



**JOAN BALLWEG**

STATE SENATOR · 14<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

Senate Bill 36: Modifying the Department of Tourism's Reporting Duties and  
Repealing Requirements to Distribute Cheese, Submit a Financial Statement, and  
Use Famous Residents in Marketing  
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism  
Testimony of Senator Joan Ballweg  
February 16, 2023

Good morning, members of the committee, and thank you for hearing this legislation.

SB 36 revises the following statutory language for the Department of Tourism regarding their reporting responsibilities and other obsolete mandates:

- 1.) **Reporting Duties:** Current law dictates that the Department of Tourism makes their annual report to the "Senate Natural Resources Committee and the Assembly Committee on Tourism." Instead, this proposal directs the Department of Tourism to make its annual report to the "appropriate standing committees" in the legislature.
- 2.) **Cheese Distribution:** This bill repeals obsolete statute dictating that the department shall distribute free cheese to visitors at tourist information centers. The department has not operated tourist information centers since 2009 when funding was eliminated, so this statute is no longer relevant.
- 3.) **Golf Wisconsin Audit:** Vehicles may be registered with a Golf Wisconsin license plate which donates a portion of the proceeds to the Wisconsin Professional Golfers Association Junior Foundation (WPGA). However, current law stipulates that the WPGA must annually submit an audited financial statement showing how it used these funds. The financial burden of this audit falls on the WPGA, and the audit may cost nearly as much as all the money generated for the WPGA through the program. As a result, the WPGA Junior Foundation has not conducted reports or audits. This bill repeals the statute dictating that the WPGA makes an annual audited financial statement on its expenditure of funds generated by the program.
- 4.) **Use of Famous Residents in Advertising:** This bill removes language in statute requiring the department to "consider the use of famous residents and former residents of this state in tourism marketing strategies." There are countless tactics the Council on Tourism may consider to optimize marketing, but the use of celebrities is the sole tactic delineated in statute.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



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# JON PLUMER

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 42<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Senate Committee on Agriculture & Tourism

February 16, 2023

Thank you Chairman and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism for your consideration of Assembly Bill 23/Senate Bill 36.

AB 23/SB36 is a straightforward piece of legislation that updates statutory language, eliminates various outdated provisions that apply to the department of tourism, and makes a common sense revision to benefit a non-profit organization.

Currently, state statute requires the Department of Tourism to make an annual report on their activities to the Senate Natural Resources Committee and the Assembly Committee on Tourism. Legislative committees are not set in stone and change from session to session, and there are frequently more appropriate committees in the Senate to receive the annual report than the committee set in statute. This session for example, the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism deals directly with tourism related issues. AB 23/SB36 changes statute to direct the annual report be made to the “appropriate standing committees.”

The bill also eliminates an obsolete provision of statute that requires the Department of Tourism to distribute free cheese at tourist information centers. This provision is outdated as the department has not operated these centers since 2009 when funding was eliminated.

AB 23/SB36 repeals the requirement for the department of tourism to consider the use of famous Wisconsinites in their marketing strategies. This provision was enacted in 1987 and is no longer appropriate for advertising strategies in 2023. Market and data driven strategies should be what guide our state’s advertising campaigns. The professionals at the Department of Tourism know the value of celebrity endorsements, but should not be required to consider their use for every marketing campaign.

Finally, the bill eliminates an annual requirement for the WPGA Junior Foundation to submit an audit of funds received from their specialty license plate to the Attorney General and the presiding officer of each house of the legislature. Other non-profits that receive funds from specialty plates are not subject to this provision and a professionally conducted audit costs nearly as much as the group receives from the plates.

Thank you again for your consideration of this common sense legislation.



**Testimony of Secretary-designee Anne Sayers**

*Senate Agriculture and Tourism Committee*

*February 16, 2023*

**In favor of Senate Bill 36**

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Senator Ballweg,

I want to thank you for working to clean up outdated items in Wisconsin's tourism statutes. As we focus on helping the tourism industry not just bounce back, but bounce back stronger, this bill helps clarify our role in inspiring travelers to share unexpected moments of joy in Wisconsin. This technical bill cleans up four areas of the statutes:

**Modernize the Department of Tourism's reporting duties**

Under 41.11(1), the Department of Tourism is required to annually report on its activities to the Senate Natural Resources Committee and the Assembly Committee on Tourism.

As members of this committee know, committee names change each legislative session. To keep our statutes evergreen and to ensure we are in compliance with the law, we recommend modifying the statute to bring it in line with historic practice by requiring the department to report to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature in addition to the Chief Clerk of each chamber. This proposal more accurately reflects previous practice of the agency, which is to communicate our annual report to the Assembly and Senate committees that most frequently handle tourism-related matters.

**Cheese distribution**

I just want to be crystal clear that we love Wisconsin cheese, and we promote it a gouda-amount already. However, current law is outdated, as it requires the Department of Tourism to distribute donated Wisconsin-made cheese at tourist information centers. As a result of a 2009 change in the state statute, the Department of Tourism no longer operates tourist information centers, as referenced in statute 41.11 (5). While the letter of the law are in the right place, the statute is null and the Department of Tourism hasn't fulfilled this section of the statutes since that time. For this reason, we recommend deleting 41.11 (5) in its entirety.

**WPGA audit requirement**

Under current law, drivers may purchase a special Golf Wisconsin license plate, the fee for which includes a contribution to the Wisconsin Professional Golf Association's Junior Foundation. The foundation is required to annually submit an audited financial statement on its use of the contributions to the attorney general and legislature. The department recommends deleting this requirement.

In CY 2020, 164 license plates brought in \$11,925 to the WPGA Junior Foundation. Now, I'm sure that when these license plates were created, we thought it was a hole-in-one, but as the committee can see, the revenue generated from these license plates, while welcome, doesn't substantiate the cost of an audit. By paying for an audit of the small sum, there would be even fewer dollars remaining for the

**Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers**

**Wisconsin Department of Tourism Secretary-designee Anne Sayers**

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WPGA Junior Foundation. As such, the WPGA has not conducted reports or audits to date and they have indicated to us support for this change.

**Removing marketing strategy from statute**

Under current law, the Council on Tourism is required to consider the use of famous Wisconsin residents and former residents in tourism marketing strategies. The department requests that 41.12 (3) be deleted for multiple reasons.

Primarily, we believe our marketing campaigns should be data-driven. As a \$20.9 billion industry, there is a lot is riding on the success of the department’s strategic marketing efforts. There are times when celebrity can be helpful in marketing a product, but committee members should consider that aligning the state’s tourism reputation with that of a celebrity is not without risk. Celebrities are humans and subject to personal downfalls. When a celebrity experiences a scandal, it’s not just their reputation on the line, but also every product they endorse.

Secondarily, celebrity is just one of the many potential tactics to consider when designing a successful marketing campaign. Just as other marketing tools such as data and market research are appropriately not delineated in statute, the department believes it is unnecessary to require consideration of celebrity as a marketing strategy by law.

Thank you for taking the time to bring these items before the Committee today.

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