

Saving tax dollars

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/40568542.html>

Preserve a law requiring the state to determine whether contract work can be done more cheaply by state workers.

Mar. 3, 2009

Speed is important in many tasks the state undertakes, particularly as federal stimulus money comes its way. But speed need not be inconsistent with oversight or implementing common-sense precautions against overspending or misspending.

Making sure that the state lets no contract without determining whether it can be done by state employees for less cost is one of those precautions. Gov. Jim Doyle, in his budget package, proposes that the three-year-old law that mandates this analysis be eliminated [<http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/39858377.html>](http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/39858377.html). State legislators should remove his measure from the budget.

The law was passed after reports of problem contracts surfaced. A Journal Sentinel investigation in 2007 revealed at least 74 times the state hired contractors for work it would have cost less to perform by state employees. Last week, Assembly Speaker Mike Sheridan (D-Janesville) and Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Madison), co-chairman of the Legislature's Finance Committee, jointly sent a letter [<http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/40327332.html>](http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/40327332.html) to Doyle explaining the benefits of the law.

We hope the letter represents what will be a groundswell of opposition to the law's repeal.

The law requires analysis. It doesn't mean that the state can't still contract the work if speed of getting the job done is important or there is some doubt about whether state employees have the expertise to do it as well.

But the state should go through at least the exercise of determining whether costs can be pared, particularly in this period of shrinking revenues. This is essential oversight. Wisconsin paid \$450 million in contracting for the fiscal year that ended June 30.

And speaking of federal stimulus money, how does allowing the 16-member Joint Finance Committee review of the stimulus spending accomplish speed? Yes, oversight is important here, too. But much of that money will come with strings or formulas attached. Administering federal money flowing through the state traditionally has been the job of the governor and his cabinet.

One fear is that politics could intrude if legislators have too much control of that money - that money better spent in Fond du Lac, for instance, somehow ends up spent in Wausau. The Joint Finance Committee review might be just and appropriate. Just in case, some oversight for the overseers, please.

Should Wisconsin retain the law that mandates cost analysis of contracts? To be considered for publication as a letter to the editor, e-mail your opinion to the Journal Sentinel editorial department [<http://www.jsonline.com/general/30627794.html>](http://www.jsonline.com/general/30627794.html).

