

# Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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*State of Wisconsin*

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Representative John Nygren, Assembly Chair  
Senator Alberta Darling, Senate Chair  
Joint Committee on Finance  
State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Representative Nygren and Senator Darling:

Early each year, this office conducts a review of the status of the state's general fund and presents its findings to the Legislature. In even-numbered years, the analysis includes an examination of economic forecasts and tax collection and expenditure data of the current fiscal year, and projections for each fiscal year of the current biennium. We have now completed that review.

Based upon our analysis, we project the closing, net general fund balance at the end of this biennium (June 30, 2017) to be \$70.2 million. This is \$94.3 million below the \$164.5 million balance that was estimated prior to our review. The \$164.5 million balance includes all bills enacted to date in this legislative session (through 2015 Act 126).

The \$94.3 million reduction is the net result of: (1) a decrease of \$158.2 million in estimated tax collections; (2) an increase in departmental revenues of \$6.3 million; (3) a decrease of \$87.1 million in sum sufficient appropriation expenditures; and (4) a \$29.5 million decrease in estimated lapses to the general fund.

The following table reflects the 2015-17 general fund condition statement, which incorporates our revenue and expenditure projections.

**TABLE 1****2015-17 General Fund Condition Statement**

	<u>2015-16</u>	<u>2016-17</u>
<b>Revenues</b>		
Opening Balance, July 1	\$135,555,000	\$283,990,800
Taxes	15,175,600,000	15,655,700,000
Departmental Revenues		
Tribal Gaming Revenues	25,605,000	24,705,800
Other	<u>518,042,900</u>	<u>513,953,700</u>
Total Available	\$15,854,802,900	\$16,478,350,300
<b>Appropriations, Transfers, and Reserves</b>		
Gross Appropriations	\$15,896,434,700	\$17,058,396,000
Sum Sufficient Reestimates	-40,252,300	-46,884,300
Transfer to Transportation Fund	38,009,600	39,458,300
Compensation Reserves	10,692,500	18,616,800
Less Lapses	<u>-334,072,400</u>	<u>-726,425,200</u>
Net Appropriations	\$15,570,812,100	\$16,343,161,600
<b>Balances</b>		
Gross Balance	\$283,990,800	\$135,188,700
Less Required Statutory Balance	<u>-65,000,000</u>	<u>-65,000,000</u>
Net Balance, June 30	\$218,990,800	\$70,188,700

Net appropriations are projected to decrease by \$57.6 million (a decrease of \$87.1 million of sum sufficient expenditures offset by a \$29.5 million reduction in estimated lapses). Significant factors in this estimate include a reduction in homestead tax credits for the biennium (-\$19.5 million) and earned income tax credits (-\$4.9 million). In addition, debt service is projected to be \$18.8 million lower than previously anticipated.

The following additional points should be noted about Table 1. First it incorporates the fiscal effects of all bills enacted to date in the current legislative session (through 2015 Act 126). Second, it does not reflect the impact of any bills that are pending before the Legislature that have not yet been enacted.

Finally, it does not reflect any changes to the appropriations for the medical assistance (MA) program, or assume any lapses of unexpended GPR from those appropriations. 2015 Act 55 (the 2015-17 budget act) allocated \$5.6 billion GPR for MA benefits over the 2015-17 biennium. Statutes require the Department of Health Services to submit a quarterly report to the Joint Committee on Finance on the status of the MA budget, based on actual expenditures and updated program information. The most recent report, dated December 30, 2015, projects a biennial GPR surplus in the MA budget of \$72.6 million (approximately 1.3% of the total MA

GPR budget). This is due mainly to lower-than-expected enrollment in the program over the first half of 2015-16, and an increase in the projected federal matching rate for federal fiscal year 2016-17. As the biennium progresses, projected MA expenditures will change due to fluctuations in program enrollment, average benefit costs, federal revenue, and other factors. Through the Department's quarterly reports, the Legislature will be able to monitor the fiscal status of the program and react to any modifications, if necessary, prior to the conclusion of the biennium.

## **General Fund Taxes**

The following section presents information regarding general fund taxes for the 2015-17 biennium, including a discussion of the national economic forecast and general fund tax revenue estimates for fiscal years 2015-16 and 2016-17.

