

Soldiers Grove 'Easter Egg Hunt' returns to village

By GILLIAN POMPLUN
Great news – after a gap of a few years, the Village of Soldiers Grove will once again hold an Easter Egg Hunt. The April date for the event will be announced soon, according to Soldiers Grove Village Clerk Kaitlynn Ott.

At their March 9 meeting, the Soldiers Grove Village Board voted to make a \$250 donation to the Lion's Club for the event.

The board also voted to award a construction contract for repairs to bathrooms in the Soldiers Grove Fire Department building. The repairs will include floors, toilets, showers, walls, and new doors and sinks. Mark Swiggum's bid of \$14,760 was approved for the work.

Events in the village
Kathleen Sobek, owner of Desperados Bar, attended the board meeting to discuss an upcoming May 27 'album release party' for Marty Cina. Sobek asked the board to approve not requiring a fence to be put up in the courtyard behind the bar in order to allow attendees to move freely between the event, and other businesses such as Country Gardens and Driftless Brewery.

The board voted to allow the event, and not require that the area be fenced.

Arleena Roe from the Swamp Project People addressed the board in the public input section of the agenda about the group's wish to hold multiple small fundraising events this year, as well as the larger Swampfest, planned for September 29-30.

Roe specifically asked for permission for the group to do a 'brunch cookout' on the same day as the village's clean up event. The board told her that the fire department is also thinking of doing a cookout that day, and that the group should stay in touch with the village clerk.

Public works
The Soldiers Grove Public Works Department reported that they were able to accomplish a lot of things in February. Those included maintenance, lighting, plumbing, and getting things lined up for clean up days. They were also able to read water meters.

McCormick Electric put in new LED lights outside of the fire department, and replaced the lighting in the village office. The village is also in the process of having the lights on the village's electric sign fixed, and are also looking to find a way to light the village signs coming into town, so they are able to be seen at night.

During the month, the public works department had some breakdowns, but was able to fix them in house. For instance, the plow broke on the dump truck, but they were able to get it welded back together.

They report that a new air compressor was purchased and installed at the village garage, and they replaced the men's toilet in the village hall. Last, they met with Star Karate Studio to help locate a plugged sewer line.

The board moved to schedule Soldiers Grove Clean Up Days for April 15, which will include electronic drop off and tires.

In other business
In other business the board:
• heard from resident Diane Coleman about a person letting their dog run, and poop in the tennis court
• tabled the Soldiers Grove Public Library Report to the April meeting as the librarian was unable to attend due to the snow
• voted to pay a \$100 bill from Prairie du Chien Chamber of Commerce out of CDC funds

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CRAIG ANDERSON, recently appointed Crawford County Board Supervisor for Gays Mills, was out showing his Irish pride last Saturday at the Prairie du Chien St. Patrick's Day Parade. Anderson was marching with the Crawford County Democrats.

Lower Wisconsin River Riverway Board hears of change to Lone Rock Bridge construction

By GILLIAN POMPLUN
The Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board (LWSRB) learned of significant changes to the 'design-build' plan for construction of the new bridge at Lone Rock. News of a total closure of Highway 133 between Lone Rock and Avoca, and closure of the south navigation channel under the bridge, came to the board at their March 9 meeting.

"We have concluded that the only way to get girders across the span and to construct the south abutment of the bridge requires Highway 133 between Lone Rock and Avoca to be shut down from early June through Labor Day," Jake Gregerson of Kramer North America told the board. "It also means we need to construct a causeway across the main navigation channel which will result in that passage down the river being closed to paddlers almost all summer."

This differed greatly from the plan previously communicated to the board. That plan called for only "periodic closures" of Highway 133, and no closure of the main channel of the river. The exact route of the detour has not yet been announced on the project website.

Gregerson said that there would be a 'barge opening' in the causeway, and that this might be opened at times during the summer if construction work shifts were away from the south abutment area. He said that opening and closing the structure is "very time consuming," and so it would not be feasible to open it frequently.

