



STATE REPRESENTATIVE JEFF SMITH

93RD ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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REPORT FROM THE CAPITOL

Committees 2007-08

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Gov. Jim Doyle congratulates Rep. Smith after signing one of Rep. Smith's bills into law.

REPORT FROM THE CAPITOL 2008



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Hello!

As the legislative session comes to a close, I want to thank you, once again, for allowing me to serve as your representative in the State Assembly.

In this Report from the Capitol, I want to share with you some of the legislation we worked on, what we were able to accomplish, and some things that the clock ran out on.

I was pleased that we were able to finally complete the budget, and there were a number of good things included in the budget for the Chippewa Valley.

The budget agreement included:

- ✓ \$48,802,000 for the UW-Eau Claire Davies Center addition, remodeling, or replacement
- ✓ \$50,000 grant for the renovation of Hobbs Ice Arena
- ✓ \$2,909,300 for advanced science, technology, and engineering programs at UW-Eau Claire and UW-Stout
- ✓ \$3,024,900 to expand off-site and accelerated nursing programs at UW-Eau Claire, UW-Oshkosh, UW-Green Bay, UW-Milwaukee, and UW-Madison

The end of the legislative session brought a flurry of activity, and I am proud that I was able to get AB 789 passed. This bill allows the transfer of unused tax credits to Technology Zones and Ag Development Zones that have nearly exhausted their original allocation of tax credits, like the I-94 Corridor Technology Zone in the Chippewa Valley and the North Central Ag Development Zone. This bill, which was signed into law by Gov. Jim Doyle, will greatly increase investment in technology development in the Chippewa Valley. As the lead author on this bill, I could not be happier.

In addition to the legislative work, an equally important role I play is to be your advocate. I have held 67 listening sessions across the district just in this first term, and I look forward to holding even more in the future. When you have questions about a state agency, or need help navigating the bureaucracy, or if you would just like a state highway map, a tour of the Capitol, or a Blue Book, my office is here to help. You can reach me by phone at 608-266-0660 or email me at rep.smith@legis.wi.gov.

I want to thank all of you who have called my office to express your views on the issues of the day. I appreciate hearing from you, it helps me do a better job representing you. Thank you, again, for allowing me to serve you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

JEFF SMITH
State Representative
93rd Assembly District

Serving Eau Claire, Dunn, Pepin and Pierce Counties



Rep. Smith leads his colleagues at a press conference calling for action on health care reform in Wisconsin.

Addressing Health Care Reform

When this session began, maybe the most recognized issue of the day was the cost and accessibility of health care. Nothing has changed. While there has been even more discussion regarding healthcare and the negative effects on those who don't have access and those who struggle with the cost, there has been no movement toward solutions.

The most comprehensive attempt to address these issues has been well documented. One of the top stories of 2007 was the prolonged, and sometimes grueling, budget negotiations which we all know took too long. Much of that negotiation revolved around a proposal to fully reform how we pay for and deliver healthcare in Wisconsin. The proposal, Healthy Wisconsin, was scrutinized and debated all over the state, and I am proud to say that it really brought healthcare reform closer to reality.

Through all the presentations, debates and discussions, a couple of points that kept cropping up were always related to the payroll tax deduction which was seen as unfair by some. Particularly SMALL business felt they would be unfairly hit hard by this proposal. My hope is that as we draw closer to the next version of healthcare reform those issues will be addressed.

In the meantime, I will continue to push for AB392, a bill I authored last year that would give small business owners and their employees the option to buy into the state insurance pool. This option would, more often than not, cover small businesses at a lesser cost with far better coverage.

This is not a partisan issue. The list of co-sponsors on this bill has members from both parties. In addition, we continue to hear from both sides of the aisle that we must do something to address cost and access to healthcare and especially for small business. I have heard from many small business owners that the number one runaway cost of doing business is healthcare. Wisconsin needs to do more to encourage entrepreneurship and keep our existing businesses competitive. Addressing healthcare costs can only help grow our economy.