**National Economic Review and Forecast.** This office prepared revenue estimates for the 2015-17 biennium in January, 2015, based on IHS Global Insight, Inc.'s January, 2015, forecast for the U.S. economy. The forecast predicted accelerated economic growth in 2015, primarily due to lower gasoline prices, income gains, and positive consumer sentiment. Slower, positive growth was predicted for 2016 and 2017. Under that forecast, Global Insight assumed that the Federal Reserve would begin increasing the federal funds rate in June of 2015, and that Congress would pass legislation to increase the debt ceiling prior to mid-March. In addition, the forecast assumed that the Brent spot price for oil would average \$64/barrel in 2015, reaching its lowest level during the second quarter of 2015, and that the trade-weighted value of the dollar would appreciate by 5.7% in 2015. The primary risk to the forecast was a slowdown in Chinese and European economies that could create downward pressure on growth in the U.S. economy.

In May, our office reviewed additional tax collection data and Global Insight's April economic forecast and did not revise revenue estimates for 2014-15, 2015-16, or 2016-17. Our office noted that it was possible that additional revenues would be realized in 2014-15, but that any excess collections in that year would likely be offset by reduced growth rates for personal income and personal consumption expenditures in the following two years. General fund tax collections in 2014-15 were \$71.4 million above estimated amounts, which was 0.5% higher than aggregate general fund tax collection estimates for that year.

Economic growth in 2015 was somewhat slower than projected last January. Real (inflation-adjusted) growth in U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) is now estimated at 2.4% in 2015, which is lower than the projection of 3.1% for that year. The U.S. dollar appreciated faster in 2015 compared to foreign currencies, caused by expansionary monetary policy among major trading partners and lower than expected growth among emerging markets. The stronger dollar contributed to downward pressure on U.S. exports and domestic production. Global Insight expected declining oil prices (which decreased faster and for a longer period of time than forecast) to provide consumers with additional disposable income to spend on other goods and services. However, oil refinery shutdowns in California and Chicago tightened the supply of refined gasoline, causing pump prices for consumers to fall at a slower rate than the declining price of crude oil. In addition, consumers chose to save a larger portion of their reduced energy costs than Global Insight had expected, lowering the personal consumption growth rate to 3.4% in 2015 rather than the previously forecasted rate of 3.9%. In response to slower growth, the Federal Reserve did not increase the federal funds target rate until December of 2015, six months

after Global Insight had projected.

Global Insight expects underlying domestic economic growth in employment, consumer spending, and housing to offset declines in manufacturing that are expected to be caused by weak international demand and an increased value of the U.S. dollar. Under the current (January, 2016) forecast, Global Insight expects real GDP growth of 2.7% in 2016 and 2.9% in 2017. The revised forecast is based on the following key assumptions. First, the outlook incorporates changes from recently enacted federal spending and tax bills and assumes that: (1) the federal tax on high-premium insurance plans will be postponed until 2020; (2) the federal gasoline tax will remain at its current level through the forecast period; (3) grants-in-aid to state and local government and local highway spending will be higher than previously forecast; and (4) accelerated depreciation allowances on equipment will be made permanent, rather than sunset after 2019. Second, the Federal Reserve will increase its target for the federal funds rate at a steady, moderate pace until it reaches 3.25% by the end of 2018. Third, real GDP growth over the next decade will average 1.8% per year among major currency partners and 3.6% among other important trading partners. Fourth, the average price of oil will decline from \$54/barrel in 2015 to \$48/barrel in 2016 before increasing to \$58/barrel in 2017. Finally, the inflation-adjusted, trade-weighted value of the dollar is expected to continue appreciating against the U.S.'s broad index of trading partners through the first half of 2016, at which point the dollar is expected to be 17.7% higher than its average value in the second half of 2014, and then begin a steady decline over the remainder of the forecast period.