Gregerson told the Riverway Board that the Otter Creek Boat Launch in Iowa County would remain open, but motorized craft would need to navigate into the north channel around Long Island. He said that paddlers could

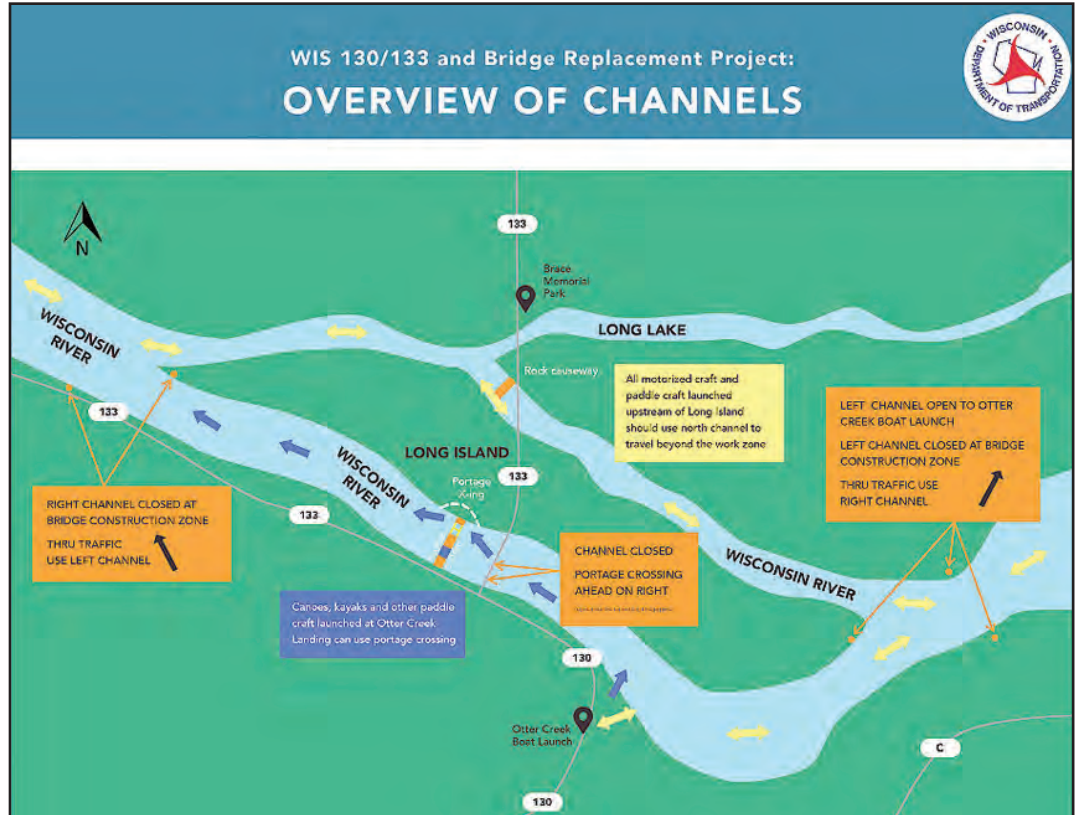
also take this route, or use a portage through the construction zone that will be established. He said the area would be marked with buoys.

The changes to the plan were announced to the board as a 'fait accompli' that had already been approved by Richland County's Town of Buena Vista Board, and Wisconsin DNR.

Riverway Board member Steve Wetter asked if the representatives of the construction firms had considered what might happen to the causeway in the event of 'high water' on the river.

"We've thought of that, and realize that we may have to rebuild certain portions of the causeway if it is eroded by high water," Gregerson said. "We don't anticipate that the entire causeway would erode, however."

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THIS MAP shows how the south navigation channel of the Wisconsin River under the Lone Rock bridge will be closed to motorized craft, and can be portaged by paddlers through the construction zone.

From the EPA Proposed PFAS limits signal a concern over health risks

Earlier this week the Environmental Protection Agency issued its first ever proposed limits for PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) under the Safe Drinking Water Act—limits that are far below those enacted by the State of Wisconsin late last summer.

"EPA based these public health protections on the latest science, and we appreciate the Biden Administration's leadership to make enforceable PFAS standards a priority," says Clean Wisconsin Water Program Director Scott Laeser. "This is a significant step in the fight against PFAS contamination, and it comes after years of tireless work from researchers and safe drinking water advocates across the country."

