



State Engineering Association

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State engineers take good-government issues to legislators

MADISON - Good-faith bargaining, sensible civil service rules, open government and ethical campaigning are major concerns that State of Wisconsin engineers are sure to bring up when they meet one-on-one at the Capitol with legislators Wednesday April 18.

"The state needs to be more forthcoming in all these areas, and our members will let their elected representatives

know what they think should be done," said Tom Mugan, president of the State Engineers Association (SEA).

SEA is a bargaining unit for about 1,100 engineers and engineering-related professionals employed by more than a dozen state agencies. Annually for the past nine years, SEA members across the state have set aside a day of personal time to travel to Madison and exchange information and express their personal views to legislators.

Treating employees fairly and agreeing to equitable compensation for their work and expenses would be a start, Mugan said.

"It took our association a couple of years of hard bargaining beyond an expired contract to get the state to approach reasonable compensation adjustments," Mugan said. "Now we're about to begin the process all over again. Our members want their legislators to know that as state workers we provide great service at an economical cost."

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WHO: State Engineering Association (SEA), representing about 1,100 State of Wisconsin engineering and technical employees

WHAT: Annual SEA Day government office visits

WHEN: Wednesday, April 18
9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

WHERE: Room 400NE Capitol

SEA DAY NEWS RELEASE PAGE 2

Mugan noted that a state study comparing private consultants versus state engineer costs last year showed that state engineers are at least 18 percent more cost effective than private alternatives.

The state Department of Transportation (DOT) dragged its feet for months in response to SEA's request for a copy of the study. After newspapers filed Open Records requests, the report finally was released but a court fined DOT \$500 for violating the Open Records law. Evidence in the case indicated that direction to withhold the study came from the Department of Administration.

"Our members are very interested in ensuring that the state gets the best value out of every tax dollar," Mugan said. "But it's obvious we also have to get the state to be more open and honest in carrying out its programs and studies, and not let political considerations drive bad public policy."

"Citizens need to ensure that the state follows its own rules. State programs must be run in open ways, so that taxpayers can measure government effectiveness."

Mugan said SEA members likely will bring up the continuing issue of transportation funding and the need to continually monitor contract reform rule-making under Act 89. Other issues include:

- Sick pay conversion benefits: SEA has no formal opinion about the benefits for elected officials, Mugan said, but recognizes the state's need to attract competent and dedicated employees at all levels, as long as benefits are properly disclosed.
- Mileage reimbursement and travel expense policies: Use of state versus personal automobiles has been an issue with SEA for years. The DOT obliges some employees to drive their own personal cars while receiving far less mileage reimbursement than the state pays legislators who do exactly the same thing.

"SEA Day gives legislators a chance to better understand the issues our members face as we try to deliver good service to communities where we live and work," Mugan said. "We like to remind our legislators that our members are not just state employees. We are also citizens, taxpayers and voters."

For more information about SEA, visit www.wisea.org on the Internet.

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