

Memorandum

To: Michael Best Strategies Clients & Friends

From: Sabrina Stencil
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Date: March 16, 2023

Subject: Cabinet Secretary Appointment Hearings

Randy Romanski, Dept. of Agriculture, Trade, & Consumer Protection Secretary

Secretary Romanski gave remarks about the different programs that the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has worked on this past year including meat processing, fostering innovation in Wisconsin dairy processing, dealing with the impacts of the avian flu in Wisconsin, and working to ensure Wisconsinites have clean water and limiting the impacts of nitrates. Sec. Romanski also discussed his goal of trying to continue to protect Wisconsin citizens from unfair business practices, identity theft, and fraud and offering those impacted solutions and support. He additionally highlighted for the committee members the outreach and presentations that the Department hosts and asked for committee members to contact his office if they or any of their constituents have interest in hosting a presentation. Sec. Romanski ended his testimony by stressing that he wants to continue to work with the legislature on these issues and that there is a lot of room for agreement in the world of agriculture. He told the committee members that it has been great to collaborate with them.

In response to his testimony the committee members had the following questions:

- Sen. Ballweg (R) asked about the 640 FTE employees that DATCP has and where these individuals are stationed.
 - Sec. Romanski stated that 60% of DATCP's employees work outside of the Madison area campus and the other 40% of employees work at the Madison offices, meat processing labs, or other labs in the area. He stated that the remainder of the office staff have a hybrid work option, and that the Department continues to assess how they can best deliver their services, as this is a top priority.
- Sen. Pfaff (D) and Sen. Spreitzer (D) both thanked Sec. Romanski for his service and the relationships that he has built with the farming community and industry.

There was no vote taken on Sec. Romanski's appointment by the Senate Committee on Agriculture.

Watch the full hearing here: [Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism - WisconsinEye \(wiseye.org\)](https://www.wisconsineye.org/2023/03/16/senate-committee-on-agriculture-and-tourism-hearing-on-secretary-romanski/)

Craig Thompson, Dept. of Transportation Secretary

Secretary Thompson gave remarks on the progress of the Department of Transportation (DOT) over the past four years of his service. He stated that four years ago he vowed to work to find inefficiencies, reduce red tape, stretch every dollar, and update the MAPS Dashboard for added accountability and transparency. He stated that he feels the Department has done a good job of accomplishing these things. Sec. Thompson additionally discussed the Bridge Pilot Program that is now transitioning into a formal program that will allow for standardization with regards to bridge projects. Sec. Thompson stated that the MAPS Dashboard has been updated and continues to be updated with new metrics quarterly so that the information is available to the public. Sec. Thompson highlighted the changes that have been made to the state's salting operations for winter with the addition of the tool of liquid brine allowing for highways to be cleared faster and less salt being necessary throughout the state. Sec. Thompson discussed electric vehicle charging funding that the state received and said that Wisconsin is well-poised to deploy this funding efficiently. He also highlighted a new position created at WisDOT—the Chief Cybersecurity Officer. He stated that this position is aimed at reducing critical computer vulnerabilities and protecting WisDOT data. Sec. Thompson ended his testimony by stating that the Department of Transportation is in the best shape it has been in years, not just because of his tenure, but because of the policymakers around him that have made transportation a nonpartisan issue.

In response to Sec. Thompson's testimony the committee members had the following questions:

- Sen. Pfaff (D) thanked the Secretary for his work and asked what the committee members can do to help his agency.
 - Sec. Thompson stated that committee members should continue to reach out if there is any issue from themselves or constituents so that the Department can work to find solutions. Sec. Thompson additionally stressed that DOT needs adequate funding to continue to make strides in transportation and asked for their support there.
- Sen. Cowles (R) asked the Secretary about DOT's electric vehicle (EV) plan and if the committee and legislature need to pass a bill to make that work.
 - Sec. Thompson stated that a bill would be needed because in order to make electric vehicles feasible they need to be able to sell by the kilowatt/hour.
- Sen. Carpenter (D) asked the Secretary if there is federal funding expected which will prevent the need for additional bonding.
 - Sec. Thompson discussed Gov. Evers' allocation of one-time money which allowed DOT to free up the bonds that are coming due. He said that the federal money makes up about 25% of the budget and that when the federal government passed the bill it had increased that money by about 25%. DOT has proposed that 100% of that money will go to the bridges because they felt that is the greatest need, but that there is separate EV money coming in as well.
- Sen. Carpenter also asked if there are any conversations happening about a passenger rail going up to the Fox Valley and Green Bay.
 - Sec. Thompson stated that there are mayors asking about this, but that more conversations need to be had on the matter.

