



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Property Tax Relief and Campaign Finance Reform On Deck for the Senate

Madison – The Senate Democratic Caucus announced three more bills that will come up soon in the Senate. Majority Leader Russ Decker said issue ad disclosure, property tax relief and public financing for the Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice elections will all be taken up by the Senate early in the new session.

Senator Jon Erpenbach (D-Middleton) will introduce a bill to regulate issue ads. So-called “issue ads” are ads run by independent groups without any disclosure of funding sources, which means groups can use money that is otherwise illegal in the political process. The most recent attempt to regulate issue ads was struck down by the US Supreme Court in the summer of 2007, but the court gave a clear path on how to move ahead. Under the bill, legitimate issue ads will be allowed, but an ad that cannot reasonably be interpreted to be anything other than a campaign expense will be required to raise and spend money like other campaigns.

“The US Supreme Court said states cannot ban so-called issue ads, but the decision also clearly states we can regulate them, and that is what we should do,” said Erpenbach.

“Everybody knows that so-called issue ads are trying to influence an election. Issue ads should be regulated just like every other dollar spent in political elections. Requiring those running so-called issue ads to register and follow the laws of our state, just like everyone else, will help bring civility and responsibility back to our political campaigns,” said Senator Jon Erpenbach.

Under a plan to be introduced soon by Senator Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) voters would be able to decide if they want to change the state Constitution to target property tax relief to Wisconsin homeowners and families.

Under the plan, called HOPE, voters could change the constitution to exempt the first \$60,000 in their home’s value. That amount would then be adjusted annually for inflation.

“It’s time we restore fairness in the tax code for homeowners. For too long we’ve seen more and more of the tax burden shifting onto the backs of homeowners and working families while high-priced lobbyists get more exemptions for big business,” said Hansen.

Senator Pat Kreitlow (D-Chippewa Falls) will also reintroduce the Impartial Justice bill this session. The bill, which makes changes in campaign finance law to provide for full public financing for Supreme Court races, passed the Senate last session but was not taken up by the Assembly.

“Wisconsin voters have had to watch every recent Supreme Court election turn into a bidding war between special interests trying to put their candidate on the court,” said Kreitlow. “This process has left

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us with a court riddled with conflicts of interest that regularly force one or two justices to sit out cases before the court. If citizens can't count on their courts to be impartial, how can we expect them to trust that court's judgment? Our bill limits the influence of these special interest groups, making the judges we elect only accountable to us."

Under the bill a qualified Supreme Court candidate who accepts public financing would receive \$100,000 in the spring primary and \$300,000 in the spring election. This would discourage outside spending by independent groups by providing additional financing equivalent to any independent expenditures made against the candidate or in support of his or her opponent.

"Property tax relief for homeowners remains a top priority for Senate Democrats," said Decker. "And the change of leadership in the Assembly means issues ads and the elections for Supreme Court Justice will finally get a fair hearing."

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