Working for Our Community

Back in November, 2007, Rock County Judge Michael Byron ordered Mark Staskal released from the Mendota Mental Health Institute, where he had resided the past 23 years after being found not guilty by reason of insanity for murdering his sister. Sixteen other facilities declined to accept Staskal before the Bernice and Genevieve Group Home in Eau Claire agreed to take him.

I listened to the concerns of the community, and formally requested a comprehensive review of the Bernice and Genevieve Group Home to determine if the staff is adequately prepared to handle someone like Mark Staskal.

I spoke with the Department of Health and Family Services, and expressed the reservations of the community and Mr. Staskal's parents and that I share. I requested that the Department conduct a thorough review of the staff and facility at Bernice and Genevieve to determine whether this is an appropriate environment for someone with a history of violence.

I questioned the ability of this particular group home to adequately care for someone like Mark Staskal, and protect the other residents and community at the same time.

Upon further review, Judge Byron and DHFS agreed that Mendota was a more appropriate environment for Mr. Staskal, and he was returned to Mendota 10 days after arriving in Eau Claire.

I want to thank all of you in the community who contacted me and took the initiative to hold open meetings with state and local officials to discuss this issue. We were able to keep the focus on the appropriate environment for Mr. Staskal, and he is now in a facility that can provide better care for him.



Working with other members is an important part of the job. Here, Rep. Smith discusses a bill with another Representative.

Promoting Economic Growth

I introduced AB 770, a bipartisan bill to create a new business tax credit to help businesses that significantly increase their investment in research and development in order to create new jobs in the state. The tax credit is one of the centerpieces of Gov. Jim Doyle's economic stimulus plan that was outlined in his State of the State Address.

At a time when neighboring states are losing jobs, Wisconsin is gaining. That is good news, but it's a reminder that we can't get complacent. Strengthening our job market is the best thing we can do in the face of a national economic slump.

The Grow Wisconsin Tax Credit will provide a significant tax incentive for Wisconsin based companies who increase their investment in research and development. In order to qualify companies must first spend 25% more than their three-year average on research development. Once they have reached the 25% threshold they will get a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for all additional investments.

I have never been someone who supports handing out tax credits like candy, but when appropriate they can be powerful tools to stimulate our economy. This tax credit is focused, targeted and requires a substantial capital investment. Best of all it will go to responsible Wisconsin companies who are committed to keeping



Rep. Smith working in the Colleges & Universities Committee. Rep. Smith also serves on the Financial Institutions and Rural Affairs Committees.

jobs in the Badger State. With the NanoSTEM project at UW-Eau Claire, Chippewa Valley Tech, and UW-Stout, the Chippewa Valley is in a unique position to really benefit from this bill.

I am pleased to report this bill passed the Assembly with overwhelming bipartisan support, on a vote of 83-13 in February 2008.



Rep. Smith talks about the Autism Bill, which would have required insurance companies to provide coverage for autism treatment, with autism care providers and families at REM Wisconsin in Eau Claire.

Campaign Finance Reform

The way campaigns are currently funded is just ridiculous. Something has to change so that the voices of average, working voters carry the same weight as those with the power and influence to channel money to candidates.

I authored AB 704, which would create a Fund for Clean Elections by imposing a 10% tax on non-charitable lobbying activities. The fund would provide grants of up to \$50,000 for candidates for the Assembly, and up to \$100,000 for State Senate candidates. The fund only applies to candidates for the Legislature. The grants can be spent on any lawful campaign activity.

The lobbying tax is directed at those special interests that have contributed to the current state of campaign financing. It only makes sense that those that created the mess should have to pay to clean it up.

Supporting our Dairy Industry & Our Students

The dairy industry is vital to our state. It has been the backbone of our economy and our culture. The University of Wisconsin System is the envy of other states. Wouldn't it be nice if the two could support each other?

I authored AB 931, a bill that requires UW campuses to purchase cheese manufactured or processed by a dairy plant located in

Wisconsin. This is an attempt to promote the dairy industry in this state and provide our students with great, locally prepared cheese products.

This is a great example of how we can take action to reinforce and enhance our strengths.

