

THE MUNICIPALITY

January 2017, Vol. 112, No. 1

Your Voice. Your Wisconsin.

THE 2017-2018 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



IN THIS ISSUE:

*The Municipal Agenda for the
2017-2018 Legislative Session*

An Insider's View

*Wisconsin's Political Landscape for the
2017-2018 Legislative Session*

*Legislative Municipal Opportunities
and Challenges*

*Eliminating Personal Property Tax
Would Shift Tax Burden to Homeowners*

Rental Property Inspection Program

As It Was in 1917, So It Is in 2017

*Social Host Ordinances Should Be
Reviewed*

Dealing with Common Winter Issues

WISCONSIN'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE FOR THE 2017-2018 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

By: Steve Lyons, Government Affairs, Husch Blackwell

Last November pundits from across the political spectrum and across the nation scrambled for excuses on why they miscalculated the election outcomes as badly as they did. In the weeks leading up to the election only one poll had shown Donald Trump and Senator Johnson ahead of their challengers.

In Wisconsin the scene was similar. Some of those very same pundits believed that the Republicans in the Wisconsin State Senate, which had a majority of 19 (GOP) to 14 (DEM) would lose a seat or perhaps two. The State Assembly, in which the Republicans have enjoyed the largest majority since 1959 (63 GOP) and (36 DEM) seemed poised to lose a few seats.

But none of that turned out to be the case.

In the State Senate all even numbered Senate Districts were up for election for a total of 16 seats. At the end of the election night, all Republicans had won re-election. However, the Republicans also won the open seat formerly held by Senator Gudex (R-Fond du Lac) and beat Senator Julie Lassa (D-Stevens Point). In a surprise, Senator-Elect Pat Testin beat Lassa by almost 4,000 votes. The 32nd Senate District race between Senator Shilling and former Senator Kapanke was much closer than anticipated.

In the State Assembly the Republicans increased their majority by one seat. Republican Treig Pronschinske, Mayor of Mondovi, beat incumbent Chris Danou (D-Trempealeau), bringing the Republican majority to an astounding 29 seat differential (64 GOP / 35 DEM).

So how did it happen? A coalition of voters formed that had never been seen before. Rural America (and rural Wisconsin for that matter), along with blue collar workers, some in the trades, Bernie Sanders supporters and others made up this election cycle's "silent majority." It appears that the common denominator was that all felt that their voice was not being heard, felt disenfranchised, a sense of not being able to get ahead, and left out of the American Dream. In Wisconsin, it is important to note that this new coalition of voters did not seem to be against or at odds with local officials as many local referendums passed by significant margins.

So what changes in the State Capitol this session from last session? Not much actually. In Wisconsin the Republicans in both the State Senate and State Assembly have re-elected their leaders. Senate Majority Leader Fitzgerald (R-Juneau) and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) will keep their posts. On the Democrat side, Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca (D-Kenosha) and Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse) also retained their leadership positions.

Governor Walker will introduce the State Budget in February of 2017. It is expected that the budget will have very little new spending for programs and that the transportation budget will be the most contentious issue in the budget.

Also worth noting are the appointments to the powerful Joint Committee on Finance. This will be the third state budget with State Representative John Nygren (R-Marinette) and State Senator Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) as Co-Chairs of the committee. The committee's makeup remains essentially the same with the exception of two new Assembly GOP members: Rep. Mark Born (R-Beaver Dam) and Rep. Mike Rohrkaste (R-Neenah).

The Legislature will initially focus on passing the 2017-2019 Biennial State Budget.

Governor Walker will introduce the State Budget in February of 2017. Because the Medicaid program continues to grow, it is expected that the budget will have very little new spending for programs. The transportation budget will be the most contentious issue in the budget. Republicans are divided on whether and how much to increase revenues for the State's Transportation Fund. There are those who feel we should borrow more to fix Wisconsin roads now. There are those who believe we should only fix roads we can pay for currently (thus, leaving several transportation projects on hold for decades to come) and lastly, those who support new revenue sources to pay for road projects.

Regardless of the change in landscape, the impact on the League's legislative strategy is minimal. The League will continue to work with its municipal champions from both political parties, in both houses, and continue to have a strong dialogue with Governor Walker, the Legislature, and state agencies regarding our priorities.



About the author:

Steve Lyons is a Government Affairs Professional at Husch Blackwell with over 25 years' experience in the political arena and has represented the League of Wisconsin Municipalities for the last four years. Contact Steve at Stephen.Lyons@huschblackwell.com