The proposed drinking water standards include two of the most well-studied and concerning types of PFAS, which is a class of thousands of chemical compounds. The two chemicals, PFOA and PFOS, have been largely phased out of production and use in the United States, but they are showing up in lakes, rivers, streams, groundwater and drinking water across Wisconsin, frequently at alarming concentrations.

"PFAS are some of the most persistent chemicals in existence. They are incredibly difficult to break down. That's why they've earned the nickname 'forever chemicals,'" says Clean Wisconsin Staff Scientist Paul Mathewson. "So it's no surprise we're seeing PFOA and PFOS, two chemicals first manufactured in the 1940s, contaminating Wisconsin waterways today. PFAS accumulate in the environment and in our bodies when we are exposed to them primarily through contaminated water, food, or dust."

The proposed Federal drinking water standards for PFOA and PFOS are 4 parts per trillion (ppt) combined, 17 times lower than Wisconsin's own standard of 70 ppt, which took effect last August. Laeser says it was clear when those standards were passed that tougher limits would be on the way from the EPA.

"The good news is Wisconsin's standards have spurred the widespread testing of municipal drinking water across the state that is long overdue. But when the Natural Resources

Board arbitrarily weakened those standards in February despite what the science indicated was appropriate, we knew Wisconsin would soon have to revisit them with EPA action on horizon," Laeser says.

In its February 2022 meeting, the Natural Resources Board (NRB) also voted down PFAS limits for groundwater that had been recommended by Department of Natural Resources staff. Those limits would have offered some protection for the 1/3 of Wisconsin families who get their drinking water from private wells, which are not covered under the Safe Drinking Water Act. In December 2022, the NRB voted to start the process of setting groundwater standards for PFAS again.

More compounds included
The EPA's proposed regulations also include four additional compounds left out of Wisconsin's standards: PFHxS, GenX Chemicals, PFNA, and PFBS. To prevent health risks from mixtures of certain PFAS in drinking water, EPA is proposing that water utilities use a Hazard Index approach to regulate PFHxS, GenX Chemicals, PFNA, and PFBS.

While federal PFAS limits will ultimately replace those enacted at the state-level, Laeser says it's important to understand that the standards released by the EPA today are not final. And while the EPA hopes to wrap up this process quickly, he says the risk of delays caused by polluters intent on avoiding responsibility for PFAS contamination is real.

"Every step of the way, manufacturers and chemical companies that have put these dangerous chemicals into our environment and our bodies have fought accountability and action to protect families," he says. "It is essential EPA move quickly to finalize these standards. If these companies and the special interest groups that represent them care at all about public health, they can take a simple step; get out of the way."

Clean Wisconsin is also calling for water standards addressing more types of PFAS and action to address grease-resistant food packaging that contains the chemicals.

Source: Clean Wisconsin

With April vote nearing 'Election Integrity' proposals don't address vote concerns

By MATT MENCARINI
Election fraud is exceptionally rare: Over the past decade in Wisconsin, it has been prosecuted fewer than 200 times, or about once for every 163,000 ballots cast.

And within that tiny universe, the most common reason for criminal charges is not people voting under dead people's names, double voting or voter impersonation — the kinds of crimes election skeptics like former President Donald Trump claim happen on a large scale. The main cause is a voter's probation status, a Wisconsin Watch analysis of every Wisconsin election fraud case since 2012 found.

The analysis, with data compiled by Court Data Technologies, also found Black Wisconsinites, most of them from Milwaukee County, are even more overrepresented in election fraud prosecutions than they are in the court system overall.

The Wisconsin Watch analysis is the most comprehensive accounting of Wisconsin election fraud cases to date. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, includes in an online election fraud database of only 35 cases since 2012.

"I would say the allegations are out of scale with the rate at which there are actual crimes committed by voters,"

said University of Wisconsin-Madison political science professor Barry Burden, who runs the Elections Research Center. "It's not that there are no crimes committed by voters ... but they're just minuscule compared to the number of allegations."

81% of GOP 'very scared'
In 2022, the Marquette Law School poll found 81 percent of Republicans were "very concerned" about accurate vote count — topping the level of concern over issues including inflation, crime and illegal immigration.

