

Rep. Mark Born Discusses State Budget with WHA Board, Workforce Investments and Funding for Hospitals

State Rep. Mark Born (R-Beaver Dam) joined the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) board of directors meeting on Feb. 16 to provide insight into the 2023-2025 State Budget and how lawmakers in the Republican-controlled Legislature will react to the Governor's proposal. Born is a co-chair, alongside Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green), of the Joint Committee on Finance, the state Legislature's powerful budget-writing committee.



L to R: WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding, Rep. Mark Born, WHA 2023 Board Chair Monica Hilt, WHA 2023 Board Chair-Elect David Hartberg, and WHA 2023 Board Immediate Past Chair John Russell.

WHA President & CEO Eric Borgerding introduced Born and thanked him for his support of hospitals in the previous state budget and recognized Born's position on the UW Hospital Board, which gives a close-up understanding of issues facing hospitals.

In his opening remarks, Born noted the value of that UW role. "Because of my experience on the UW Health Authority Board, I have a newfound understanding of health care issues. There is an incredible amount of work that goes into running a health system or hospital in this state, and having a greater understanding has been valuable in my role in the Legislature," said Born.

In recognition of the historic health care workforce shortage and record inflation as top challenges hospitals are currently facing, Born praised hospitals for working through these challenges, but expressed a need for better public understanding of the state of hospitals.

"You all do such a good job providing care. No matter what, you rise to the challenge and save lives. It all works like magic. But you do not do a good enough job communicating how tough it is for you to do your job. The average person thinks everything is fine. There is little understanding that there are major struggles," said Born.

"Between [workforce and inflation], your margins are taking a hit and this impacts your ability to provide care. This is something other members of the Legislature need to hear about, and they need to hear about it from their local hospitals," Born continued.

Shifting to the comments on the state budget, Born told board members they can expect the GOP-led Legislature to focus on funding support for hospitals in areas supported in previous budgets, like the Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) program and Medicare reimbursement rates. Born expressed interest in learning more about health care workforce initiatives.

Born said, "On the workforce side, that is where we could see something new. I think we'd be open to some new ideas."



Eric Borgerding and Rep. Mark Born at WHA's 02-16-2023 board meeting.

Borgerding referenced a \$100 million grant program dedicated to health care workforce initiatives introduced in Governor Evers' budget the night before. "These grants could go to hospitals to bring new, localized strategies to the table to grow their workforce. We have a track record of working in a public-private partnership and doing some really great things," said Borgerding.

Board members engaged in the discussion reinforcing local solutions. "These problems are local and vary by local areas, like childcare, housing or other factors that impede employment. Grant programs directly to local hospitals could be an effective way to address the workforce shortage," said Brian Stephens, CEO of Door County Medical Center.

For the remainder of the meeting, WHA staff provided various updates to the board. Borgerding presented WHA's annual goals document outlining the priority areas of focus for 2023. Progress reports on the 2023 goals are provided at each board meeting throughout the year. Borgerding also updated the board on outstanding items from the December board meeting and previewed special projects ahead.

Other staff updates included WHA's Government Relations staff discussing policy priorities and advocacy strategies for the upcoming legislative session, including the state budget.

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