*GDP.* Real GDP is now projected to grow 2.7% in 2016 and 2.9% in 2017. The revised forecast maintains the same growth rate in 2016 and a slightly higher growth rate compared to the January, 2015, forecast of 2.7% in 2017. The expectations for nominal (current-dollar) GDP growth are slightly lower in 2016 and slightly higher in 2017 as compared to the prior forecast, changing from 4.6% in 2016 and 2017 to 4.4% in 2016 and 4.9% in 2017. As noted previously, both real and nominal GDP growth in 2015 were lower than had been previously forecast by 0.7 percentage points and 1.4 percentage points, respectively.

*Consumer Prices.* The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 0.1% in 2015, which was the same as had been anticipated by Global Insight last January. CPI is expected to rise 1.2% in 2016 and 2.6% in 2017. The revised forecast is significantly lower than the prior forecast in 2016, which expected the CPI to increase by 2.3%, and slightly higher than the prior forecast of 2.4% for 2017. The previous forecast expected energy prices to increase in 2016, following declining prices in 2015. However, the current forecast expects prices for energy and commodities to continue to fall in 2016, providing a larger offset against higher prices for food and services than was previously forecast. The higher CPI growth in 2017 reflects Global Insight's expectation that energy prices will increase faster in that year than under the previous forecast.

*Monetary Policy.* The U.S. Federal Reserve increased its target range for the federal funds rate of 0.25% to 0.50% at its mid-December meeting. The Fed had maintained its previous target for the federal funds rate of 0% to 0.25% since December, 2008, and this was the first rate increase by the Fed since June, 2006. The Fed has expressed confidence that inflation will rise, over the medium term, to its 2% objective and that the labor market has shown considerable improvement over the course of the year. However, the Fed noted that continued low prices for energy and non-energy imports in the near term could result in a lower level of inflation.

Global Insight projects that the Fed will gradually increase rates during the forecast period, with the average federal funds rate rising from 0.13% in 2015 to 0.90% in 2016 and 1.91% in 2017. These rates are lower than Global Insight's prior forecast, which projected the average federal funds rate to rise to 0.44% in 2015, 1.56% in 2016, and 3.33% in 2017. The lower federal funds rate projections, in part, reflect that the Fed first increased rates in December instead of June, as previously forecast.

*Personal Consumption.* Nominal consumption expenditures rose by 3.4% in 2015, which is lower than the 3.9% projection under the prior forecast. Sales of items generally subject to the state sales tax (most durable goods, clothing, restaurant meals and accommodations, and other taxable nondurable goods and services) grew by 4.3% in 2015, led by strong growth in sales of new light trucks and motor vehicle leasing services. Sales of nontaxable items (food for home consumption, gasoline, certain medical equipment and products, and most services) grew by 3.0% in 2015, with growth in expenditures for most services offsetting the reduction in gasoline expenditures. Nominal expenditures for taxable and nontaxable goods and services were projected under the prior forecast to be 4.7% and 3.5%, respectively, in 2015. As previously noted, lower gasoline prices did not result in as much of an increase in spending on other items as was previously forecast by Global Insight, with consumers choosing to increase savings.

The forecast expects consumption growth of 4.1% in 2016 and 5.2% in 2017, which is considerably lower in 2016 and slightly higher in 2017 than the prior projection of 4.9% in both years. Growth in purchases of items subject to the sales tax is projected to be 4.3% in 2016 and 5.4% in 2017. Sales of nontaxable goods and services are projected to follow a similar growth pattern, increasing 3.9% in 2016 and 5.2% in 2017. As compared to the previous forecast, growth in purchases of nontaxable goods and services are significantly lower for 2016, primarily due to the expectation that expenditures on gasoline, natural gas, and other energy goods will continue to decline in that year rather than increase as had been previously predicted.

*Personal Income.* Personal income grew by 4.5% in 2015, which was slightly faster than the 4.4% growth that was previously projected. Global Insight expects personal income growth of 4.2% in 2016 and 5.2% in 2017, which is lower than the previous forecast of 5.0% in 2016 and 5.5% in 2017. The downward revision for personal income growth in 2016 reflects reduced expectations for growth in wages and salaries, personal dividend interest, personal interest income, and proprietors' farm income.