The specter of even a scant amount of election fraud has been used to justify the state's voter ID law, Republican efforts to restrict voting options during the pandemic and Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election results.

Yet none of the dozens of GOP 'election integrity' proposals would help prevent or detect the most common voting infraction: people who, knowingly or not, vote while still under Wisconsin Department of Corrections supervision.

The overheated rhetoric over fraud — and the threat that any voting mistake could lead to jail or probation — can be enough to dissuade a person from voting, said Christopher

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Study finds claims of voter fraud in elections is greatly misrepresented

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Uggen, a University of Minnesota sociology professor who co-authored a book about felony disenfranchisement.

"And that's not to say necessarily that anybody who raises the issue of voter fraud is engaging in these efforts," he said. "But I do think there is an element, at least, who is more cynically and actively trying to suppress the vote and may raise doubts in people's minds about the negative consequences of them going out and voting."

Fraud is rare

Between January 1, 2012, and spring 2022, Wisconsinites cast more than 31 million ballots in contests from president to town clerk.

There were 48 general, primary and special elections, but only 192 prosecutions for election fraud, or 0.0006 percent of all votes cast.

Wisconsin Watch partnered with Court Data Technologies to compile a database of all felony cases since 2012 that included charges related to election fraud, illegal voting or illegal voter registration.

Of the 192 prosecutions statewide, Wisconsin Watch was able to determine the nature of allegations in all but 11. There were 40 cases that involved the kind of fraudulent voting of the type banned everywhere, such as double voting or voting in the name of a dead person.

In 20 cases, election workers, volunteers or candidates were charged. The most recent and high-profile example is a now-former Milwaukee election clerk who requested military absentee ballots be sent to a lawmaker under fake names just before November's election. Five of those were for candidates who submitted fraudulent nominating papers.

Three Marathon County cases stemmed from a town clerk who signed a random voter's name in the poll book so the list matched the number of votes cast in the 2020 election. The clerk pleaded guilty in December and received two years of probation, with the condition to have no election involvement. Felony cases against Marathon County poll workers are ongoing.

In seven cases, voters used improper addresses to register; three cases involved noncitizens voting; and two involved disorderly conduct at a polling place. Five cases against Fond du Lac voters charged in 2022 for using their UPS Store address are now closed, with prosecutors dismissing one, deferring prosecution in another and accepting misdemeanor plea deals in the others.

More than half of the cases — 109 — involved people voting or registering to vote before their probation ended. And 39 of those came from Milwaukee County.

From 2012 through spring 2022, Milwaukee County prosecutors charged 57 people with election-related crimes — the equivalent of 0.0013 percent of 4.46 million votes cast.

"There is not a significant number of fraudulent votes being cast," said Matthew Westphal, the Milwaukee County assistant prosecutor who handles election crimes.

"The fact that we get referrals for illegal voters or fraudulent voters is indicative of the fact that the system is working, because it is catching those people who are voting fraudulently."

It's common for prosecutors to bring charges more than a year after an election, particularly for felony disenfranchisement cases. The Wisconsin Elections Commission, by law, does an audit after each election to see if anyone ineligible due to their probation status voted. Cases are referred to local prosecutors, and additional investigation is likely needed.

Court data show at least 52 people received sentences that went beyond fines and fees; only six were ordered to serve more than a month in jail.

Few cases double voting, voter impersonation

Voter fraud cases in Wisconsin include a Fort Atkinson man who voted twice in the 2012 gubernatorial recall election against then-Governor Scott Walker — once in his voting district in Fort Atkinson and once in the nearby town of Koshkonong, where he used to live. Wis-

consin Watch is not naming him and another defendant because both told authorities they didn't know they were violating the law.

The man initially told police he couldn't explain why his signature was also in the Koshkonong poll book and denied voting there. However, court records indicate he later told police that while he lived in Fort Atkinson for several years, he continued voting in Koshkonong, which he did not realize was wrong.

He is one of just 21 people charged with voting more than once in an election in the previous 10 years.

Another anti-fraud measure enacted in Wisconsin requires voters to present a photo ID to vote. It was signed in 2011, but legal challenges delayed implementation until 2016.

