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Joint Finance Continues to Delay Final Vote

Over three weeks have passed since the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) met on the Governor’s proposed budget, even though only three items are left unfinished: transportation, revenue, and the Bucks arena. As time continues to pass and promised hearing dates come and go, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos has stepped forward to hint at what may be happening behind closed doors.

This past Tuesday, the Speaker emerged from meetings with other Assembly leaders to discuss budget negotiations. Vos commented on the transportation budget, stating that a cut of $800 million from the Governor’s proposal is currently up in the air. He claimed limiting bonding to $500 million would be most sustainable, but he and Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald have yet to settle on a deal.

Vos also noted that the proposed tax package would be made over before the committee went back to work. He pointed to Rep. Kooyenga and Sen. Marklein as two legislators working to close loopholes in state law to increase sales tax collections, including a provision to tax online reservation fees charged by companies such as Orbitz. They hope to use the additional revenue to eliminate the alternative minimum tax and change the current “marriage penalty”.

As for the Bucks arena, the new deal offered has yet to be agreed upon, and it’s unlikely the Bucks arena deal will not be in the state budget. The deal has brought controversy since it was first discussed back in January and has led many legislators to draw a line in the sand. With the deal out, the JFC will increase their chances of passing the budget out of committee soon rather than later.

Prevailing wage has also become a central issue in budget deliberations. Over the past few weeks, Speaker Vos has hinted at the inclusion of a motion that would make changes to the state’s prevailing wage law. Though a full repeal or limited changes have not been decided upon, the speaker hopes to find a solution with the Senate on this issue as soon as possible.

The JFC will try again next week to meet and finish their changes to the Governor’s proposed budget. The bill will then head to the Senate floor to be voted on before heading to the Assembly, and finally the Governor’s desk. Unfortunately, with a deadline of July 1st, it does not seem as though the budget will be finished on time.

Race Heats up as Special Election Draws Near

On May 1st, Republican Senator Paul Farrow notified the Senate Chief Clerk that he would be resigning from his post as of July 17th. Farrow was elected to Waukesha County Supervisor post back in April. The senator’s resignation set the wheels in motion for Governor Walker to announce the dates of the special election to replace Farrow and now the time has finally arrived. Next Tuesday – June 23 – will be the partisan primary for the 33rd senate district, and each candidate is pulling out all the stops.

Over the past month and a half, Republican candidates Rep. Chris Kapenga and Brian Dorow have been hitting the streets in Waukesha County competing for the coveted seat. Each
candidate has been hard at work raising money from supporters to finance their campaigns. In a recently released finance statement, it was reported that Rep. Kapenga out raised his opponent by 2 to 1.

Rep. Kapenga raised over $140,000 during the most recent six month reporting period, spent over $180,000, and has a significant amount of cash on hand. Dorow raised $67,800 and is left with only $11,000 cash on hand. Although Kapenga is better financed, Dorow is not considered a huge underdog. The finance report showed Rep. Kapenga lent his campaign $150,000 of his own money and repaid himself only a little over half. Brian Dorow loaned his campaign money as well, but only a mere $18,000, a small amount in comparison to Kapenga. For Dorow's first race, he seems to have made an impression on his financial supporters.

On Tuesday, the voters of the 33rd senate district will make their decision on who will represent the GOP in the special election on July 21st. The winner will be sworn in to the senate in late July.

Walker Continues to Top Presidential Poll

As the state of Wisconsin is waiting for the Joint Finance Committee to finish the state budget, Governor Walker has wasted no time in climbing the nation’s political ladder. While traveling the world to promote Wisconsin’s growing business climate, the Governor continues to be consider a top contender in the race for the GOP nomination in the 2016 presidential race.

Walker, who has yet to officially announce if he will run for president, received 17 percent of the vote in this month’s poll from the democratic Public Policy Polling organization. Close behind the Governor is former Governor Jeb Bush with 15%, followed by Marco Rubio with 13% and Ben Carson with 12%. Other candidates polled at follows: 11% for Mike Huckabee, 8% for Ted Cruz and Rand Paul, 5% for Carly Filorina, and 4% for Chris Christy. This marks the fourth consecutive poll with Walker as the front runner.

As the race beings to heat up with numerous competitors throwing their hat in the ring, the Democratic race continues to be one sided. Hilary Clinton continues to dominate the nation’s polls with a strong lead of 65%. Her closest competitor, Bernie Sanders, comes in at 9%, Martin O’Malley is at 5% and both Lincoln Chafee and Jim Webb share last with 4%.

Governor Walker is predicted to eventually join the race for president but is said to be waiting for the state budget to be finalized before making his announcement. Until then, he does not show signs of slowing down as he travels the world as both Governor and political speaker. The Public Policy Poll surveyed 1,129 national voters between June 11 and 14th. The poll places the margin of error at plus or minus 2.9 percentage points overall.