Personal income is a proxy for adjusted gross income (AGI), which is the basis for calculating individual income taxes. However, not all components of personal income are included in AGI. Wage and salary income is the largest component of both measures, and forecasted growth rates for wages and salaries are 4.2% in 2016 and 5.2% in 2017. These percentages represent downward revisions to the previous forecast, which predicted growth rates of 5.0% for 2016 and 5.5% for 2017. AGI also includes farm and nonfarm proprietors' income, rental income, personal dividend income, personal interest income, and transfer payments from businesses to individuals, and the current forecast predicts combined growth rates of 2.9% in 2016 and 5.2% in 2017 for these personal income components. These rates compare to 5.7% for 2016 and 6.9% for 2017 under the previous forecast. It should be noted that these personal income components also have a nontaxable component since personal income includes a small amount of imputed income. In addition, AGI includes certain components that are not included

in personal income.

*Employment.* Expectations for the national unemployment rate, which is a function of both the number of jobs and the number of labor market participants, improved under Global Insight's most recent forecast. The average unemployment rate was 5.3% in 2015, which is lower than the prior forecast of 5.5%. The average unemployment rate is expected to decline to 4.9% in 2016 and remain at that level in 2017, which is lower than the previous forecast of 5.3% in 2016 and 5.2% in 2017. The labor force participation rate has declined each year from a peak of 64.6% in 2006 to 61.3% in 2015. However, this trend is expected to reverse beginning in 2016, with the labor force participation rate increasing to 61.6% in that year and to 61.8% in 2017. These rates are slightly lower than projected last January.

Total nonfarm payrolls increased by an estimated 243,000 per month in 2015, and are projected to increase by 198,000 per month in 2016 and 155,000 per month in 2017. These projections are similar to the prior forecast. Private sector payrolls are expected to grow by 1.9% in 2016 and 1.4% in 2017, and public sector payrolls are expected to grow by 0.4% in 2016 and 0.6% in 2017.

*Housing.* The average interest rate for a conventional 30-year fixed rate mortgage was 3.9% in 2015, and is projected to increase to 4.4% in 2016 and 4.7% in 2017. These projections are lower than Global Insight's previous forecast of 4.4% in 2015, 5.4% in 2016, and 6.1% in 2017. Compared to the previous forecast, the lowered projections reflect delayed rate increases by the Federal Reserve.

Housing starts increased 110,000 in 2015 to 1.11 million, and are expected to increase to 1.26 million in 2016 and 1.42 million in 2017. These projections are lower than Global Insight's previous projections, which expected housing starts to reach 1.50 million by 2017. Similarly, growth in sales of new and existing houses has been revised downward from the previous forecast, with estimated growth of 6.5% in 2015, 3.2% in 2016, and 3.6% in 2017. Under the prior forecast, new and existing home sales were projected to grow by 10.4% in 2015 and 7.4% in 2016, and then fall by 1.3% in 2017. Although the growth rate in 2017 has improved under the revised forecast, overall sales of new and existing homes are projected to be 165,000 units lower in that year than under the previous forecast. It should also be noted that sales of new and existing homes and the number of housing starts in 2015 remain 32% and 46% below their 2005 peak levels, respectively, and are not expected to exceed those levels over the forecast period.

Global Insight estimates that home prices contracted by 0.4% in 2015, which is lower than the 4.4% growth that had been projected in the prior forecast. Home prices are expected to recover over the forecast period, with projected growth of 4.1% in 2016 and 4.4% in 2017. The revised estimates project higher growth rates over the next two years compared to Global Insight's previous forecast, which expected growth in home prices of 2.0% in 2016 and 3.6% in 2017.

*Corporate Profits.* Economic profits are estimated to have declined 1.6% in 2015, but are anticipated to grow by 4.0% in 2016 and 2.8% in 2017. Global Insight had previously forecast growth of 10.6% in 2015 and 1.8% in 2016, followed by a contraction of 3.9% in 2017. Before-tax book profits grew 4.6% in 2015, which was lower than the prior growth forecast of 5.5%.

Growth in before-tax book profits is now estimated at 2.8% in 2016 and -0.2% in 2017, which is higher growth than was projected in the January, 2015, forecast of -0.1% in 2016 and -5.8% in 2017. The before-tax profits estimates are significantly affected by federal law changes regarding bonus depreciation.

