

Legislative Committee
Monday, March 23, 2009
JAMES P. COUGHLIN CENTER

Present: Stan Kline, Nancy Barker, Tom Ellis, Bill Wingren, Pat Brennand, Ken Robl, Jef Hall, Harvey Rengstorf, Jo Sievert, Patrick O'Brien, Jerry Finch, Tom Widener and Kathy Lennon

Also Present: John Casper – Oshkosh Chamber, County Executive Mark Harris, State Representative Spanbauer, State Senator Hopper, State Senator Hintz, Melissa Kok – Federal Representative Petri's Office, and Patty Francour – Information Systems Director

Excused: David Albrecht

Absent: Don Griesbach and Jim Koziczowski

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 A.M. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of February 23, 2009. Supervisor Widener made a correction to the minutes of the February 23, 2009 meeting. After the correction was made to the minutes, the motion to approve the minutes was approved.

UPDATE ON LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Senator Hopper told the committee that the state is getting into the budget. They have received the budget repair bill – in which there is still a \$600,000,000 deficit from the last biennium. The repair bill came to the legislators at 4 AM and was passed along party lines at 11 AM. There were no public hearings. It dealt with less than \$200,000,000 of the budget deficit. We just keep pushing a large deficit from one budget to the next.

The Governor's budget involves more spending at the state level and less aid to the municipalities and counties. Winnebago County will be receiving a 1.3% decrease over the last budget or a little bit less than \$40,000. This is not as bad as some counties are being cut. Everyone is being asked to tighten their belts, except state government. Taxes are being increased to pay for increased spending at the state level. Right now, it looks like the state will be increasing spending by 7.7%.

We will be receiving \$2.1 billion from the Federal government that is specifically earmarked for education and healthcare initiatives.

Right now there are disagreements between the assembly, senate and the governor on key issues in the budget. These will have to be worked out before the budget will be passed.

Right now Senator Hopper is touring the state with group called Wisconsin Jobs Now. This task force is looking at ways to keep Wisconsin jobs, create Wisconsin jobs and this should be the number one focus. The task force is challenging people to increase jobs. The listening sessions will let Madison know the unintended consequences of some of the policies that are being passed in Madison.

Part of the budget repair bill is combined reporting. When businesses are looking to cut expenses and to be more productive, it is a fear that Wisconsin jobs will be lost because of combined reporting. There are different levels of combined reporting and Wisconsin took a very aggressive form of combined reporting. The fear is if we don't look at some of these unintended consequences, we are actually going to lose jobs.

Wisconsin raised the minimum wage. The problem with this is we raised it above the federal level and indexed to inflation. This means we will always be above the federal level in Wisconsin. This is a major factor when businesses are looking to expand or locate into a state. The number one focus should be creating jobs so families are able to support themselves.

The John Doe bill will pass. Senator Hopper was very happy to support that bill. Senator Hopper feels that if a bill makes sense, we need to get behind it, despite political affiliations.

Senator Hopper reminded the committee to contact him with any issues that he can help them with.

Representative Spanbauer told the committee that some companies may not be paying taxes on their revenues, however they do pay taxes, they pay property taxes, personal property taxes and the people who work for these companies pay taxes. He doesn't want to discourage business growing in Wisconsin.

Mr. Spanbauer is against borrowing from one fund to help offset another. He feels that better planning is one way to offset this type of "robbing peter to pay paul" fix. He is also very interested in alternative types of energy, looking for ways to offset our dependence on foreign oil. This would also help create more jobs in America.

He also encouraged everyone to come to Madison for "Capitol Days". This is a chance to meet your legislators.

Representative Hintz told the committee that we need to look at trade-offs. He dislikes making a new tax or fee when alternatives are available. He also encouraged the committee to attend the public hearing on the budget, which will be held at Lawrence University for our area.

Mr. Hintz told the committee that he feels combined reporting puts Wisconsin on equal footing with neighboring states. Minnesota, Michigan and Illinois all have some form of combined reporting.

He informed the committee that if Wisconsin didn't take any federal stimulus money or any new increases to state revenue, there would be a 17% cut across the board to balance the budget. There has been a \$4.1 million drop off in state revenue since last August. The budget is out of whack because of everything that is happening with the economy.

He discussed the nursing home bed tax with the committee. He also mentioned mental health referrals to Winnebago State Mental Health Institute and the proposed burden to Winnebago County.

Mr. Hintz feels the biggest problem to be focused on is Medical Assistance.