Burden said the state's voter ID law was "probably the most significant effort to try to combat either perceptions of vote fraud happening or actual crimes." However, the only crime it is designed to prevent is voter impersonation.

Of the 192 election fraud prosecutions from 2012 through spring 2022, only five dealt with voter impersonation — with just one of those coming prior to the ID law taking effect, according to the Wisconsin Watch analysis. Those five include the case of Harry Wait, a Racine County political activist who turned himself in to authorities in 2022 after requesting absentee ballots for elected officials to show such fraud was possible.

Critics of Wisconsin's voter ID law and other restrictions or hurdles to voting have said such measures are not preventing much fraud — but they are keeping many people from voting.

"Voter suppression has been applied differentially throughout the nation's history," said Uggen, the University of Minnesota sociologist. "We know from the Reconstruction era and the Jim Crow era that there were many efforts taken to suppress the Black vote. And a threat of cracking down on illegal voting can have that same chilling effect."

Probation most common

Two-and-a-half months after his release from prison, a Milwaukee man went to a polling place in November 2018 with his mother.

He didn't go along planning to vote, according to court records, but once at the polls, his mother told him he was eligible. He also remembered hearing something about the government overturning the rule banning people with felony convictions from voting, so he registered that day and cast a ballot.

Two-and-a-half years later, he was charged with a felony for providing false information to an election official. The charge stemmed from checking a box declaring he wasn't on probation.

Six months later, he pleaded guilty, and a judge ordered him to pay court fines and fees.

That's what the typical election fraud prosecution in Wisconsin has looked like over the past decade, Wisconsin Watch found.

State law bans anyone convicted of a felony from registering or voting until they're 'off paper,' meaning they've completed probation, extended supervision or parole.

Bill would ban voting until fines paid

A bill introduced in February by state Senator Duey Stroebel, R-Saukville; Representative Shae Sortwell, R-Two Rivers; and 13 other GOP lawmakers would bar voting until they've paid "all fines, costs, fees, surcharges, and restitution, and have

completed any court-ordered community service." A similar law passed by Florida's GOP-run Legislature in 2019 keeps hundreds of thousands of felons — who regained voting rights in a 2018 statewide referendum — from voting.

In a statement to Wisconsin Watch, Stroebel said probation and restitution are as much a part of someone's sentence as incarceration.

"When a court determines a necessary part of a felon's punishment and rehabilitation is to make restitution for the harm that felon imposed on others, fundamental fairness demands such debts to society be paid if that person is to be treated the same as the vast majority of Wisconsinites who didn't commit a felony," he said.

However, the bill doesn't include additional safeguards to prevent someone with a felony conviction from casting a ballot, such as improving the system poll workers have to check before such a person registers and votes. Sortwell's office said the Wisconsin Elections Commission should issue rules to inform local clerks about the changes in voting eligibility.

Uggen said many states are moving to ease voting restrictions on people with felony convictions. Confusion about eligibility is common among formerly incarcerated people, even probation officers or election workers, according to court records and interviews.

Probation can last years, during which someone moves or has new probation officers. They can be misled by false information. In one case, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections incorrectly told a man he could vote again, his attorney said.

Uggen said one way to reduce confusion would be to establish a clearer line for eligibility, such as allowing people to vote after incarceration ends, which happens in Illinois, Indiana and 20 other states.

"It's increasingly hard to justify disenfranchising those who are fit to be in the community in every other way," Uggen said.

Racial disparity

Black Wisconsinites make up just 6.8 percent of the state's population, but 25 percent of defendants in election fraud prosecutions, the Wisconsin Watch analysis found.

They make up about 27 percent of everyone on probation or community supervision in Wisconsin, but 33 percent of those charged with voting while on probation.

In Milwaukee County, which is 28 percent Black, prosecutors brought charges against Black voters in 70 percent of its election fraud cases.

Westphal, the Milwaukee County prosecutor, said he doesn't review demographic information when deciding whether to charge someone, but acknowledged his office is aware of disparities in whom it charges. He cited a recent study as part of the office's efforts to address those disparities.

Keisha Robinson, deputy director of Black Leaders Organizing for Communities Milwaukee, said Wisconsin Watch's findings don't surprise her. Felony disenfranchisement cases, she said, have ripple effects for years.