*Business Investment.* Business investment in equipment grew at a rate of 4.5% in 2015, and is expected to grow 5.5% in 2016 and 7.2% in 2017. These estimates are lower than Global Insight's previous forecast, which anticipated growth of 7.8% in 2015 and 7.6% in 2016, but higher than the previous forecast for growth in 2017 of 5.8%. According to Global Insight, the slower near-term growth rate is primarily caused by capital spending cutbacks among companies that are exposed to foreign competition, low oil and gas prices, and falling agricultural prices.

Intellectual property investment for software, another indicator of business investment, grew by 4.9% in 2015 and is expected to grow at slower rates over the forecast period of 4.5% in 2016 and 5.0% in 2017. In the January, 2015, forecast, intellectual property investment was expected to grow by 7.2% in 2015, 7.1% in 2016, and 6.8% in 2017.

Business investment in nonresidential structures contracted 1.7% in 2015, and is expected to grow by 3.6% in 2016 and 5.6% in 2017. Under the previous forecast, growth was projected at 0.3% in 2015, 6.1% in 2016, and 11.9% in 2017. The downward revision to the forecast reflects significant reductions in investment for mining and petroleum structures, which contracted by more than twice the rate that had been previously forecast for 2015 and is expected to continue contracting by nearly 25% in 2016.

*International Trade.* In 2015, exports decreased by \$88.4 billion (3.8%) compared to reduced imports of \$93.0 billion (3.2%), which decreased the U.S. trade deficit by \$4.6 billion. Weak foreign growth and a stronger dollar contributed to lower exports, but were offset by a steep decline in imports of petroleum products due to low oil prices. The trade deficit improved less than was expected in the prior forecast, which anticipated a reduction of \$124.1 billion in 2015. Global Insight expects the trade deficit to decline by an additional \$58.3 billion in 2016 before reversing direction in 2017, when net imports are expected to increase by \$84.9 billion. The declining trade deficit in 2016 under the current forecast is primarily due to continued reductions in petroleum imports coupled with improved growth in exports of services.

According to Global Insight, weak foreign growth coupled with continued U.S. growth resulted in the trade-weighted value of the dollar appreciating against all major currency and other important trading partners (except for those pegged to the U.S. dollar) in 2015. The dollar appreciated against major currency trading partners by 19.6% and against other important trading partners by 11.5% in 2015, which is substantially higher than the prior forecast that the dollar would appreciate 10.7% against major currency trading partners and 3.8% against other important trading partners. The dollar was expected to depreciate in value against all other currencies in 2016 and 2017 under Global Insight's prior forecast. However, the current forecast expects the trade-weighted value of the dollar to continue to appreciate by 5.6% against major currency trading partners and 7.5% against other important trading partners in 2016, but then depreciate by 7.5% and 1.5%, respectively, in 2017.

The revised projections outlined above, which reflect Global Insight's baseline forecast, are

summarized in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Summary of National Economic Indicators**  
**IHS Global Insight, Inc., Baseline Forecast January, 2016**  
**(\$ in Billions)**

	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>
Nominal Gross Domestic Product	\$17,348.1	\$17,951.1	\$18,743.4	\$19,668.4
Percent Change	4.1%	3.5%	4.4%	4.9%
Real Gross Domestic Product	\$15,961.7	\$16,346.8	\$16,780.6	\$17,274.5
Percent Change	2.4%	2.4%	2.7%	2.9%
Consumer Prices (Percent Change)	1.6%	0.1%	1.2%	2.6%
Personal Income	\$14,694.2	\$15,359.7	\$15,998.1	\$16,825.4
Percent Change	4.4%	4.5%	4.2%	5.2%
Personal Consumption Expenditures	\$11,865.9	\$12,269.8	\$12,767.5	\$13,435.9
Percent Change	4.2%	3.4%	4.1%	5.2%
Economic Profits	\$2,072.9	\$2,040.7	\$2,122.8	\$2,181.5
Percent Change	1.7%	-1.6%	4.0%	2.8%
Unemployment Rate	6.2%	5.3%	4.9%	4.9%
Total Nonfarm Payrolls (Millions)	139.023	141.944	144.319	146.174
Percent Change	1.9%	2.1%	1.7%	1.3%
Light Vehicle Sales (Millions of Units)	16.44	17.39	17.76	18.19
Percent Change	5.8%	5.8%	2.1%	2.4%
Sales of New and Existing Homes (Millions)	5.360	5.708	5.890	6.101
Percent Change	-2.6%	6.5%	3.2%	3.6%
Housing Starts (Millions of Units)	1.001	1.109	1.265	1.419
Percent Change	7.8%	10.9%	14.0%	12.2%

