



Sen. Risser with Assembly Representatives from the 26th Senate District. From left: Rep. Mark Pocan, Rep. Terese Berceau, Sen. Risser, and Rep. Spencer Black

Badger State Trail: After what has been a very long winter, many of us are looking forward to getting our bicycles out and enjoying some of Wisconsin's many miles of bike trails. The past few months I have been working, along with Representative Spencer Black, to secure funding for the final phase of the Badger State Trail.

The Badger State Trail is a 40-mile trail that extends from Madison to the Wisconsin-Illinois border. Thirty-two of the 40 miles have already been completed. The last eight miles located near Fitchburg will be paved to allow for commuter travel. The completion of this trail is a priority of mine.

To find out more about Wisconsin bike trails go to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' website — www.dnr.state.wi.us. Click on "Outdoor Recreation" on the left side and then click on #15 Bike Touring.

Fred Risser State Senate President

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RISSER REPORT

State Senate President Fred A. Risser Spring 2008

Breathe Free Wisconsin

This session, one of my biggest disappointments was the failure to enact a comprehensive statewide smoke-free workplace law, including restaurants and taverns.

Inspired by the success of the City of Madison ordinance, and calls to provide a level playing field for businesses in our state, I introduced Senate Bill 150, known as "Breathe Free Wisconsin".

Over one-half of the people in the United States live in smoke-free states. There is no doubt about the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. More people die in Wisconsin from tobacco related illnesses than from automobile accidents, homicides, suicides and AIDS combined.

"Senator Risser has been a champion for clean indoor air long before it was a popular cause. Our successful smoking ban in Madison's restaurants and bars would not have been possible if Fred Risser hadn't led the way."

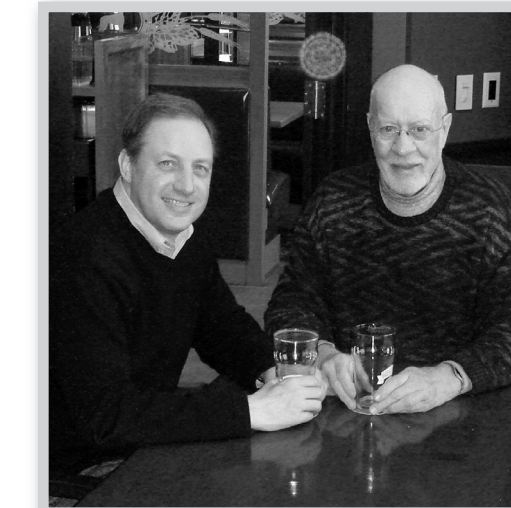
**Dave Cieslewicz, Mayor
City of Madison**

It is currently the most preventable health care problem in Wisconsin, yet Wisconsin refuses to provide an even playing field for its businesses or join its neighbors in Minnesota and Illinois who have adopted smoke-free laws within the past year.

There is enormous public support for smoke-free workplaces in Wisconsin. At a public hearing on the issue in May 2007, 400 people packed a hearing room—as well as two overflow rooms—in the State Capitol to offer their comments on this issue. Public support at this hearing was over 2 to 1 in favor of clean air in our workplaces, including restaurants and taverns.

In January, a Senate Committee approved my bill with bi-partisan support. In March, an Assembly Committee approved companion legislation, also with bi-partisan support. Enhancing the health of Wisconsin citizens is not a partisan issue—both Democrats and Republicans support the right to breathe clean air.

Nearly 1,000 Wisconsin residents descended on the Capitol in early March to rally the Legislature in support of Breathe Free Wisconsin. The public call for clean air in our state grows louder each day.



Despite my repeated efforts—as well as the efforts of many others—to advance a statewide smoke-free law, neither house was given the opportunity to debate the issue this session. It is my belief that next session we will get the necessary votes to schedule and pass this important initiative.

Mayor Dave Cieslewicz and Sen. Risser enjoy one of Madison's smoke-free establishments.

A little history...

I have been involved in the fight for clean air in Wisconsin most of my legislative career.

In 1975, I introduced for the first time legislation that would eventually become Wisconsin's Clean Indoor Air Act.

The Clean Indoor Air Act became a reality in 1983—after 8 years of hard work and negotiation. It is that law which currently provides protection from secondhand smoke in most Wisconsin workplaces, including many restaurants.

