felony if an individual is trafficked for labor, services, or a commercial sex act and done by specified actions, including harming any individual, removing any identification document of any individual, extortion, and debt bondage. A person who is convicted is subject to a fine of up to \$100,000, imprisonment for up to 25 years, or both.

For the offense of trafficking of a child, any person who knowingly recruits, entices, provides, obtains, or harbors a child for commercial sex acts or sexually explicit performance, or who knowingly benefits from such activity, is guilty of a felony. A person who is convicted is subject to a fine of up to \$100,000, imprisonment for up to 40 years, or both.

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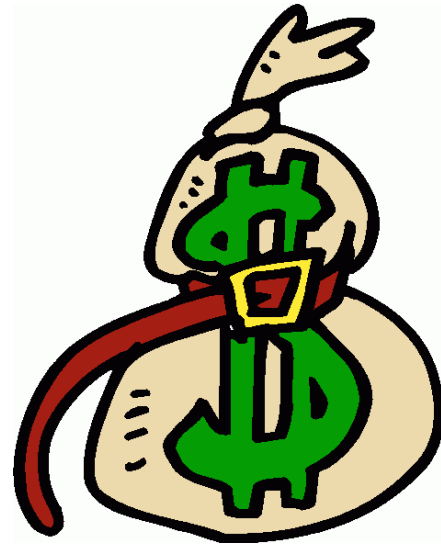


### Effort to Rename “Holiday Tree”

Assembly Joint Resolution 5, which would rename the decorated tree on display in the Capitol rotunda during the Christmas holiday season as the “Wisconsin State Christmas Tree,” passed the Assembly on December 11, 2007 (84-12). However, the resolution did not receive any consideration in the Senate, and it is now “dead” for the session. The resolution was introduced by Representative Marlin Schneider (D-Wisconsin Rapids) with no cosponsors.

## Budget Repair Bill Signed Into Law

In mid-February 2008, the Legislative Fiscal Bureau released revenue estimates that predicted a \$652.3 million state budget deficit at the close of the current biennium, which ends June 30, 2009. In response to this news, Governor Jim Doyle proposed a budget repair bill to fill the shortfall and called the Legislature into special session in mid-March to consider it. The bill was amended by both the Assembly and Senate, with each house passing very different versions. At that point, legislative leadership and the Doyle administration began several weeks of negotiations to produce a compromise budget repair bill. On Monday, May 12, Assembly and Senate leadership announced that a deal had been reached, and the plan passed both houses later that week.



On Friday May 16, Governor Doyle announced his vetoes of the budget repair bill. Regarding an issue of particular interest to WJC, he eliminated a provision to provide a property tax exemption for low-income housing, saying it was a laudable goal that needed a full public hearing and legislative debate. However, he let several provisions of interest stand. The final bill, as vetoed and signed by the Governor, includes the following:

**\$270 million in unspecified cuts to state agencies.** The Governor used his veto pen to increase the amount of cuts to state agencies from \$69 million to \$270 million. These cuts are not specified and will be determined by the Department of Administration.

**Youth camps.** Exempts non-profit youth camps from certain town sanitary district and town special assessments.

**Medical Assistance benefits funding reduction.** Reduce funding for Medical Assistance (Medicaid) benefits by \$24.4 million to reflect savings DHFS (renamed Department of Health Services, effective 7/1/08) is expected to be generated in the program without cutting eligibility requirements or services. Note that the total amount includes savings of \$10 million in General Purpose Revenue and will result in the loss of nearly \$14.4 million in federal matching funds. Thus, the provision reduces Wisconsin's budget shortfall by \$10 million, but will cost the program \$24.4 million when the federal funds are considered.

**Child care subsidies.** Provide \$18.6 million for direct child care subsidies under the Wisconsin Shares program. The money is for an anticipated shortfall in the program and covers holding of slots.

**Tobacco use control grants.** Increase funding for the grants by \$250,000 in 08-09. (Current base is \$15 million annually).





## 2007-2008 Cemetery/ End of Life Legislation

### **Assembly Bill 305 / 2007 Wisconsin Act 58**

AB 305, relating to the control of final disposition of certain human remains, was signed into law by the Governor as 2007 Wisconsin Act 58 on March 5th, 2008. This bill was introduced by Representative Samantha Kerkman (R-Genoa City) and Senator Mark Miller (D-Monona). Act 58 would allow individuals over the age of 18 to create a document called an "authorization for final disposition" that would outline their final requests regarding their funeral and the deposition of their remains. The document would also specify a list of individuals, in order of priority, who may control the disposition of the decedent's remains.