Global Insight also prepares "pessimistic" and "optimistic" scenarios. Under the pessimistic scenario, given a 20% probability of occurring, the U.S. economy enters a recession during the middle two quarters of 2016 in response to unanticipated declines in international markets. Global Insight predicts that, under this scenario, European markets decline more than anticipated and lower commodity prices cause slower growth in emerging markets, which in turn causes investors to purchase U.S. assets and further strengthen the dollar compared to other currencies. Under this scenario: (1) domestically manufactured goods become more expensive as the dollar appreciates; (2) nonresidential construction declines; (3) employers choose to hire fewer employees; and (4) the unemployment rate begins to increase. The Federal Reserve does not increase the target federal funds rate over the forecast period in response to recessionary pressures. Real GDP growth is projected to be lower than the baseline scenario by 1.8 percentage points in 2016 and 1.6 percentage points in 2017.



In the optimistic scenario, to which Global Insight assigns a 15% probability, higher productivity growth, an increase in household formation, and stronger foreign growth cause a lower trade-adjusted value of the dollar to help the U.S. economy grow at a faster rate than forecast under the baseline. Increased residential and nonresidential construction, consumer spending, and corporate profits are projected under this scenario, contributing an additional 0.7 percentage points to real GDP growth in 2016 and 1.0 percentage points in 2017. The optimistic scenario projects that oil prices average 22.9% higher than the baseline projection in 2016, the dollar strengthens against other currencies in 2017, and the Federal Reserve increases its target for the federal funds rate more rapidly, averaging 2.58% in 2017 compared to the baseline projection of 1.91%.

**General Fund Tax Projections.** Table 3 shows revised general fund tax revenue estimates for 2015-16 and 2016-17. The projections are based on Global Insight's January, 2016, forecast of the U.S. economy and incorporate all tax law changes enacted to date.

**TABLE 3**  
**Projected General Fund Tax Collections**  
**(\$ Millions)**

	2014-15 <u>Actual</u>	<u>Previous Estimates</u>		<u>Revised Estimates</u> <u>January, 2016</u>	
		<u>2015-16</u>	<u>2016-17</u>	<u>2015-16</u>	<u>2016-17</u>
Individual Income	\$7,325.8	\$7,858.5	\$8,238.2	\$7,810.0	\$8,050.0
General Sales and Use	4,892.1	5,050.9	5,217.5	5,050.9	5,217.5
Corporate Income and Franchise	1,004.9	994.0	1,015.7	990.0	1,045.0
Public Utility	381.8	366.8	373.4	370.8	382.4
Excise					
Cigarette	569.6	551.0	545.5	571.0	565.5
Tobacco Products	71.9	71.4	73.6	76.4	79.6
Liquor and Wine	48.8	48.5	49.4	50.0	51.0
Beer	8.8	8.6	8.4	9.0	9.0
Insurance Company	165.5	181.0	187.0	168.0	172.0
Miscellaneous Taxes	<u>72.0</u>	<u>73.9</u>	<u>76.3</u>	<u>79.5</u>	<u>83.7</u>
Total	\$14,541.2	\$15,204.6	\$15,784.9	\$15,175.6	\$15,655.7
Change from Prior Year		\$663.3	\$580.3	\$634.4	\$480.1
Percent Change		4.6%	3.8%	4.4%	3.2%

As shown in the table, total general fund tax revenues are estimated at \$15,175.6 million in 2015-16 and \$15,655.7 million in 2016-17. These amounts are lower than the previous estimates by \$29.0 million in the first year and \$129.2 million in the second year. The biennial decrease is \$158.2 million, or 0.5%. The largest reduction is in the individual income tax, and the estimates for insurance company taxes have also been decreased. With the exception of the sales and use tax, all of the other estimates have been increased somewhat. The sales tax estimates have not been revised.

