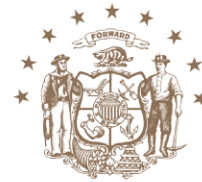




SONDY POPE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
80TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT



For Immediate Release
February 23, 2016

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LEGISLATOR THROWS TANTRUM, WALKS OUT OF LOCAL EDUCATION GATHERING

MADISON - This morning, members of the Chippewa Falls, Altoona and Eau Claire School Districts held a “Breakfast with Our Legislators” gathering to discuss the state of their school districts with area legislators. In the middle of the meeting Representative Kathy Bernier (R-Lake Hallie) stormed out – refusing to hear anything further from her school districts – after school board members made statements indicating that Minnesota’s school funding formula is better than Wisconsin’s. Representative Sondy Pope (D-Cross Plains), the ranking Democrat on the Assembly Committee on Education, released the following statement regarding Rep. Bernier’s actions:

“Representative Bernier’s actions this morning were clearly unprofessional,” said Representative Pope. “It is unfortunate that Rep. Bernier would walk out of a meeting, refusing to listen to her constituents just because they weren’t saying what she wanted to hear. In a representative government, the essential job of elected officials is to listen to constituents - especially if we do not agree. This is how our work is informed.

According to Rep. Bernier, the offensive comment involved a member of the Eau Claire School Board noting that Minnesota’s economic state and education spending is favorable compared to Wisconsin’s.

Unfortunately for Rep. Bernier, the school board member was simply stating fact. Wisconsin cut state general funding for K-12 schools by 12.7 percent per student between 2008 and 2016, while in Minnesota, state general funding per student increased by 6.9 percent during the same time period. In fact, Wisconsin has cut more spending than almost every other state with the exception of Oklahoma, Alabama and Arizona. This administration, supported by the votes of Rep. Bernier, has provided the deepest cuts to public education in the state’s history.

“Saying Minnesota is funding their schools better than Wisconsin isn’t a ‘sweeping partisan statement’ – it’s a fact. Representative Bernier can run away from facts all she wants, but that doesn’t make them any less true.

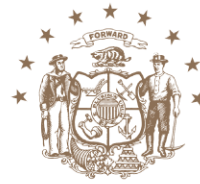
In explaining her actions, Rep. Bernier used dramatic language to characterize the incident, calling her school board’s statements “vile” and saying their comparing states was a “sweeping partisan statement.”

“Pointing out fact, attempting to work with your legislators, and conveying very real concerns isn’t vile. Being pro-education isn’t partisan. Representative Bernier’s unprofessional and petulant conduct today verges on vile. Her refusal to listen to statements she doesn’t already agree with is partisanship in its worst form.



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“In her statements, Rep. Bernier characterized schools’ concerns as saying ‘we need more money’ and ‘we don’t like this.’ Representative Bernier didn’t appreciate that her school districts didn’t pat her on the back and tell her she was doing a great job. What they were saying was that they had very real concerns and needed her, as their representative legislator, to address them.

“There is an old saying that Rep. Bernier would do well to consider, ‘If you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.’”

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