### **Assembly Bill 547 / Senate Bill 288 / 2007 Wisconsin Act 174**

AB 547 / SB 288 relate to the regulation of and registration requirements for certain cemetery authorities, cemetery associations, and cemetery merchandise. This legislation was introduced by Representative Dean Kaufert (R-Neenah) and Senator Jeff Plale (D-South Milwaukee). The Senate version, SB 288, was signed into law by the Governor as 2007 Wisconsin Act 174 on March 27th, 2008. Act 174 makes a number of changes in the laws governing cemetery associations and cemetery authorities in regard to trustees of a care fund and preneed trust funds, the licensure and registration of certain cemeteries, reporting requirements, the deposit and investment of care funds and preneed trust funds, the sale or encumbrance of cemetery land, and the regulation of warehouses. Many of these requirements do not apply to religious cemeteries unless the cemetery opts to become licensed.

### **Assembly Bill 186 / Senate Bill 92**

AB 186 / SB 92 would have created a sales and use tax exemption for maintenance equipment and supplies used exclusively by nonprofit cemeteries. This legislation was introduced by Representative Michael Sheridan (D-Janesville) and Senator Joseph Leibham (R-Sheboygan). Both bills were not acted on and died at the end of the legislative session.

### **Assembly Bill 298 / Senate Bill 151**

AB 298 / SB 151 would have permitted certain individuals to make written requests for medication for the purpose of ending their lives, but the proposal did not gain much traction. The authors were Representative Frank Boyle (D-Superior) and Senator Fred Risser (D-Madison). The Senate version received a public hearing but no committee vote. There was no action on the Assembly bill.

### **Assembly Bill 783**

AB 783 would have made several changes to the protocol of medical examiners, as well as cases in which an autopsy must be performed. This legislation was introduced by Representative Amy Sue Vruwink (D-Milladore). Although the bill passed out of committee it died without a vote on the Assembly floor.

### **CR 07-050: Rules Relating to Cemeteries**

These administrative rules address the licensure of cemetery authorities, cemetery salespeople and preneed sellers, as well as the filing of annual reports by cemetery authorities and preneed sellers. These rules were finalized and made effective on February 1st, 2008.

## Unsuccessful Efforts in the 2007—2008 Legislative Session

- **Mental Health/Substance Abuse Parity:** WJC, along with a coalition of mental health advocates, worked diligently on legislation to require health insurance plans to provide coverage for mental health and substance abuse treatment to the same extent that the plans cover physical ailments. While the legislation went further in the process than at any time over the past few sessions, it failed in both houses. Companion bills were introduced in the Assembly and Senate. The Senate bill (SB 375) was approved by the Health Committee, but it did not receive a vote after being referred to the Joint Finance Committee.
- **Ethnic Logos, Mascots and Names:** Two proposals were introduced during the 2007-08 legislative session that related to the use of ethnic names, nicknames, logos, and mascots by school boards. One of these bills would also have prohibited the Department of Natural Resources from using the word squaw in the name of a lake or stream. The bills died in committee at the end of the session.

## Legislative Comings and Goings

2008 will be an important election year in the State Legislature. All 99 Assembly seats and 16 of 33 Senate seats (even numbered districts) are up for election. Currently, Republicans hold a five seat majority in the Assembly (52-47) and the Democrats hold a three seat majority in the Senate (18-15).



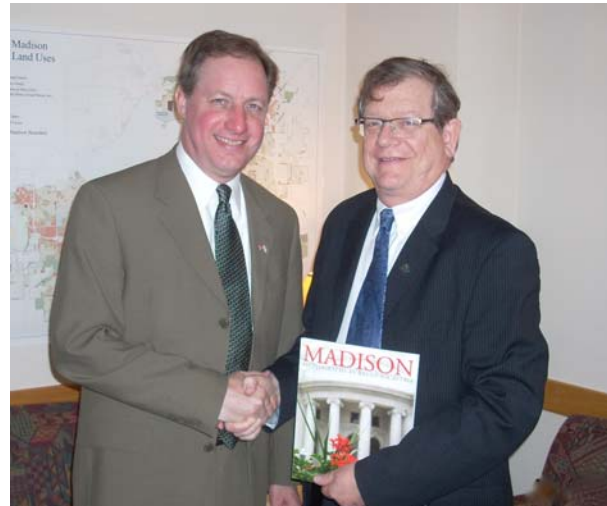
There have been several announcements from current legislators regarding the next election. In the Assembly, five Democrats and six Republicans have decided not run for reelection. Minority Leader Jim Kreuser (D-Kenosha) is running for Kenosha County Executive in a June special election. Representative Kreuser is unopposed and plans to give up his Assembly seat at the end of this year. Three other veteran Democrats – Representatives David Travis of Waunakee (81<sup>st</sup> district), Barbara Gronemus of Whitehall (91<sup>st</sup> district) and Frank Boyle of Superior (73<sup>rd</sup> District) – have announced plans to retire from the Assembly. Travis was first elected to the Assembly in 1978, Gronemus has served since 1982 and Boyle has represented his district since 1986. In addition, Representative Sheldon Wasserman (D-Milwaukee, 22<sup>nd</sup> district) will not seek re-election to the Assembly. He was first elected in 1994. He is leaving his seat to run for the 8<sup>th</sup> Senate District now represented by Republican Alberta Darling of River Hills.

