



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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APR - 1997

April 3, 1997

TO: Representative James Baumgart
Room 3 North, State Capitol

FROM: Tony Mason, Fiscal Analyst

SUBJECT: Proposal to Restructure the Legislature's Partisan Caucus Staffs

You have asked this office to provide a comparison of the salary and fringe benefits costs of your proposal to restructure the Legislature's partisan caucus staffs with the salary and fringe benefits costs of the existing caucus staffs.

Since we do not have any actual draft legislation to review at this time, you have asked that we rely on the summary of the proposal, as prepared by the Legislative Reference Bureau. Based on this summary, we understand your proposal to include the following elements:

- The current authority of the Joint Committee on Legislative Organization (JCLO) or either house of the Legislature to employ partisan caucus staffs would be repealed and all existing partisan caucus staff positions would be deauthorized, effective July 1, 1998.

- A new legislative service agency (known as the Legislative Partisan Caucus Staffs) would be created. The agency would be headed by a director, appointed by JCLO, and a total of 25.0 FTE staff positions (including the director) would be authorized. All agency employees would be appointed on a nonpartisan basis and would be in the unclassified service. The director would be required to assign an equal number of employees to exclusively serve each party caucus in each house of the Legislature.

- JCLO would set the salary of the director, who would in turn fix the salaries of all other agency employees.

The summary of the draft provides no other fiscal details as to a budget level for the new agency or how the transition to a new agency structure might be accomplished.

In order to prepare an estimate of the potential fiscal impact of your proposal, we have used the following approaches and assumptions:

First, to arrive at the estimated costs for operating the current partisan caucuses, we have annualized the March 1997, payroll for the partisan caucus staffs in each house of the Legislature in order to determine personnel costs. Where there are current caucus staff vacancies, we have adjusted the payroll figures to reflect positions filled at the salary minimum for an entry level analyst. Since the amount of supplies and services costs attributable to the operation of the caucus staffs is not separately tracked in each house, we have not included an estimate of any such costs in this comparative cost estimate.

Second, to arrive at the salary and fringe benefits costs for the new Legislative Partisan Caucus Staffs agency, we have followed instructions from your office and have: (1) set the director's salary at the average of the four current caucus directors' salaries; and (2) for the remaining 24.0 FTE positions, budgeted the salary and fringe benefits costs at the starting salary rate for an Assembly caucus analyst 1 position (22.0 FTE positions) or an Assembly caucus secretary 1 position (2.0 FTE positions). (The Senate does not have separate, specific caucus staff position designation and list all such employees as legislative assistants.) The above professional staff to clerical staff ratio approximates that observed in the existing partisan caucus staff offices.

Third, if the Legislative Partisan Caucus Staffs office were established as a separate legislative service agency with a separate and distinct appropriation, a determination would ultimately have to be made as to what amounts should be provided for space rental, supplies, telephone service, other supplies and permanent property.

Based on the above approaches and assumptions, the following cost comparison has been developed.

**Comparative Salary and Fringe Benefits Costs for
Existing Partisan Caucus Staffs and a Legislative Partisan Caucus Staff Agency
(GPR Funds)**

	<u>Total FTE</u>	<u>Estimated Annualized Costs</u>
Existing Caucuses	54.0	\$2,726,900
Proposed Caucus Agency	<u>25.0</u>	<u>905,900</u>
Estimated Net Change	-29.0	-\$1,821,000

While annual net salary and fringe benefits savings of \$1,821,000 GPR and a reduction of 29.0 GPR full-time equivalent position are indicated from this exercise, the following points should be emphasized. First, as previously indicated, this comparison is for salary and fringe

benefits costs only. Second, the actual legislative draft may have provisions which might affect these estimates (for example, the assignment of the Legislative Partisan Caucus Staffs director to a particular executive salary group range). Third, the amount of potential salary and fringe benefits savings identified above should also be viewed as the upper level of savings which could be realized under your proposal. This is because we used the starting salary for caucus analyst 1 positions to prepare our estimate, per your instructions. Both the Assembly and the Senate currently base an employee's starting salary level on a combination of factors, including any prior service as a legislative employee and level of educational attainment. Thus, to the extent that the proposed Legislative Partisan Caucus Staffs agency hired experienced, more educated applicants, many of these individuals might likely be hired above the salary minimums used in this analysis. Depending on: (1) the extent that this occurred; and (2) the total funding limits, if any, established for the separate Legislative Partisan Caucus Staffs agency, the potential savings identified above would be correspondingly reduced. Finally, the new staff director would also be able to establish salary ranges for the new caucus staff which might differ considerably from the current salary ranges for caucus employees. If it were determined that the new, nonpartisan professional staff should have an increased level of training or take on more responsibilities than the current partisan caucus staffs, the need to pay higher salaries could result. Such a change could also affect the amount of savings identified above.

