

2007 - 2008 Legislative Update

Rep. Albers was privileged to have many constituents join her in Madison to testify on bills that were important to them. Here New Lisbon Correctional Officers shared tragedies of the New Lisbon prison riot. AB 92 would hold inmates accountable for their actions, but it was never taken up by the Senate despite the support of unions and law enforcement.

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Juneau County Sheriff Brent Oleson joined Rep. Albers to testify on AB 590, a bill that had it been taken up by the Senate, would have protected our troops when flying in and out of any state base, including Volk Field.

Economic Development

The national economy is soft and anxiety for families and businesses is high. Yet Senate Democrats contend that higher taxes and new government programs are the answer. My Assembly colleagues and I, joined by Governor Doyle, sought to stimulate the economy with financial incentives, investments in the workforce, and tax credits. Here are a few of the ideas that the Assembly approved before adjourning:

Education Tax Credits – Aimed at encouraging businesses to invest in their workforce, employers would get between a 50 and 75 % tax credit for higher education tuition paid.

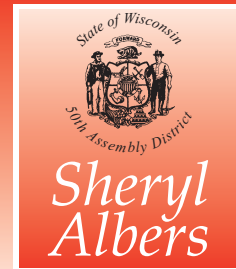
Investing in Innovative Businesses – The Assembly overwhelmingly approved

several measures that would provide tax credits for investments in start-up companies, research & development, and the fields of manufacturing, biotechnology and nanotechnology.

Growing Our Agricultural Economy – The Assembly passed legislation to expand the dairy investment tax credits to dairy cooperatives and provide tax incentives to Wisconsin meat processing facilities. In addition, the bipartisan budget agreement included an ethanol and biodiesel fuel pump tax credit and a biodiesel fuel production tax credit. That's good news for our economy, consumers and biofuel producers like Castle Rock Ethanol in Necedah, which will create almost 40 new jobs and contribute to our state tax revenues!



Assembly Bill 118 - improving communication between local units of government and drainage districts when land use development is up for discussion – became law. Here, Rep. Albers and her co-author Rep. Louis Molepske Jr., along with Rosalie Murphy a member of the Wisconsin Drain Board Association and Terri Sue Griffiths, Rep. Albers' Chief of Staff, watch as Governor Doyle signs the bill.



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Albers' Bills Become Law

Governor Doyle signed into law several bills which I authored:

Assembly Bill 58 adds a second circuit court for Juneau County beginning this August. With an overwhelming caseload and the facilities to accommodate another judgeship, this much-needed legislation was incorporated into the state budget bill.

Senate Bill 186 was co-authored by myself and Senator Dale Schultz. It should encourage greater use of neighborhood electric vehicles (NEVs) by establishing a statewide licensing system and clarifying on which roadways they may be used. NEVs are an environmentally-friendly and low-cost alternative to standard automobiles for short trips, and they are made in Reedsburg at Columbia Par Car. Their wider use is beneficial for our local economy.

Senate Bill 244 was co-authored by myself and Senator Dave Hansen. Courts will no longer be able to order a defendant to make a payment to crime prevention organizations or other law enforcement funds in lieu of criminal charges or harsher punishment. Wealthy individuals should not be allowed to buy their way out of being charged or serving time in jail.

Assembly Bill 116 & Assembly Bill 118 was co-authored by myself and Representative Molepske. AB 116 increases drain district bid requirements to the same amounts as other units of government (\$25,000). AB 118 requires local units of government and drain district boards to communicate when development or land use changes are considered, and requires sellers who own property within a drain district to disclose certain information to potential buyers.

You may track all legislative business – including other bills I co-sponsored this session and special study committees for 2008 – by using the Wisconsin Legislature's homepage at www.legis.state.wi.us.



Dear Friends,

The Legislature recently wrapped up its regular business for the 2007-08 session. Our work, however, is not quite over. We must still deal with a substantial funding shortfall in our current state budget, and the Legislature may be called back to deal with other special matters. In addition, study committees will begin meeting to discuss ideas for the next legislative session.

As I look back on this past session, it was one of accomplishments but also disappointment. First, the good news: comprehensive ethics & elections reform became law, which created an independent and non-partisan Government Accountability Board; we voted to abolish the "Frankenstein Veto" and constitutionally limit the power of the governor; and creation of BadgerCare Plus to ensure that 98% of Wisconsin citizens have access to health care.

With a split Legislature - a Democrat-controlled Senate and a Republican-led Assembly - good ideas on both sides of the aisle fell by the wayside. My biggest disappointment is with the state budget because ultimately it levies more taxes, spends more money, and borrows more than taxpayers could afford, so I voted against passage.

Wisconsin faces many challenges in the months and years ahead: maintaining quality and improving affordability of health care for families and small businesses, controlling property taxes while providing for basic government services and creating jobs during a softening economy.

I appreciate the input and thoughtful comments from all who took the time to contact my office. It's been an honor to serve as your representative.

Sheryl K. Albers
State Assembly 50th District

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Representative Sheryl Albers • 2007 - 2008 Legislative Highlights



Wonewoc Parade



60 Years in business in Mauston



Reedsburg Fall Festival



Juneau County Historical Society



Juneau County Sesquicentennial



Richland County Farm Bureau

Good Government

Ethics Reform - The first bill signed into law this session reforms our state's ethics and elections laws by creating an independent and non-partisan Government Accountability Board with the authority to investigate violations of ethics, campaign finance and election laws.