The adverse health effects of secondhand smoke have become more apparent since the Clean Indoor Air Act was enacted 25 years ago. The United States Surgeon General reported in 2006 that there is no safe level of secondhand smoke and only smoke-free environments afford full protection from the harms of secondhand smoke.

I have learned during my tenure in the Legislature that forward progress is often slow. However, I remain confident that a comprehensive smoke-free law will be in place before the end of next session.

Continuing Efforts

The Great Lakes Compact: The State Senate, on a large, bi-partisan vote (26-6), approved enabling legislation to implement the Great Lakes Compact in Wisconsin. The Compact, once ratified by the other seven Great Lakes states and two Canadian Provinces, and consented to by Congress, will establish the legal framework for prohibiting most new or increased diversions of water to places outside of the Great Lakes basin, and for regulating large withdrawals and consumptive uses of water within the basin.

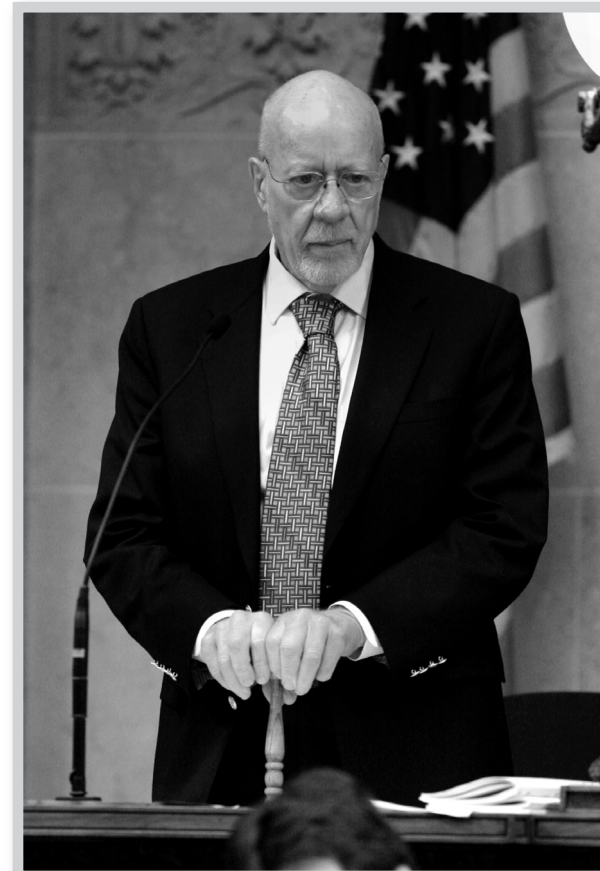
Regrettably, the Assembly leadership failed to act on the measure prior to the adjournment of the regular legislative session on March 13th, 2008. Nevertheless, negotiations continue and I am hopeful that the Legislature will reconvene in a Special or Extraordinary Session and give final approval to this vitally important piece of legislation prior to you receiving this report.

Campaign Finance Reform: One disappointment this session was the failure to pass comprehensive campaign finance reform proposals. One such measure was a bill that I authored along with Representative Mark Pocan to provide full public financing of state races. Another measure I co-authored would fully finance State Supreme Court races. This bill passed the State Senate but failed to even be considered in the Assembly.

In my opinion, until we control the cost of running for office, our government will be held hostage by special interests with deep pockets. I will continue to look for answers to the problem of money in politics.



Sen. Risser with cycling legend Lance Armstrong.



Sen. Fred Risser presides over the Wisconsin State Senate.

