

Rep. Fred Clark Fights for Priorities in Budget

Three Common Sense Fixes

MADISON – Representative Fred Clark (D-Baraboo) shared news today of three amendments Assembly Democrats recently made to the 2009-11 State Budget. Rep. Clark highlighted several key amendments that local constituents have had concerns about.

One of these amendments, authored by Reps. Clark, Hubler, Van Akkeren and Molepske, removed all budget provisions related to Contributory Negligence, also known as Joint and Several Liability. The provision, which originated in the Governor's budget, reduced the threshold at which a party to a personal injury case could be found liable for as much as 100 percent of damages. In current law, the threshold is 51 percent. The Governor's budget changed that threshold to one percent, which the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) later raised to 20 percent. "The business community I represent was overwhelmingly in support of removing this from the budget entirely, and I was glad that our caucus worked to do this because I strongly believe this issue deserves its own bill process" said Rep. Clark. Our state budget is difficult enough without the addition of legal policy that does not directly relate to state finances, and today we achieved a victory with this common sense change."

Another amendment authored by Rep. Clark restores the requirement that state agencies and constitutionally recognized state offices publish legal and official notices in the Official State Newspaper (currently the Wisconsin State Journal). A JFC provision had deleted this requirement in order to save money, but the provision had unintended consequences that needed to be addressed. "Newspapers have long been a principle way for citizens to stay informed. My motion allows people who only obtain their news from the print media to continue to view these important notices. It simply helps ensure an open and accessible government," said Clark. "While I recognize the quickly transitioning media markets to the internet, I believe we still need to maintain the availability through newspapers while we move in that direction."

Rep. Clark also authored an amendment to preserve the Wisconsin Clean Sweep program. This program helps farmers, businesses, homeowners and municipalities keep chemicals and hazardous wastes out of landfills, as well as the water and soil supply. Clark's efforts helped maintain \$750,000 in grant funding as well as the staff needed to continue this program within the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. "This program has been very popular with local governments," said Clark. "It's common sense to protect a currently successful program that enables local businesses and farmers to deal with hazardous waste in a safe and economical way."

These are only a few of the actions that were taken up on Wednesday by Assembly Democrats to improve the state budget proposal. These measures must be approved by the full Assembly, Senate, and the Governor to become state law.