

WPA Legislative Update – September 2017

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Wisconsin Biennial Budget Bill Gets Final Approval

After more than two months of delay, Governor Walker signed Assembly Bill 64, the 2017-19 biennial budget bill, on September 21, 2017 after making 99 line-item vetoes.

Prior to review by the Governor, the Wisconsin State Assembly passed the budget with a 57-39 vote after almost 11 hours of debate and the rejection of all 19 amendments offered by Democratic Representatives. Five Republicans, Representatives Scott Allen, R-Waukesha, Janel Brandtjen, R-Menomonee Falls, Bob Gannon, R-West Bend, Adam Jarchow, R-Balsam Lake, and Joe Sanfelippo, R-New Berlin, joined all of the Assembly Democrats in voting against the budget on the Assembly floor.

Final passage of the bill in State Senate was uncertain right up to the final vote, as Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, tried to persuade three of his Senate colleagues, Senators Chris Kapenga (R-Delafield), Steve Nass (R-Whitewater) and Duey Stroebel (R-Saukville) to support the bill. These three Senators eventually voted with all but one Republican Senator to pass the budget 19-14. No amendments were adopted. Senator Dave Craig (R-Big Bend) was the only Republican to join all Senate Democrats in voting against the bill.

Earlier in the day when the Senate took the floor, Governor Scott Walker reportedly promised to use his veto pen immediately to veto several provisions that were key to securing “yes” votes from Kapenga, Nass and Stroebel.

The Governor used his veto to immediately move up a repeal of the prevailing wage on state projects and to adjust K12 funding. According to the Governor’s press release, “The vetoes improve the general fund balance by \$16.5 million in the current biennium and by an estimated \$71 million in the 2019-21 biennium.”

Budget Provisions of Interest to Wisconsin Farmers:

Transportation Budget Funding. After intense debate over transportation funding, the final transportation budget would rely on \$402 million in borrowing and the DOT would be required to eliminate 200 jobs over the next two years. There would also be a new fee on hybrid vehicles (\$75) and electric cars (\$100) to generate additional transportation revenue over the biennium.

Repeal of IOH Sunset. The budget bill sent to the Governor would eliminate the January 1, 2020 sunset provision related to the Implements of Husbandry (IOH) / Agricultural Commercial Motor Vehicle (Ag CMV) no-fee permit program. This repeal of the sunset was supported by Wisconsin agriculture groups.

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants. The budget maintains funding of \$500,000 over two years for producer-led watershed grants. The current program was created last budget and

was well-received by farmers and communities committed to nonpoint source pollution abatement. Fourteen producer-led watershed protection grants were issued in 2016.

Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium (WLIC). Wisconsin's livestock premises registration law requires anyone who keeps, houses or co-mingles livestock to register their premises with the non-profit Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium (WLIC). The WLIC maintains the livestock premises information, which is key to protecting animal health and market access. The importance of this program was recently demonstrated by DATCP's rapid response during the avian influenza outbreak in 2015. The WLIC is funded at \$500,000 over the 2017-19 biennium (or \$250,000 per year).

Additional Staff for DNR CAFO Program. Wisconsin farmers have expressed continued support for additional staff and positions at DNR to review and respond to WPDES permits for CAFOs. This budget provides an additional \$114,600 annually for two full-time positions assigned to work on wastewater permitting activities for concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).

Funding for High Capacity Well Studies. The budget bill provides \$400,000 from the DNR's environmental fund to conduct the hydrologic evaluation and modeling of the impacts of high capacity wells on specific areas designated in 2017 Wisconsin Act 10. Under that legislation, the DNR "...shall evaluate and model the hydrology of Pleasant Lake in Waushara County, Plainfield Lake and Long Lake in the designated study area, and any other navigable stream or navigable lake located in the designated study area for which the department seeks to determine whether existing and potential groundwater withdrawals are causing or are likely to cause a significant reduction of the navigable stream's or navigable lake's rate of flow or water level below its average seasonal levels."