



SENATOR JANET BEWLEY

WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

For Immediate Release

February 3, 2017

A Blank Check

It's been a few years since my daughters were teenagers and almost as many years since most people used checks to pay all their bills. But I'm guessing that anyone reading this can relate to the time my girls asked me to give them a signed blank check. Once I realized they weren't kidding, we had a discussion about what it was they were going to use the money for, a school trip, if my memory is right. After I had the necessary information and assurances, I gave them the check.

One of my new duties as the assistant minority leader is serving on the Senate Organization Committee. This committee makes decisions about how to spend taxpayer's money, decisions that don't have to be approved by the full legislature.

Earlier this week, I was surprised to be asked to vote on a proposal authorizing potentially unlimited resources to be paid to both named and unnamed law firms for unspecified work relating to the unconstitutional district maps enacted in 2011. Taxpayers have already been forced to pay at least \$2 million to outside law firms related to redistricting. This ballot would have authorized an unlimited increase. I got the ballot at 2:00 pm and was told I had two hours to decide whether or not to sign this blank check. I voted no.

I have serious concerns about approving this kind of expense that includes no mechanisms for public notification or review. I cannot justify this expense to the people of Northern and rural Wisconsin.

I might have been able to vote yes if I could assure myself that the taxpayer's money would be well spent. I asked my Republican colleagues on the committee if they would provide more public disclosure and add safeguards to ensure that the hardworking people of Wisconsin wouldn't be fleeced.

I wanted assurances that lawmakers and their staff would not be allowed to sign secrecy oaths. Public officials should not be signing secret agreements that keeps information out of the hands of taxpayers who are paying the bills. They did in 2011, and I asked for guarantees that it wouldn't happen again. All members of the Legislature and the people we represent must have access to information on the activities and expenses related to this new contract.

I also asked that legal expenses be capped at \$50,000 at the most, something my colleagues sought in 2011. Since that motion was defeated, taxpayers have been tapped for far more than is reasonable in the efforts to draw and defend the 2011 maps.

I'm not sure why we're spending any money on outside legal services, since both the Senate and Assembly have access to bi-partisan, discreet and respected legal minds at the Legislative Council. We should turn to the legal staff we already have before turning to the taxpayers for millions more.

Wisconsin tax dollars should support Wisconsin roads, Wisconsin schools and Wisconsin jobs – not payouts to well-heeled law firms. Elected officials should put the needs of the people we represent ahead of their own self-interest.

-30-



25th Senate District

State Capitol: P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707-7882 ★ E-mail: sen.bewley@legis.wi.gov
Web: <http://bewley.senate.wi.gov> ★ (608) 266-3510 ★ Toll-free: (800) 469-6562