

## BUDGET BLOG

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2015

6:37 PM

### [First public hearing wraps up](#)

Co-chair John Nygren, R-Marinette, thanked the committee for its time and adjourned the first public hearing on the budget a little after 6 p.m.

According to the committee clerk, 251 people registered with the committee.

The second of the four planned public hearings will be Friday at Alverno College in Milwaukee.

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 6:37 PM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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5:03 PM

### [Prison guard says shutting down towers would be 'tragedy'](#)

Trent Ventura, who has worked for the Departments of Corrections for the last three decades, urged the committee to keep third shift watchtower guards.

The gov's budget calls for no longer staffing the towers during third shift, when inmates are locked in their cells for the night, and instead relying on technology to help patrol the grounds.

Ventura said that the Oshkosh Correction Institution staff would be outnumbered 57-to-1 during third shift without guards in the towers.

"You're taking away the last line of defense," Ventura said. "It will be a tragedy if you shut down these towers."

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 5:03 PM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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4:43 PM

### [Budget hearing starting to wind down](#)

JFC Co-chair John Nygren has stopped calling names from his list and has invited anyone who wants to speak to wait in line at either of the podiums.

About 40 people were waiting in line for their two minute chance to speak.

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 4:43 PM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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4:42 PM

### [Woman chides lawmakers](#)

Katie Schierl originally came to speak about her son and their need for IRIS, but instead she offered strong criticism for the legislators about many things she heard today, specifically proposals to change multiple programs from public to private funding such as schools and transportation.

She said she believes it is a result of political alliances and campaign donations.

"You're no longer working for the people, but for money," said. "I hope you can all start working for the people again. Some of you are, but most of you aren't."

She received cheers from the crowd which Rep. Nygren reprimanded.

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 4:42 PM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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3:21 PM

### [Students oppose UW System changes](#)

A slew of students came to oppose changes to the UW System.

Michael Heck, a junior at UW-Whitewater, said his classroom size has helped make his college experience and is afraid the reduction will increase class sizes while decreasing quality and class choices.

He also spoke against removal of shared governance and said that students will lose their voice in governing their own school.

Nathan Perry, president of Student Government at UW-Whitewater, said he fears the cuts will negatively impact quality in classrooms.

Another concern he has is the possibility to cut student life programs and offices. Specifically, he said that the office of financial aid could cut workers and hurt the process of students receiving aid.

Meanwhile, Richard Weber, a student at Fox Valley Tech, spoke against a tuition freeze at technical colleges.

He worried the proposed aid reduction would mean his program in communications would be cut because it is small.

"In paper it may look good, but when you add it up it's really not a good proposal," Weber said.

UW-Manitowoc Dean Charles Clark said more than 50 percent of students at his campus are first generation and that the proposed cut will close the door to them, along with minority students and non-traditional students.

"The UW System is the front door to the middle class for tens of thousands of students each year," Clark said.

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 3:21 PM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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**3:18 PM**

### [Fan makes plea for public TV, radio](#)

Ronald Dunlap was one of the few who came to the hearing to support public broadcasting in Wisconsin.

He said he is a regular donor to Wisconsin Public Television and Wisconsin Public Radio and argued funding the state provides is important to aid in education.

"I know that my donations preserve the programs I love," Dunlap said. "But I'm afraid the cuts will undermine the quality of their programs, specifically to education and infrastructure."

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 3:18 PM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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**3:08 PM**

### [Lawyer cautions committee on gov's drug testing plan](#)

Scott Schnurer from the Green Bay office of Legal Action in Wisconsin said that he is concerned about the changes in unemployment insurance, specifically with the proposal of drug testing.

He said that testing will increase the cost for taxpayers. He also said that the proposal is not compliant with federal laws and if found true the state would lose federal funding.

He said the gov's budget is supposed to protect taxpayers, but leaves them liable for the costs if the proposal violates federal law.

"I just don't get it," he said.

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 3:08 PM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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**1:14 PM**

### [Some urge committee to preserve senior programs](#)

Several people have urged the committee to protect programs benefiting seniors.

Pat Fenderstone, who said she is an 86-year-old registered nurse and representing AARP, said she and other members of the seniors group oppose changes to FamilyCare.

"By any measure it's a win-win program for both taxpayers and participants," Fenderstone said. "We see many red flags that make the care plan less effective and less efficient."

Donna Ellenbecker works with people with severe disabilities and was concerned about proposed changes to IRIS, a program that provides in-home health care. Two working individuals with mental disabilities spoke to the JFC, and she said with the proposed cuts they may not have the resources to work and be contributing citizens to their communities.

John Hanson volunteers for Meals on Wheels, a meal program designed for elders and funded through the Aging Resource and Disability Center. He said that they are efficient the way they currently run, each meal costing under \$4, and local management is key to their program.

"We are locally managed and have to make sure we aren't disrupted by for-profit groups," Hanson said.

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 1:14 PM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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**12:07 PM**

### **[Education an early focus at budget hearing](#)**

Education is an early focus at the budget hearing with members of the public testifying on the gov's proposal to lift the cap on school choice, state support for schools and the school report cards, among other things.

A trio of teachers spoke in favor of lifting the cap of the voucher program.

Lead Principal Douglas Olig from St. Mary's Academy in Fond Du Lac said he supports removing the cap from school choice. He said that private schools run more effectively.

"Not only private schools. Students shouldn't have to choose their school by their city," Olig said.

Superintendent Brain Hanes of the Ashwaubenon School District said all schools in Wisconsin are struggling to get by already and cannot take another hit.

"The potential loss of students across the state is just alarming," Hanes said. "We're at the end of the rope at this point."

He said the school district went from more than \$14 million in state aid in 2006 to less than \$6 million in 2014.

Mark Flaton, Principal of West High School in Green Bay, said that about of 75 percent of students in his district are living in poverty. He said that their school would have a 'D' rating if the state were to incorporate the proposed grading system.

He said the district uses extra resources to keep up with other schools and has succeeded in helping students make a better life for themselves.

"We are arguably the best school in the system," Flaton said. "I hope you change the grading system."

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 12:07 PM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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**11:58 AM**

### **[JFC budget hearing opens with ground rules](#)**

JFC Co-chair John Nygren opened today's public hearing on the budget by laying down the ground rules: Everyone will have two minutes to speak and five minutes if they are in a group of three or more.

More than 150 people were scheduled to speak with the hearing slated to wrap up at 5 p.m.

First up was Brillion School District Superintendent Dominick Madison, who said that many in Brillion have worked hard to support the local public school that the JFC is meeting in today.

He spoke against cuts to public schools.

"Consider the affect this budget will have on public education," he said. "We cannot allow a student's zip code to be the quality provider of their education. "

Madison also spoke against vouchers for private schools

"We need to focus on funding one system before we fund a second," he said.

The Mayor of Brillion Gary Dieter was the next to speak. He thanked the JFC for the opportunity to host the hearing in his city. Dieter urged controlling property taxes and funding local infrastructure.

-- By Jordyn Noennig

Posted @ 11:58 AM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)

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**11:14 AM**

### **[Public JFC hearings kick off in Brillion](#)**

The Joint Finance Committee is in Brillion today for the first of four public hearings on the budget.

Public testimony is scheduled to last until 5 p.m., the same hours the committee has planned for its next hearing on Friday at Alverno College in Milwaukee.

Meanwhile, Dem JFC members and leaders have announced plans for another nine hearings. The first is tomorrow in Wisconsin Rapids with the final one April 11 in Eau Claire.

**[See more on the Dem hearings](#)**

Posted @ 11:14 AM | [Permalink](#) | [0 comments](#)