

Legislative Oversight Needed Now More than Ever for Veterans Care Fund

Written by Wisconsin Senate Democrats
Friday, 10 March 2017 11:34

<http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/veterans-012015-s5.jpg>



Past decisions to divert funds from the veterans nursing homes to the Veterans Fund and the “banking” of \$35 million in revenue reserves has led to the deterioration of facilities and care. Erpenbach wants to reestablish Legislative oversight of all funding.

MADISON – Senator **Jon Erpenbach** (D-Middleton) circulated a bill Thursday to reestablish Legislative oversight of revenue overages from the care of veterans in state veteran’s nursing home facilities. Room for repair and improvements at the Veterans Home at King were highlighted again in the “for cause” survey requested by US Senator Tammy Baldwin. The survey found the home failed to meet three requirements and partially met another two during the survey which was conducted unannounced between January 10th and 13th at the Veterans Home at King.



“Struggles at the Veterans Home at King have been well documented in the media. Decisions to divert funds from the veterans nursing homes to the Veterans Fund and the “banking” of \$35 million in revenue reserves has played a part in the deterioration of facilities and care at King. Unfortunately turning back the clock and granting requests made for facility improvements, like the \$18.5 million denied by Governor Walker last budget, is not an option. Our only choice as a Legislature is to move forward,” said Senator Erpenbach.

Erpenbach is proposing reestablishing Legislative oversight of all funding for the veterans homes. DVA will transfer a total of \$21 million away from the Veterans Homes just this biennium. Governor Walker’s 2013 budget included language that allowed for unlimited transfers from the Veterans Nursing Home Fund into the Veterans Fund without Legislative approval. The Legislature added JFC passive review, but the Governor vetoed it. DVA can now transfer at any time revenue from our state veteran’s nursing homes facilities directly into the Veterans Fund.

“The “For Cause” investigation requested by US Senator Tammy Baldwin provides us with a

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renewed clear path for repair. These veterans care funds should be used for improvement at the facilities, to increase wages to keep and recruit the best professionals, and to provide cutting edge medical care at our veteran's homes. While diverting to other veterans services is not the worst way to spend this money, I believe a state that supports their veterans allocates state funds for programs for veterans and does not use money meant for the care and comfort in nursing homes for administration and rent," continued Erpenbach.

Overages in the nursing homes are derived from an exemption from the state nursing home bed tax, the higher Federal "per diem" paid to facilities for the care of veterans, the Federal service related disability payments made for the care of disabled veterans, the higher "state rate" for reimbursement for Medicaid, and private payment from veterans and their families.

"Funds provided by families and the federal government for the care of our nursing home residents should be used at the nursing homes first. The Wisconsin Legislature has a responsibility to properly allocate resources for veterans," Erpenbach concluded.