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## Capitol Connection

By Senator Joe Leibham

### ~ One Memorable Weekend ~

While most Wisconsinites were enjoying the Memorial Day weekend by attending veteran's events and spending time with their families, the State Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance (JCF) was conducting a curious Saturday voting session on the 2009-11 state budget. Such a meeting on a holiday weekend is an extremely rare occurrence, especially in a state where we pride ourselves on conducting business in an open and honest fashion.

Any time a legislative committee conducts a voting session on a weekend or holiday, when citizens are so busy with other activities, it ultimately raises questions as to whether the members of that committee are seeking to hide something. While this may or may not be the case, I wanted to inform you of some of the budget provisions that the JCF voted to approve on the Saturday of the Memorial Day Weekend.

- **Unionizing home health care** – Require that all qualified providers of individual in-home health care services in Wisconsin be subject to unionization.
- **Welfare fraud** – Reject a proposal to make welfare fraud a felony.
- **Prevailing wage** – Substantially expand Wisconsin's prevailing wage laws to, among several other things, lower the state prevailing wage threshold from \$200,000 to \$25,000 and apply the law to private projects receiving more than \$1 million in direct public funding.
- **Fines for pharmacists** – Specify that a pharmacist who refuses to distribute contraceptives be subject to a state-imposed fine of \$250 - \$2,500.
- **Garbage tax increase** – Increase the garbage tax, or "recycling tipping fee", by \$3/ton. This is 300 percent above and beyond what the Governor had requested and amounts to a tax increase of \$16.8 million.
- **Condoms for boys and men** – Expand the Medicaid Family Planning Waiver program to allow for the distribution of condoms and other contraceptives to boys and men ages 15-44.
- **Vehicle title fee** – Adopt the Governor's proposal to eliminate the sunset of the Vehicle Environmental Impact Title Fee, which had been scheduled to terminate at the end of 2009.

In addition, late in the day on Friday, the JCF approved the following:

- **In-state tuition for illegal immigrants** – Allow illegal immigrants who have been in Wisconsin for at least three years to receive in-state tuition rates at UW System schools and Wisconsin technical colleges if the individual provides an affidavit that he/she will file an application for a permanent resident visa.
- **Domestic partner benefits** – Require taxpayers to provide retirement and group health insurance benefits to the same-sex partners of state employees. The JCF added that, "The Legislature finds that it is in the interests of the citizens of this state to establish and provide the parameters for a legal status of domestic partnership."

While it is not specifically against the law for the JCF to deliberate these proposals on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, Wisconsin residents have a reasonable expectation that state business will be conducted in a manner that is respectful of the people and our open government tradition. Why did the Democrats, who control the Committee, feel they needed to vote on these items out of the regular public spotlight?

I do not support these provisions. But even if I did, I do not believe it is in the best interest of good governance to have these discussions and votes take place in this fashion. Conducting budget business on a holiday weekend casts a shadow over everything that was passed that day. This was definitely not a "Memorable" weekend for good government in Wisconsin.

As always, it has been a pleasure communicating with you. Please remember to communicate with me and share your input by calling 888-295-8750, writing to me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707-7882, or by e-mailing me at [Sen.Leibham@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Sen.Leibham@legis.wi.gov). You can also log on to the 9<sup>th</sup> Senate District on-line office at [www.leibhamsenate.com](http://www.leibhamsenate.com).

It is an honor representing the residents of the 9<sup>th</sup> District in the State Senate.