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~ Leibham Proposal Would Reduce Phone Taxes and Enhance Public Safety ~

Disingenuous Police & Fire Tax Would be Repealed

SHEBOYGAN – State Senator Joe Leibham (R-Sheboygan) has introduced legislation that would reduce the amount of taxes assessed on phone bills in Wisconsin while funding efforts to maintain and enhance emergency 911 systems across the state. Under Leibham’s proposal, taxes assessed on phone bills would be reduced by \$.35 - \$.75 per month per device.

As a part of Leibham’s bill, the current \$.75 per month per device Police and Fire Protection tax would be eliminated. The revenue generated from the tax, which was created by Governor Jim Doyle, was supposed to provide funding for 911 services. Instead, revenue was diverted to the state’s general budget fund. “Since its creation, citizens have been outraged at the dishonesty of this tax. Disingenuous actions like this undermine citizens’ faith in their state government,” Senator Leibham said. “Righting this wrong is critical to restoring the credibility of our budgeting process”.

In addition to the current bogus Police and Fire tax, counties currently have the option to assess a fee on landline telephones of up to \$.40 per device. For instance, Calumet County taxes at a rate of \$.35 per device, Manitowoc at \$.40, and Sheboygan at \$.24. Leibham’s proposal would eliminate this fee as well. In exchange for eliminating these two taxes, a monthly \$.40 tax would be assessed on all telecommunications devices, with the revenue being required to be used to establish a comprehensive statewide emergency 911 program that would ensure an integrated 911 telecommunications system. In addition, the program would provide grants to local Public Safety Answering Points for the improvement of emergency 911 services.

“Under this proposal, state telephone taxes will be reduced by \$.35 to \$.75 per device per month. At the same time, we will enhance emergency response across the state and restore accountability to our budgeting”, Senator Leibham said. “I have appreciated working with telecommunications providers, the Wisconsin Counties Association, constituents, and other individuals to bring this proposal forward.”

Leibham’s proposal implements, in part, recommendations from the March 2013 report from the Joint Legislative Council’s Special Committee on 911 Communications. This report, issued after months of study by legislative and public citizen Committee members, recommends the type of comprehensive, statewide emergency 911 program established by this proposal.

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