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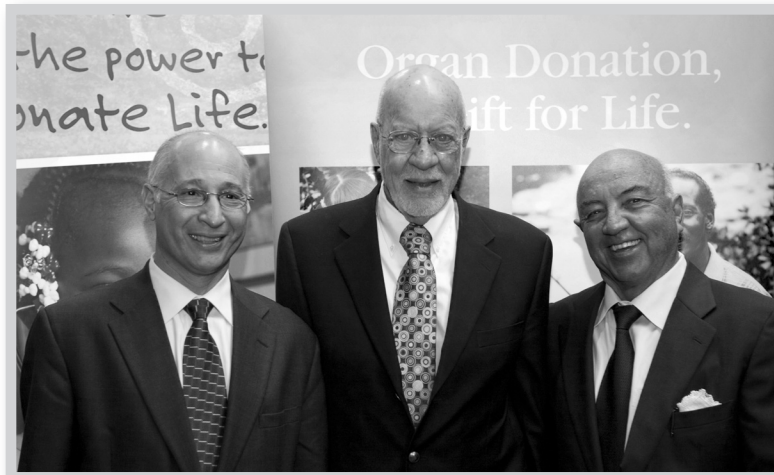
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From left: Dr. Anthony D'Alessandro, Sen. Risser, and Dr. Hans Sollinger.

"Senator Risser has been a longstanding leader in advancing legislation promoting organ donation. Once again, his authorship this session of the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act demonstrated this leadership and Wisconsin residents will benefit through increased organ donation. We are deeply appreciative of his efforts."

Dr. Hans Sollinger, Professor of Surgery Chair, UW Health Transplantation

Organ Donor Registry

One of the more important long-term pieces of legislation passed this session was a bill which I authored to increase the availability of life saving organs and tissues.

While Wisconsin is already a leader in organ donations, this new law will expand the program in a number of ways. My bill establishes our state's first Organ Donor Registry which will permit individuals to sign up for organ donations at any time. The Donor Registry will assist doctors in critical situations to determine whether or not an individual is an organ donor, and to find potential organ donors much more quickly than current law permits.

The new law also honors and respects the choice of an individual to make an anatomical gift (or not to) and strengthens the language barring others from overriding a donor's decision. Further, an individual's healthcare power of attorney is given greater weight in permitting an organ donation.

A 16-year old who applies for a driver's license is now eligible to be an organ donor. Further, under this law, Wisconsin will now recognize anatomical gifts made under the laws of other jurisdictions.

As a result of this new law, Wisconsin joins 18 other states in adoption of the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act. More organs will be available on a regional and nationwide basis to help address the organ and tissue shortage by creating additional methods to make lifesaving organ and tissue donations.

UW Building Projects

The recently concluded 2007-2008 Legislative Session proved to be highly successful for the University of Wisconsin-Madison building program. As Vice Chairman of the State Building Commission, I helped develop this session's State Building Program which included renovations to the Chadbourne and Barnard Residence Halls, the School of Human Ecology, Memorial Union Theatre Wing, and construction of a new Union South building.

The Governor also recently signed a bill that I authored to help maintain the UW's status as a top-tier research institution. My bill permits the School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM) to accept over \$2.5 million in gifts and grants to construct a TomoTherapy addition onto the SVM structure. TomoTherapy is state of the art technology developed at UW-Madison that delivers highly localized and controlled radiation treatment to animal patients with cancerous tumors.

"For more than 30 years I have had the pleasure to work with Senator Risser. In my role as chancellor for the past six years, Senator Risser's advocacy for UW-Madison in the Legislature has played a key role in the university's success."

John Wiley, Chancellor University of Wisconsin-Madison

UW Research Funds and Domestic Partner Benefits

This session I worked hard to secure vital research and development funding for the UW System. I fought to protect \$10 million in state funds for the recruitment and retention of high demand faculty and staff. I also helped obtain \$2.5 million in funding for the UW-Madison Comprehensive Cancer Center and continued to advocate for groundbreaking biotechnology research at the new Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery.

Another item I worked hard to enact was domestic partner benefits for all state and UW employees. While I was successful in including this provision in the Senate version of the 2007-2009 State Budget, the final budget document did not include these benefits. Extending domestic partner benefits to all state and UW employees will continue to be a legislative priority for me.



Sen. Risser discusses legislation with his colleagues in the Senate Chamber.

Supporting Access to Health Care

My Democratic colleagues and I in the State Senate made health care reform a top priority this session. We supported a number of measures that would have made health care more affordable and accessible to all Wisconsin residents. However, most of the Senate's proposals were rejected or not even considered by the State Assembly. My goal has always been to make health care available for all Wisconsinites.

