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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2/09/2018

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Legislators Should Read Bills Instead of Playing Demagogue

Madison – With record low unemployment levels and more Wisconsinites working than ever before, it is important that nobody is sitting on the sidelines. That is why Governor Walker has called for a special session to pass a number of welfare reform bills seeking to help get people who are unemployed and on assistance back into the workforce. This package of 10 bills does not seek to kick people off of welfare, but instead helps them live up to their potential if they are physically and mentally capable of working. We need programs that are efficient, effective, and accountable in helping people out of poverty.

On Monday, February 5th, both Senator Bewley and I took to Wisconsin Public Radio to give our views on the upcoming special session bills. During the discussion, Senator Bewley claimed she'd spent time "trying to make sure I understand them completely." But after an hour-long discussion, it became quite clear that Senator Bewley did not read – and did not want to understand – the bills.

Why would a public official agree to talk on the radio about a package of bills before knowing what is in them? Maybe because that makes it easier to make ridiculous claims that don't add up.

One of the proposed bills seeks to put asset limitations on new applicants that seek state help. If you live in a home that is worth more than \$240,000, have liquid assets (cash or can be converted to cash without penalty) of \$25,000, and have \$20,000 or more in the equity of your personal vehicle, you don't qualify. I as your legislator can't afford a \$240,000 house, nor have I ever owned a vehicle worth \$20,000, let alone one that has \$20,000 of equity in it. There are exceptions to the rule, such as farmers, the elderly, and disabled. I believe most people would say that these restrictions are more than reasonable.

When Senator Bewley talked about this bill, she used a scenario of a family having to sell their \$15,000 truck if someone fell ill. I may not have been the best math student, but even I can see you can't have \$20,000 of equity in a \$15,000 vehicle. The Senator also went on to state that under this bill "you own a home and someone has computed that you have too much equity in it so now you've gotta move." That is also false, as the bill simply talks about the value of the home, not how much equity you have in it. Frankly, if you have enough money to make a \$1,700 mortgage payment, you probably don't need food stamps – and if you do, you need to downsize. It was pretty obvious to me, and anyone listening, that the Senator had not read the bill.

Asset limitations are just one of the bills in the package. Northern Wisconsinites are generous people; they just want to know that the people they are helping are also pulling their own weight, and that their legislators actually read legislation before commenting.

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