Abolishing the "Frankenstein" Veto

Two years ago, the governor vetoed 752 words out of the state budget to create a single 20-word sentence that removed \$427 million from one of the state's largest trust accounts and transferred the monies to an un-elected bureaucrat to spend elsewhere. This was the first time in the state's history that the governor's partial veto authority was used to increase spending. Fortunately, legislators and voters have put an end to this practice by amending the state's constitution.

Ending the Raids on Segregated State Funds

This proposed constitutional amendment, which I co-authored with Representative J.A. "Doc" Hines, would end the practice of raiding segregated state funds to

pay for items unrelated to the funds' original purpose. Fees that you and I pay for a state program should be used for that program and not to fill a hole in the state budget. Although the Assembly passed the measure overwhelmingly (91-6), the Senate refused to take up this common sense legislation.

Health Care

Protecting SeniorCare - Legislators from both parties urged the federal government to do the right thing and grant Wisconsin a waiver to continue the popular and cost-effective prescription drug program for seniors. Through a collaborative effort by Republicans and Democrats this vital program was retained and fully funded.

Health Savings Accounts - An HSA is a portable savings account that can be used to pay for health care costs; it puts consumers in charge of their health care decisions and helps lower the overall cost of health care. Wisconsin is one of only a few states that still tax an HSA; this session, I voted to exempt them from state taxation. Although this proposal failed to become law, Republicans

are determined to keep this tax change on the front burner.

BadgerCare Plus - The 2007-09 budget agreement included the creation of BadgerCare Plus, which ensures that all children in Wisconsin, regardless of income, have access to affordable health care.

Making Health Insurance

Premiums Tax Deductible - Beginning in tax year 2008, individuals who receive their health insurance through an employer, but are required to pay a portion of the premium, will be able to deduct those costs on their state income tax. When fully implemented, this deduction will mean \$150 million a year back into the pockets of families.

Putting Consumers & Doctors in Charge of Health Care, Not Government

Senate Democrats insisted on passing a massive government-run health care scheme requiring more than \$15 billion in new taxes that would drive jobs away from this state - the largest proposed tax increase in U.S. history. Fortunately, their plan was rejected by all Republicans and even Governor Doyle.

Education

More Than \$524 Million in Additional Funding for K-12 Education

Despite the budget shortfall, the 2007-09 state budget once again provides record funding for our students.

Recognizing the Problems Facing Rural School Districts

The current budget made some changes to accommodate the unique challenges faced by rural school districts: financial flexibility was afforded to declining enrollment districts and transportation rates were increased for students transported over 12 miles.

Saving Virtual Education - A bipartisan agreement keeps on-line schools open for 3000 students and specifies standards and best practices for these schools.

Protecting School Personnel Against Threats - Because teachers and administrators are deserving of respect by students, Senator Schultz and I introduced legislation making certain threats to a school official or teacher a felony. This change, urged by Reedsburg Police Chief Tim Becker, passed the Assembly on a 66-31 vote but the Senate refused to take it up.

The 2007-09 State Budget: Taxing More, Spending More & Borrowing More Than Taxpayers Can Afford

After many months of negotiations, the 2007-09 state budget, which allocates \$57.4 billion over two years, is now law. To be sure, the budget contains good things for the 50th Assembly District: building a sediment trap and improving boat access on Mirror Lake in Sauk County and a new circuit court for Juneau County to help break the judicial backlog.

However, because it levied more taxes, spent significantly more revenues, and substantially increased debt, I was compelled to vote "no." The numbers speak for themselves: hundreds of millions of dollars in tax increases, a 6.6% increase in spending, \$2.7 billion in new bonding and a \$200 million raid of the Patients Compensation Fund. I believe we could have done better for the taxpayers.

Why did I vote "no"? Here are a few of the reasons:

- **Objectionable Tax & Fee Increases** - The budget agreement raises taxes on cigarettes by \$1 per pack, for almost \$420 million in new, regressive taxes. Republicans stood together and beat back \$18 billion in new taxes. However, my constituents made it very clear to me during the 2006 campaign for office that generally they opposed any increase in taxes.
- **New State Spending & Programs** - State spending is set to increase by more than \$3.5 billion and even creates an entirely new state agency! Taxpayers need a budget that stays within their ability to pay. This budget does not.
- **Raid on the Patients Compensation Fund (PCF)** - The most egregious aspect of the

budget was the raid on the PCF. The PCF was created as a "trust" that doctors pay into and that patients injured by medical malpractice look to for compensation. Taking \$200 million out of this fund for general purposes amounts to little more than theft, and with less money available in the PCF it could push health care costs higher for everyone.

- **\$892 Million Structural Deficit** - This is the largest structural deficit of all the versions of the budget that were proposed. It presumes that the higher cigarette tax will take in as much as it is projected to, and it also anticipates 3.8% revenue growth.

After the budget was finally completed last fall, revenue projections



Albers speaks to colleagues during assembly session

came in much lower than anticipated and that is causing a state budget deficit that needs to be addressed with a budget repair bill. While Governor Doyle and Senate Democrats want to close the gap with taxes on businesses, hospitals, and the sick, Assembly Republicans and I approved a budget repair bill that cuts spending and forces the state to live within its means. Inevitably, lawmakers and Governor Doyle will need to work out a compromise. Stay tuned!