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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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Rep. Hebl's Statement on Sunshine Week
"Good government is open and transparent"

(MADISON) – Today Rep. Gary Hebl (D-Sun Prairie), released the following statement recognizing Sunshine Week:

This week is National Sunshine Week, a campaign that highlights the importance of a transparent and accountable government at every level- local town boards, city councils, state legislatures, all the way up to the United States Congress.

Wisconsin has a long history of politicians who sought to champion clean, open government. My Capitol office displays portraits of Robert La Follette and William Proxmire, two Wisconsinites who saw value in keeping politics transparent. Unfortunately, in recent years, Wisconsin seems to have gone backwards. We have seen the majority party in Wisconsin meeting in private to draw district lines resulting in litigation that has lasted the better part of a decade.

When the majority party drew the most recent district boundaries, they did so in secret without public input, and with the goal of preventing competitive races to lock themselves into a perpetual majority. The members of their party even signed legal agreements that prevented them from talking about the maps while they were being drawn up. Backroom deals and secret votes should be a thing of the past.

This is not the open and accountable government Wisconsinites deserve or expect. It was a shameful process, and one that I hope will never be repeated. Part of the problem is that the Wisconsin Legislature is exempted from the state's Open Meetings law. Wisconsin's government and its actions should be open to the public, and the Legislature ought to adhere to that principle. There should not be one rule for politicians in Wisconsin and one for everybody else. To help fight for transparency, I have co-sponsored legislation that would require the Legislature to hold partisan caucuses out in the open. Transparency at each and every opportunity will help to hold elected officials accountable to their constituents.

Accountability starts with being able to vote out your legislator if they no longer represent your values. That can't happen when legislators redraw district maps in secret to choose their voters instead of the other way around. That is why I support legislation that would take the responsibility of redistricting out of the hands of partisan legislators and instead create an independent commission that would draw political lines using a nonpartisan approach. The move to an independent commission would create a sense of objectivity in the redistricting process. It would also ensure that Wisconsin voters are provided a more representative form of government.

Good government is open and transparent. Citizens deserve the opportunity to be involved and aware of its actions. We can return to the days of transparency and accountability, but it will require political leaders in Wisconsin acknowledging mistakes of the past and recognizing that true power ought to belong to the people. I will continue to advocate for government transparency that would make Robert La Follette and William Proxmire proud.

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