She recounted the story of a woman she knows who was charged in 2007 after voting while still on probation. The woman, who didn't know she was committing a crime, got nine months in jail.

"When people heard about her being charged and having to do jail time, there were lots of (people saying) 'That's why I don't vote,'" she said. "I think a person simply wanting to cast their vote, but is misinformed, shouldn't be charged with a felony."

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Riverway paddlers routed around bridge

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Barry Larson of HNTB Corporation discussed plans to notify Riverway users of the detour along the river in that stretch. To sign up for future project updates, e-mail Barry Larson at blarson@hntb.com.

"We've reached out to all the canoe livery companies, and posted signs at all the boat landings," Larson explained.

Friends of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway (FLOW) President Timm Zumm thanked the companies for giving those involved in the Riverway a heads-up about their change in plans, and asked that FLOW be included in any future updates to the plan.

"You should consider including the Iowa County Riverway Safety Text Alert system in your communication avenues about construction updates," Zumm said. "Riverway users may not read signs, but most always have their phone with them."

Director's report

In his 'Executive Director's Report,' Cupp addressed board confirmation hearings, and reports on various events and communications he'd undertaken since the last meeting.

"Randy Poelma had his hearing in front of a Wisconsin State Senate committee, and Ritchie Brown will have his hearing next week," Cupp said. "I watched the hearing, the committee members asked a few questions and seemed happy to have individuals interested in serving on the board."

Cupp said he had also attended the 'Fete du Voyageur' fundraising event in Prairie du Chien in February. He said that it was a wonderful meal, and that he believed it had been successful in raising funds for the June 16-17 '350th Anniversary of Marquette & Joliet's Voyage of Discovery' event planned in the city.

"The event was well-attended, and the artifacts, costumes and the meal were very good," board member Dan Hillberry said. "The

acoustics, however, were pretty bad and people kept talking even when speakers were making their presentations."

Cupp also reported he had attended a planning meeting for the Sauk City Recreational Bridge. He said the latest rendering of the bridge design showed a replication of the old railroad bridge at the site.

"The recreational bridge is billed as a snowmobile bridge connecting to the Badger Munitions Plant trail and ultimately, the Elroy-Sparta Trail, but will be open to other recreational users as well," Cupp explained. "The agreement to build the recreational bridge requires that it be built in order to be able to be returned to use as a railroad bridge in the future, as needed, and that is driving up the cost of the project."

Cupp said that currently, construction of the recreational bridge is scheduled for 2024, and that the LWSRB will be involved in approving the design for rustication of the colors, and use

of dark sky compliant lighting.

Cupp also reported that he had received a report from the Pattison Sand Company indicating the company had removed sand in November of 2022 from an area outside the Riverway boundary. He said the report indicated there are currently no plans to remove sand in 2023, either inside or outside of the Riverway boundary.

In other business

In other business the board:

- enjoyed a presentation of Frank Doerre's photographs of native and non-native flowers from Effigy Mounds Lane and Frank's Hill

- heard that the Vernal (Spring) Equinox will occur at 4:24 p.m. on Monday, March 20, and that gatherings to mark the event would be held that evening, and the next morning at 6:30 a.m. at Frank's Hill

- heard that the USGS gauge on the river at Muscoda had finally unfrozen, and was transmitting normal seasonal flows of the river.

Jeannette McCormick new Chief

BOARD from Page 1

- learned that all businesses are up to date on room taxes
- voted to renew Delta Dental and Baer Insurance for the village

- approved the Pickleball group to paint lines on the village's tennis court, requiring that the lines be a different color so the tennis lines will still be visible

- voted to approve an operators license for Jennifer Wangen.

Closed session

After meeting in closed session, where the board learned Roger Olson has decided to step down from the fire chief position, the board moved to approve Jeannette McCormick as the new S

USDA has released millions of dollars more in federal conservation funding from the Inflation Reduction Act to Wisconsin for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) to use this year. CSP has a \$4.2 million increase, and EQIP has a \$2.7 million increase. The two programs each have deadlines to sign up this year, and in Wisconsin, the CSP program sign-up is March 17, and EQIP is May 18!