No vote was taken on Sec. Thompson's appointment by the Senate Committee on Transportation.

Watch the full hearing here: [Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government - WisconsinEye \(wiseye.org\)](https://www.wisconsineye.org/2020/03/12/senate-committee-on-transportation-and-local-government-hearing-on-missy-hughes-confirmation/)

Missy Hughes, Secretary of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

No hearing was held by the Senate Committee on Economic Development and Technical Colleges. The committee collected paper ballot votes for confirmation. Secretary Hughes was recommended for confirmation with a 5-0 vote by the Committee.

Adam Payne, Dept. of Natural Resources Secretary-Designee

Secretary-Designee Payne gave remarks on his plans for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). He emphasized the large amount of outdoor recreational opportunities in Wisconsin, and additionally discussed his professional experience in natural resource conservation. Sec- Designee Payne stated that in the last two months since his appointment he has been working to get to know his coworkers at the Department and has been spending time meeting the Natural Resources Board members and with state legislators. He stated that as he has been talking with people during this time, the largest challenge he hears about is that water quality needs to be addressed. Sec-Designee Payne said that he believes that every Wisconsinite should be able to turn on a tap and have access to clean water and that water is essential to the economic engine of the state. He said that he knows that Wisconsin needs to recruit and retain more workers and that we would like for more people to move to Wisconsin, but in order for that to happen we need to protect natural resources and have clean water.

In response to Secretary-Designee Payne's testimony the committee members had the following questions:

- Sen. Cowles (R) asked him if there were any items he would like to highlight from the Governor's budget.
 - Sec-Designee Payne stated that DNR could use the \$100 million dollars proposed to protect water for private well testing to ensure clean water, and also emphasized that more federal funding is needed for PFAS.
- Sen. Cowles additionally asked Payne about the permitting backlogs at DNR and his thoughts on that .
 - Payne stated that the Department has seen a decline in staffing which has impacted responsiveness and that they are continuing to examine this.
- Sen. Wimberger (R) asked the Secretary-Designee several questions regarding PFAS and biosolid spreading in the state, specifically as it related to the lack of action by the Governor and his administration on the topic of biosolids.
 - Payne stated that the DNR knows that they need to work with municipalities and farmers allowing biosolids to be spread, but that there is no specific plan of action.
- Sen. Wimberger and Sen. Tomczyk (R) asked Sec-Designee Payne about his thoughts on the wolf hunt and wolf plan.
 - Payne responded that the issue is very emotional and that the DNR is truing to gather public issue and listen to stakeholders across the board in order to make

enhancement and improvements. He stated that the DNR is aiming to introduce a final draft of the wolf plan in late summer or early fall.

- Sen. Cowles told Sec-Designee Payne that he is regularly hearing from constituents that the deer hunting regulations are too complex.
 - Sec-Designee Payne agreed that simplification would be a good thing.
- Sen. Cowles additionally asked about the status of the Enbridge Pipeline.
 - Sec-Designee Payne stated that the DNR is starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel and that the Department has received over 34,000 public comments. However, he stated that he is not prepared to announce a timetable and is trying to be thoughtful on the matter, but stated that the environmental impact is very close to completion internally.

No vote was taken on Secretary-Designee Payne's appointment by the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environment.

Watch the full hearing here: [Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy - WisconsinEye \(wiseye.org\)](http://www.wisconsineye.org)