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**Lawmakers’ 2022 travel totals nearly $113,000**

By WisPolitics.com

Statements of economic interest show lawmakers reported $112,850 in travel expenses paid by outside groups last year, a WisPolitics review found.

The travel included events organized by groups such as the Foundation for Government Accountability, Jobs First Coalition and the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee.

Locations for various events included Louisiana, Washington, D.C., Utah and Hawaii.

The expenses listed were an uptick from the $93,974 they reported for 2021 and the $24,471 for travel in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic impacted travel dramatically.

Still, the total is less than the $149,000 lawmakers reported for trips in 2019.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos reported the highest expense amount at $14,295. That includes $1,589 for a Jobs First Coalition talk. The Rochester Republican also reported $10,909 for the National Conference
of State Legislatures and $1,797 for a State Legislative Leaders Foundation. Vos serves as president of the NCSL and is vice chair of the SLLF’s board of directors. He attended SLLF’s National Speakers Conference in Santa Fe, N.M, according to the group.

Sen. Mary Felzkowski, R-Irma, reported the second-highest amount at $14,290. That includes $6,000 for American Legislative Exchange Council conference meetings, $2,890 for an FGA seminar and $5,400 for
National Conference of Insurance Legislators meetings in Jersey City, N.J., and New Orleans, La.

Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu reported the third-highest amount, with four trips totaling $11,683.

The Oostburg Republican attended events held by conservative groups, such as a GOPAC conference for $1,306 and a Republican State Leadership Conference event for $7,730. He also attended a Wisconsin
Manufacturers & Commerce event for $500. A Jobs First Coalition event worth $2,147 rounded out LeMahieu’s spending.

Lawmakers must report expenses paid on their behalf related to government duties exceeding $50 such as: “attendance at a conference, presentation of a talk, participation in a meeting, or for a published
work about issues initiated by or affecting state government or state agencies.”

WisPolitics’ review includes numbers as reported, though some lawmakers reported the same numbers for honorarium amount and honorarium expenses. The honorarium amount is the amount a lawmaker
received in addition to travel expenses covered by a given group. Some lawmakers appear to have mistakenly doubled the total amount.

For example, Rep. Calvin Callahan, R-Tomahawk, listed both $678 in the expenses and the honorarium amount columns for a Young America’s Foundation event. Callahan and other lawmakers who included the same amounts for both categories did not respond to requests for comment on whether the amounts were listed correctly or double counted by mistake.

Sen. Dan Knodl’s report listed $1,600 in the expense’s column and $1,200 in the honorarium amount column for an ALEC conference. The Germantown Republican’s office told WisPolitics Knodl had to pay $400 out of pocket to cover the rest of his $1,600 trip after the group gave him $1,200.

Assembly Majority Leader Tyler August came in with the fourth-highest amount at $10,808 after taking five trips to meet with various groups.

August reported $1,882 to attend an FGA conference and talk, $1,435 to attend a GOPAC Education Fund conference, $786 for a Jobs First Coalition talk, $3,622 for an NCSL conference and $3,084 for a State Government Affairs Council Foundation conference.

The Lake Geneva Republican’s spokesperson, Luke Bacher, told WisPolitics the events give August a chance to discuss and help develop new strategies to address Wisconsin’s challenges. Bacher added
August finds the conferences “very beneficial.”

“Networking with legislators from across the country has resulted in a rich exchange of ideas on important policy areas,” Bacher said.

Rep. Shelia Stubbs, D-Madison, reported $7,280 in travel expenses, the most among Democrat lawmakers. Of that, $2,156 was for the Council of State Governments national conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, $1,029 was for a Hunt Institute event and the rest was for three separate NCSL meetings. The Hunt Institute is a nonprofit focused on education policy named for former Democratic North Carolina Gov. James Hunt.

Rep. Lisa Subeck reported the second-highest trip expenses of all Democratic lawmakers, with $4,920 for five trips. She reported $500 for a CSG Henry Toll Fellowship event last summer in Lexington, Ky., $1,100 for a National Foundation for Women Legislators conference and board meeting in Charleston, S.C., $660 for an NFWL health care summit in Washington, D.C., $970 for a National Caucus of Environmental Legislators meeting with Mississippi River states in Memphis, Tenn., and $1,690 for an SGAC Foundation conference in Napa, Calif.

The Madison Democrat told WisPolitics she would attend the events again if given the chance. She said she especially felt the CSG event was beneficial because it gave her the chance to go through intensive
leadership training. She also said she saw several fellow Wisconsin lawmakers at some of the events, such as the SGAC Foundation conference.

Several Republican legislative leaders frequented the Jobs First Coalition, which has spent millions backing GOP candidates since its 2009 conception.

The group’s campaign arm, the Jobs First Coalition Political Fund, frequently supports Republicans in state elections. The group reported spending $392,717 in 2022, according to campaign finance reports.

Vos, LeMahieu and August attended Jobs First Coalition events along with:
\*Joint Finance Committee Co-chair Rep. Mark Born, R-Beaver Dam;
\*Joint Finance Committee Co-chair Sen. Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green; and
\*Rep. Tony Kurtz, R-Wonewoc.

According to its website, the Jobs First Coalition is “devoted to making the creation and retention of family-supporting jobs the top priority of government and community leaders in Wisconsin.”

Several lawmakers also made trips to Young America’s Foundation events. Former Gov. Scott Walker is the current president of YAF.

Callahan and Reps. Clint Moses, R-Menomonie, and William Penterman, R-Columbus, attended YAF events, according to their SEI reports.

YAF told WisPolitics all three attended the group’s Economics Leadership Seminar at Reagan Ranch and Reagan Ranch Center in Santa Barbara, California in August.

Walker and former President Ronald Reagan’s economic advisor Arthur Laffer spoke at the event. Laffer is famous for the Laffer curve, which is a theory that an ideal tax rate between 0 and 100 percent
exists to maximize revenue without excessively burdensome taxation.

Callahan, 24, is the second-youngest Assembly member, about three months older than Assistant Minority Leader Rep. Kalan Haywood, D-Milwaukee, who is 23. Penterman, who turned 27 this week, is also one of the youngest Assembly members.

Both Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, and Rep. Janel Brandtjen, R-Menomonee Falls, attended Honest Elections Project events. The group says its goal is to protect voting rights, “which hinge on an electoral system that ensures every lawful ballot is counted, and which guards against fraud,” according to its website.

Nass’ chief of staff, Mike Mikalsen, told WisPolitics the group focuses on election issues and changes to state and federal election law in the states. The event Nass attended was held in Washington,
D.C.

Brandtjen’s form shows she participated in an Honest Elections Project event in Utah, as well as events for other voting groups. She also attended a Citizens United dinner in Palm Beach, Fla., and an event
with a group called Voices and Votes in Phoenix, Ariz. Citizens United is known for winning a Supreme Court case that found corporations and outside groups can give unlimited donations to political candidates.

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