I hope that this information is helpful.

TM/dls

Green Bay Press Gazette - Editorial - 5/30/01

Strip caucus funding from state budget

The Wisconsin State Journal has performed a valuable public service with its investigation of the questionable involvement of the state Legislature's partisan party caucuses in political activities.

The three-day series by Madison's morning newspaper last week said caucus employees secretly campaign for legislative candidates on state time and from their state offices in apparent violation of the law. State ethics laws prohibit public officials and state employees from using state government resources for their personal benefit.

Taxpayers fund the four caucuses at a cost of \$3.9 million a year.

Republicans and Democrats each have a caucus in the Assembly and Senate. The caucuses' official duties are helping legislators with jobs such as researching bills, drafting news releases and printing newsletters.

However, the State Journal investigation found that the caucuses operate as secret campaign machines, especially during the election. Eleven former caucus staff members told the newspaper that at certain times of the year, campaign work is the primary — and required — work of caucus employees.

Taxpayers and anyone else interested in preserving what's left of Wisconsin's reputation for clean government should be outraged at what the newspaper unearthed.

We recommend two courses of action:

- The state Ethics Board and state Elections Board should launch immediate investigations of caucus activity. That investigation already has been urged by two government watchdog groups — Common Cause in Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.
- The \$3.9 million per year cost of the caucuses should be stripped out of the state budget now under review. If Republicans and Democrats think that the caucuses are worth preserving, then the parties should fund them. Taxpayers should not be forced to underwrite political activity — especially political activity that is being conducted in such an underhanded way.

In a tight budget year in which many quality programs won't receive the money they need, funding of party caucuses should be on the absolute bottom of the barrel as a spending priority.

We challenge legislators to have the courage to eliminate money for the caucuses.

There's some irony here as well. Many legislators — Republicans in particular — rail against proposals for public financing of campaigns, yet that's what their caucuses are doing.

A State Journal editorial said one of the most troubling allegations that arose during the newspaper's investigation involves the Assembly Republican caucus and its ties to Project Vote Informed, an independent expenditure group.

A former Assembly Republican caucus employee told the State Journal that she and other state workers secretly helped Project Vote Informed coordinate attack ads against Assembly Democratic candidates last fall in possible violation of state campaign-finance laws. That included a sleazy personal attack against Rep. Lee Meyerhofer of Kaukauna.

Legislators apparently are unable or unwilling to police themselves. So the state Ethics Board and Elections Board must do it for them. And citizens should demand that taxpayer subsidy of political activity should end — now

(END)

COSPONSORSHIP MEMO

June 11, 2001

TO: ALL LEGISLATORS

FROM: SENATOR JIM BAUMGART

RE: CO-SPONSORING LRB 2547/1 relating to restructuring of legislative partisan caucus staffs.

DEADLINE: June 20, 2001

In light of the recent situation detailed in the Wisconsin State Journal I will be introducing legislation to restructure the caucus staff into one non-partisan support group for the legislature. The caucuses do provide invaluable services relating to information and bill research. These and other functions ought to be maintained. If you would like to sign on to **LRB 2547/1**, please contact my office at **266-2056** by **June 20, 2001**.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

Currently, the joint committee on legislative organization (JCLO) or the committee on organization in either house of the legislature may employ such number of research staff assigned to legislative party caucuses as in the judgment of JCLO or the committee on organization of either house are necessary to enable it to perform its functions and duties and to best serve the people of this state. Currently 56 full-time equivalent positions are authorized for the party caucus staffs (32 for the assembly and 24 for the senate).

This bill deletes this authority and deauthorizes all positions that are currently assigned to legislative party caucuses beginning on July 1, 2002. Instead, the bill creates a new legislative service agency named the "Legislative Partisan Caucus Staffs", headed by a director. The director is appointed by JCLO and the director appoints the other employees of the agency. The director and all other employees are appointed on a nonpartisan basis. JCLO sets the salary of the director and the director sets the salary of the other employees, subject to available appropriations. The director and all employees serve outside the classified service. The bill authorizes 25 positions for the new agency. The director must assign an equal number of employees to exclusively serve each party caucus in each house of the legislature.

For further information see the *state* fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.