It was brought up by the committee that Wal Mart is set up to avoid paying property tax. Wal Mart is the second largest employer in the State of Wisconsin. 30,000 people in Wisconsin work for Wal Mart. They spent \$5 billion dollars on products and services from Wisconsin based companies last year. If Wal Mart is pushed about property tax, they will raise prices and they will cut their largest expense – which is labor. This will affect a large segment of the population of Wisconsin. In a recession, attacking a company that employs that many people does not make a lot of sense. On the anti Wal Mart website, it states that 1252 total employees are receiving Badger Care. This statistic is from 2005. This is less than 4% of the total number of people that Wal Mart employs. Of that number, almost all of them are part-time. Wal Mart does have a policy that after 180 days of full-time employment – they offer full time health care benefits.

We shouldn't be attacking businesses that are employers in our state. Loss of jobs affects everyone. The number one priority is getting jobs back and creating new jobs as well.

Senator Hopper told the committee that we have used 1 time money too often to balance the budget.

The legislators then took question from the committee.

RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT TAX FAIRNESS FOR CHARITABLE DRIVERS

This was introduced by Senator Petri at the federal level. What this measure does is treat volunteer drivers and drivers who are paid by a business as equals. Right now, volunteer drivers are paid \$.55 a mile. They can only claim \$.14 a mile on their taxes and the rest is considered earned income. The county issues them a 1099 for that purpose. It is felt that this is an unfair practice.

After further discussion, it was moved by Jef Hall and seconded by Harvey Rengstorf. This motion was carried 12 – 0 (Supervisor Barker had left the meeting by this point)

RESOLUTION ON A "BUY AMERICAN" COMMITMENT OF THE SPENDING OF FEDERAL ECONOMIC RENEWAL GRANTS

This was put on the agenda at the request of Executive Harris, after receiving several letters requesting that the spending done at the federal level be used to buy goods made in the USA.

There was a discussion why the committee was taking this issue up, as well as several of the other agenda items for this meeting. It was explained that although many of these items are being looked at on the federal level, it will also affect us here. It was also discussed how you define what is made in America. Many items are sold by foreign owned companies,

but their products are built here, assembled here and sold here. Where do you draw the line on American made? It is "feel good" legislation.

In this day and age, we are dealing with a global economy. It was suggested that an import tax should be placed on items sent overseas to be assembled and then brought back into the USA to be sold.

It was brought up that the stimulus money is meant to create jobs in America. Discussion with the committee followed.

Jef Hall moved and Tom Widener seconded to vote on this issue. 7 – Ayes, 5 – Nays - Widener, Kline, Finch, Sievert and Brennand. Passed.

RESOLUTION ON THE EMPLOYEE PRE-CHOICE ACT

This is regarding having open ballots for workers in unions. It was discussed that this could be intimidating to some people. It was also brought up that people could be bullied into voting a certain way.

It was discussed that this bill is not banning secret balloting, as many believe. Chairman Kline told the committee that Senator Kohl is supporting this bill. This bill does not affect government workers at all.

After further discussion, it was decided by the committee not to forward this bill on to the County Board.

RESOLUTION TO OPPOSE BUDGET PROPOSALS AFFECTING PARK VIEW, INCLUDING THE CPE PROGRAM, PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NURSING HOME BED TAX AND NURSING HOME APPEALS

M. Rankin was unable to be at this meeting, so this agenda item was discussed by the committee. Executive Harris told the committee that there was going to be a Nursing Home rally in Madison on April 22. Anyone interested in this item, is encouraged to attend.

The real impact of the state budget is small changes built into the Human Services budget, and because of these changes – we stand to lose \$2 million in state money.

Jerry Finch moved and it was seconded by Pat Brennand to forward this to the County Board. This was passed 12 – 0.

CORRESPONDENCE

It was brought up by Chairman Kline that anyone interested in Lake Winnebago Fill Up and Draw Down Strategy – there will be a conference call with the Army Corps of Engineers on April 8, and this is open to the public. Mr. Kline has the contact information for those interested.

ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA

Supervisor Norton would like discussed a regional transit authority for the Fox Valley area. After a brief explanation from Executive Harris, it was decided to put that item on the next agenda.

Supervisor Norton would also like a meeting just devoted to the state budget. It was decided to keep doing it the way we are, addressing specific items, instead of the budget as a whole.

Supervisor O'Brien would like the Environmental Repair Fund discussed at the next meeting.

Chairman Kline asked that any items to be put on the agenda be gotten to him by the day before the County Board meeting.

The next meeting will be on Monday, April 27, 2009. There will be no Legislative Meeting in May, due to the Memorial Day holiday.

At 9:50 am, Jerry Finch moved and it was seconded to adjourn.

Respectfully Submitted By:
Nancy Barker
Secretary

Recorded By:
Jean Mahy
County Clerk's Office