Some of the other health care reforms that I worked on this session included:

Compassionate Care for Rape Victims Act—Thanks to the courageous testimony of rape victims, a bi-partisan effort from the Legislature, and the signature of Governor Doyle, women in Wisconsin will be assured access to emergency contraception in the event of a rape. The Compassionate Care for Rape Victims Act will require hospital emergency rooms to give rape victims information about emergency contraception and, if requested, dispense the medication on-site to prevent pregnancy following a sexual assault.

Birth Control Protection—This legislation would assure access to contraception for Wisconsin women by requiring that pharmacists dispense all valid birth control prescriptions. The Senate put Wisconsin women first, and politics second, by passing the Birth Control Protection bill with bi-partisan support. Unfortunately, the Assembly did not take action on this important initiative.

Women's Health and Safety—Wisconsin is one of only four states with a law on the books that makes abortion a crime—for both physicians and women. This session, I worked with Representative Terese Berceau and others to repeal Wisconsin's criminal abortion statute. In the event that Roe v. Wade is overturned, this law would go into effect immediately. No woman should ever be faced with jail time in an attempt to protect her own health. Neither house of the Legislature adopted this important legislation prior to the end of the session in March.

Insurance for Children With Autism—This legislation would help families with autistic children by requiring group health plans to provide coverage for autism spectrum disorder services. As a co-author of this initiative, I was encouraged by the strong bi-partisan support it received in the Senate. Regrettably, Assembly Republicans voted as a group to table the bill, thus preventing a final vote on the measure from occurring.

Mental Health Parity—This bill would require insurance companies to provide coverage of mental health and substance abuse problems equal to coverage for the treatment of physical conditions. As a co-sponsor of this legislation, I firmly believe that insurance policies should address all illnesses—mental and physical—with the same level of coverage. Unfortunately, neither house of the Legislature acted on the Mental Health Parity bill before the end of the session.

Ethics Reform

As President of the Senate and Chair of its newly created Ethics Committee, I was pleased to help draft and pass the new Ethics Reform bill, a far reaching major ethics reform package which took control of the Elections and Ethics Boards away from partisan appointees and instead created an independent, non-partisan Government Accountability Board consisting of retired state judges.

The Board is tasked with overseeing the effective administration of elections and it has the funding and

During the committee deliberations, I was able to secure a bi-partisan vote in favor of passage of this measure and, in the process, remove a poison-pill provision in the original bill that would have invalidated the whole bill should any portion of it be found unconstitutional. This was the first bill signed into law this session, as 2007 Wisconsin Act 1.

"Senator Risser is one of the senators I can count on in promoting a progressive agenda for Wisconsin. His legislative experience and position as President of the Senate have been invaluable to me."

Jim Doyle, Governor State of Wisconsin

independent authority to investigate and seek prosecution for campaign finance and ethics violations.

16-Year Old Blood Donation

One of the bills that I authored this session which became law will allow 16-year olds to donate blood with parental consent.

According to the American Red Cross, every three seconds in America someone is in need of blood. Additionally, approximately 60% of the population is eligible to donate blood and only 5% actually do. By expanding the pool of eligible blood donors, we are not only assisting in filling a void, but giving teens the opportunity to make a difference.

Enactment of this law brings Wisconsin in line with 17 other states which have adopted similar laws.

Successful Legislation



Gov. Jim Doyle signs the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact into law.

a long time advocate of passenger rail transportation, I believe that joining the compact will help Wisconsin in our efforts to promote the growth of rail as a viable transportation alternative for the residents of our state.

Promoting Local Business: As State Senator, I was able to help a business in my district, the Great Dane Pub & Brewing Company. When the Great Dane opened a third establishment at Hilldale Mall in 2006, an old state law that dates back to the end of Prohibition made it illegal for them and other brewpubs to brew and serve their own beer at more than two locations.

Promoting Rails: Earlier this spring, Governor Jim Doyle signed into law legislation that I authored to make Wisconsin a member of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact. Wisconsin is now the 10th state out of 12 to join the MIPRC.

The purpose of the compact is to promote the development and implementation of improvements to intercity passenger rail service in the Midwest. As

The state budget bill contained language that I drafted to modernize the regulation of brewpubs to give the Great Dane and brewpubs throughout the state the opportunity to grow and expand at a reasonable rate. As a result, Wisconsin brewpubs can now brew and sell their own beer at more locations.