Under current law, the state automatically conforms to federal changes to Section 179 of

the Internal Revenue Code, which allows taxpayers to claim an immediate deduction for the cost of acquiring certain types of business property, rather than depreciating such property over its useful life. Under our prior forecast, we assumed that Congress would continue to provide one-year extensions of the Section 179 expensing provisions as they existed in tax year 2014 (higher expense limits were extended on a temporary basis several times between tax years 2003 through 2014). Under the Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes Act of 2015, the higher expense limits were made permanent, rather than being extended for only one year, and will be indexed for inflation. In addition, the types of property that are eligible for immediate expensing were expanded to include certain air conditioning and heating units. Also, based on more recent federal data, the Department of Revenue has reestimated the fiscal impact of the one-year extension of the tax year 2014 provisions to be higher than previously estimated. Compared to our previous estimates, the Section 179 law changes are estimated to reduce state tax revenues by approximately \$75 million more in the 2015-17 biennium.

The remaining decrease in the estimates (\$83 million) primarily reflects the fact that the current economic forecast is less favorable than the January, 2015, forecast.

**Individual Income Tax.** State individual income tax revenues were \$7,325.8 million in 2014-15 and are estimated at \$7,810.0 million in 2015-16 and \$8,050.0 million in 2016-17. Relative to the previous figures, the current estimates are lower by \$48.5 million in the first year and \$188.2 million in the second year. On a year-to-year basis, the current estimates represent increases of 6.6% for 2015-16 and 3.1% for 2016-17.

Based on preliminary collection information through December, 2015, individual income tax revenues for the current fiscal year are 5.1% higher than such revenues through the same period in 2014-15. A higher rate of increase (7.9%) is anticipated over the next six months largely because fewer refunds are expected for 2015 tax returns, than were processed for 2014 tax returns. A lower level of refunds will occur this year because the withholding table change that took effect in tax year 2014, affected withholding levels for nine months in the 2014 tax year, but all 12 months in the 2015 tax year. Because withholding changes do not affect individuals' tax liabilities, lower withholding levels result in lower tax refunds.

The reductions from the prior estimates primarily reflect a reduced forecast of personal income, the federal Section 179 changes, and a larger share of the manufacturing and agriculture credit (MAC) being claimed under the individual income tax instead of the corporate tax. In addition, the estimated cost of the historic rehabilitation tax credit has been increased.

**General Sales and Use Tax.** State sales and use tax revenues totaled \$4,892.1 million in 2014-15, which was 5.7% higher than the year prior. Sales tax collections through December, 2015, are 2.3% higher than the same period in 2014 and are projected to accelerate to 3.9% for the remainder of the 2015-16 fiscal year. Sales tax revenues are estimated at \$5,050.9 million in 2015-16 and \$5,217.5 in 2016-17, reflecting growth of 3.2% and 3.3%, respectively. These estimates account for law changes but are otherwise unchanged from previous estimates.

**Corporate Income and Franchise Tax.** Corporate income/franchise taxes were \$1,004.9 million in 2014-15, which was \$69.9 million above the Act 55 estimate. Corporate tax revenues are projected to be \$990.0 million in 2015-16 and \$1,045.0 million in 2016-17. These estimates

reflect a decrease of 1.5% in 2015-16 and growth of 5.6% in 2016-17. These estimates are lower than the prior estimates by \$4.0 million in 2015-16 and higher by \$29.3 million in 2016-17.

The new estimates reflect a significant reduction in 2015 corporate economic profits (12.2 percentage points lower than the previous growth rate), but stronger growth in profits for 2016 and 2017 compared to the prior forecast. Quarterly estimated tax payments through December are 4.2% lower compared to the same period last year. Historically, estimated payments generate between 86% and 96% of total corporate tax collections. Although actual collections exceeded the estimate by nearly \$70 million last year, revenues in 2015-16 are now expected to be somewhat lower than the previous estimates due to the reduced profit forecast, weaker estimated payments through December, and increased costs of the Section 179 provisions and the historic rehabilitation credit.