For the Republicans, Representative Terry Musser of Black River Falls is giving up his 92<sup>nd</sup> District seat that he has held since 1984. Representatives Eugene Hahn of Cambria will not seek a 10<sup>th</sup> term representing the 47<sup>th</sup> District, and Carol Owens of Oshkosh will step down in the 53<sup>rd</sup> District where she has served since 1993. Representative Sheryl Albers of Reedsburg will not run again after representing the 50<sup>th</sup> District since 1991. In addition, Representatives Steve Wieckert of Appleton (57<sup>th</sup> District) and Suzanne Jeskewitz of Menomonee Falls (24<sup>th</sup> District) are retiring after each serving 12 years in the Assembly.

On the Senate side, there are currently two open seats. Senator Carol Roessler (R-Oshkosh) is retiring after a long career as a legislator. She has been in the Senate since 1987 and also served as the Representative for the 54<sup>th</sup> Assembly District from 1983-1987. In addition, Senator Roger Breske (D-Eland) is leaving his northern Wisconsin seat after Governor Doyle appointed him as Railroad Commissioner. Senator Breske has represented the 12<sup>th</sup> District since he won a special election in 1990. The 12<sup>th</sup> District seat will likely be one of the most hotly contested Senate races in November.

## Consul Barukh Binah Visits Madison

The Wisconsin Jewish Conference coordinated a visit from Mr. Barukh Binah, the Consul General to the Midwest of the State of Israel, to Madison on April 28th, 2008. During his visit, the Consul met with Wisconsin Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin and Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz. The Consul also had an interfaith dialogue lunch with local representatives from a variety of faiths to answer their questions and discuss various topics with them.



## WJC Hosts Israeli Legal Delegation

Also in April, the Wisconsin Jewish Conference hosted an Israeli delegation of two lawyers and a judge when they visited Madison. The delegation, along with members of the Madison and Milwaukee Jewish communities, attended oral arguments of the Wisconsin Supreme Court and afterwards had a meeting with Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson. The delegation then had lunch with several members of the Madison Jewish community who are lawyers. They also met with State Representative Gary Sherman (D- Port Wing) and with Wisconsin Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen.

Above: Delegation with Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen



Above: Delegation with Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson



Above: Delegation with State Representative Gary Sherman

Chair: Open  
Co-Chair: Mark Laufman

Past Chairs:  
Joel Pittelman  
Doris Chortek  
Daniel Chudnow  
Adrian Cohen  
Robert Frieber  
James Fromstein  
Mark Laufman  
Tom Schneider

Member Communities:

Antigo  
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Beloit  
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Janesville  
Kenosha  
La Crosse  
Madison  
Manitowoc  
Marshfield  
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## Darfur & Iran Divestment Update



In June, the Wisconsin Jewish Conference Board of Directors voted to support legislation that would require the State's public employee retirement plans to divest assets that are currently invested (and prohibit future investments) in companies doing business in Sudan or in Iran. The effort is aimed at applying financial pressure on those countries to end behavior seen as violating international standards, such as the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan and support for terrorism by Iran.

Companion bills that would require the State of Wisconsin Investment Board (SWIB) to divest assets in certain companies that do business in Sudan failed in the 2007-08 session. The Assembly Committee on Financial Institutions did not take any action on the Assembly version (Assembly Bill 124), while the Senate Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, Biotechnology and Financial Institutions held a hearing on the Senate companion (Senate Bill 57) but did not vote to send it on to the Senate floor.

However, late in the session the Senate passed a non-binding resolution that called on the State of Wisconsin Investment Board to aggressively petition companies involved in the oil, power, mining, and defense sectors of Sudan to cease ongoing business operations within Sudan and to exclude companies from its portfolio that fail to respond positively to its request to cease ongoing business operations within Sudan.

Regarding Iran, the WJC is reviewing proposed bills, resolutions and enacted legislation from other states while beginning to approach legislators who may be interested in taking the lead in introducing legislation in Wisconsin during the next legislative session that begins in January 2009.

### **THE WISCONSIN JEWISH CONFERENCE:**

- *Serves as a clearinghouse to address important public policy issues*
- *Actively continues efforts to preserve the separation of church and state*
- *Works with local communities to respond to acts of discrimination and anti-Semitic incidents*
- *Monitors legislative activity and engage in coalition building*