



Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance

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NEWS

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New Legislature Has Few New Faces, More Experience WISTAX Takes A Look At New State Senate, Assembly

MADISON—Following one of the “greenest” legislatures in years, the new 2017-18 state senate and assembly have few new faces, and thus more experience dealing with major state issues. Their experience will be tested almost immediately as lawmakers use their first six months reviewing and remaking the governor’s proposed state budget for 2017-19.

A new report from the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX), “New Legislature, Same Issues?,” examines this new legislature and the major budget issues it faces. The report also includes names and telephone numbers of all 132 state legislators. Now in its 84th year, WISTAX is a nonpartisan organization devoted to public policy research and citizen education.

With only three new senators and nine new members of the assembly, the 2017-18 state legislature will look very much like the last one, but with more experience. The 2015-16 legislature had 27 members with no prior experience in the legislature and another 30 with two years or less.

In the assembly, Republicans hold a 64-35 advantage over Democrats, their largest majority since 1957. In the senate, the 20-13 Republican majority compares to 19-14 last year. By the end of the session, the GOP will have held both the legislative and executive branches for six years.

Not only was there little legislative turnover this year, the number of candidates (224) was at the lowest level since before 2000. Candidate numbers have declined each year since 2010.

WISTAX researchers also note the lack of competition in many districts. In 41 of 115 districts up for election in 2016, only one candidate was on the ballot. In another 21, major party candidates had no post-primary opponents or only third-party competition. In other words, nearly half of all state legislative contests were decided by the August primary, when voter turnout was less than 20%.

In addition to examining the legislature, the new report also looks at major budget issues. Education and transportation are likely to be among the most-debated this spring.

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State-imposed revenue limits on K-12 schools have not increased for the past two years. With many school costs continuing to increase, there is pressure on the legislature to provide more money for schools.

Transportation finance will also be front and center. With debt service claiming about 20% of transportation revenues, several large road projects underway, and gas tax collections increasing slowly, lawmakers have limited options. The state can find transportation cost savings; delay projects; or find ways to generate more revenue.

A full list of senators and representatives is printed in the new 2017-18 *Legislative and Congressional Directory* now available from the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. The directory is the only one with district maps, and also includes the name, address, party affiliation, telephone number, and election results for each legislator. It also lists senate and assembly committee chairs, legislative leaders, constitutional officers, and legislative service agencies.

A free copy of *The Wisconsin Taxpayer* magazine, "New Legislature, Same Issues?," is available by visiting www.wistax.org; emailing wistax@wistax.org; calling 608.241.9789; or writing WISTAX at 401 North Lawn Ave., Madison, WI 53704-5033. □

(Editor's Note: An electronic version of this release is available at www.wistax.org.)