The increased revenue estimate for 2016-17 primarily reflects an improved profit forecast in that year. In addition, the share of the MAC claimed by corporate filers has been reduced from the prior estimates. Overall, the estimated cost of the MAC in the 2015-17 biennium has been reduced slightly since Act 55 was enacted.

**Public Utility Taxes.** Public utility tax revenues were \$381.8 million in 2014-15, and are currently projected at \$370.8 million in 2015-16 and \$382.4 million in 2016-17. Compared to the previous estimates, these amounts are higher by \$4.0 million in 2015-16 and \$9.0 million in 2016-17. Utility tax collections are currently expected to decrease by 2.9% in 2015-16 and increase by 3.1% in 2016-17. Private light, heat, and power companies are the largest taxpayer group, comprising 65% of estimated public utility taxes for the 2015-17 biennium. Collections from these companies totaled \$243.8 million in 2014-15, and are estimated to decrease to \$238.1 million (-2.3%) in 2015-16 and increase to \$249.1 million (4.6%) in 2016-17. The decrease in 2015-16 reflects, in part, reduced energy prices and last year's relatively warm winter weather.

**Excise Taxes.** General fund excise taxes are imposed on cigarettes, liquor (including wine and hard cider), tobacco products, and beer. In 2014-15, excise tax collections totaled \$699.1 million. Of this amount, \$569.6 million (approximately 81%) was from the excise tax on cigarettes.

Excise tax revenues over the next biennium are estimated at \$706.4 million in 2015-16 and \$705.1 million in 2016-17, which represents increased revenue of \$26.9 million in the first year and \$28.3 million in the second year compared to the prior estimates. Excise tax estimates have increased largely due to higher year-to-date cigarette tax collections, which are currently 2.2% higher than collections over the same period in 2014.

**Insurance Premiums Taxes.** Insurance premiums taxes totaled \$165.5 million in 2014-15, which was \$10.6 million less than had been estimated in January, 2015. Premiums tax collections are projected to be \$168.0 million in 2015-16 and \$172.0 million in 2016-17. The estimates are lower than prior estimates by \$13.0 million in 2015-16 and \$15.0 million in 2016-17. The reduced estimates in the first year are primarily caused by a lower base for tax collections following the actual collection totals in 2014-15, as well as a lower than expected adjusted year-to-date growth in tax collections of 0.35%. Although year-to-date premiums tax collections are 16.2% higher than last year, the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance reports

that the strong growth rate is due to an acceleration in posting certain tax payments under the Office's new tax processing system, which will be offset by less revenue allocated to the final month of collections. The estimate for 2016-17 reflects historic tax collection growth trends.

**Miscellaneous Taxes.** Miscellaneous taxes include the real estate transfer fee (RETF), municipal and circuit court-related fees, a small amount from the occupational tax on coal, and some estate tax revenue from audit activity. Miscellaneous tax revenues were \$72.0 million in 2014-15. Of this amount, \$57.8 million (approximately 80%) was from the RETF.

Miscellaneous tax revenues over the next biennium are estimated at \$79.5 million in 2015-16 and \$83.7 million in 2016-17, which represents increased revenue of \$5.6 million in the first year and \$7.4 million in the second year compared to the prior estimates. Miscellaneous tax estimates have increased largely due to higher year-to-date RETF collections, which are currently 15.2% above collections over the same period in 2014.

As noted above, the revised tax revenue estimates are based on Global Insight's January, 2016, baseline forecast of the U.S. economy, which projects continued economic growth for the next several years. Global Insight's pessimistic forecast foresees an economic contraction in the second and third quarters of 2016, with positive growth resuming in the fourth quarter. Global Insight assigns a 20% probability to that scenario. The January economic forecast was prepared before the recent declines in oil prices and global stock markets, which could affect future forecasts. Preparing tax revenue estimates always involves uncertainty. Final collections may be higher or lower than the estimates, depending upon the actual performance of the economy. Although we believe that the revised estimates reflect the most likely movement of the economy over the next 18 months, tax collections and economic forecasts will need to be monitored throughout the remainder of the biennium.

I will keep you apprised of any changes to the estimates that may be necessary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Lang", written in a cursive style.

Robert Wm. Lang  
Director

RWL/sas

cc: Members, Wisconsin Legislature