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Reps. Sargent and Berceau: After Consecutive Damning Reports, Joint Finance Republicans Move to Privatize State Audits

Vote to privatize UW system audits highlights Republicans' displeasure with recent audit results revealing malfeasance and noncompliance with state law

(MADISON) – Yesterday, Republicans on the Joint Finance Committee voted to privatize the University of Wisconsin (UW) system's annual audit in Governor Walker's 2017-2019 state budget. State law currently requires an annual audit to be conducted by the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB), Wisconsin's nonpartisan, award-winning institution charged with conducting objective audits and evaluations of Wisconsin state agencies to ensure effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. Under Republicans' proposal yesterday, however, the annual UW system audit would be privatized and conducted by a contracted, outside accounting firm.

Republicans' decision to begin privatizing audits of state agencies comes conveniently after many of LAB's objective, nonpartisan audits of state agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Transportation, and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation revealed Governor Walker's state agencies are willfully ignoring state laws and insubordinate to the Legislature's intent.

"After all the changes Republicans have made to skirt transparency and accountability over the past six years like abolishing the Government Accountability Board and changing open records laws, the move to begin privatizing state audits is perhaps the most alarming," said Representative Sargent, ranking Democratic member of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee. "This is clearly a response to Republicans' displeasure with recent audits which highlighted their agencies are not only being wasteful and malfeasant of taxpayer dollars, but they regularly willfully defy state law.

"Recent disturbing audit results have revealed gross malfeasance and ineffectiveness, and instead of finding ways to make state agencies *more* transparent and accountable, the Republican answer is to get rid of oversight entirely so they won't get the results they don't want to hear." Rep. Sargent said.

"The Legislative Audit Bureau is one of our state's most renowned institutions, promoting transparency and accountability in our state government while also ensuring state agencies are using taxpayer dollars efficiently and effectively," said Representative Berceau, member of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee. "It's funny that Republicans are all about minimizing waste and government efficiency until it's a Republican-controlled state agency being wasteful and inefficient."

"This is a slippery slope—Republicans are starting with UW, but it's no secret that Republicans have long wanted to get rid of the Legislative Audit Bureau, and this is the first step toward doing just that," Rep. Berceau concluded.

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