

Holperin

Senate

the Northern Advantage

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Holperin Says He'll Advance Logging Industry Issues

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The logging and forest products industries are key to northern Wisconsin's economic success and need a strong advocate in the state Senate, said Jim Holperin today as he pledged to advance wood industry issues.

"A major concern is that Wisconsin loggers be able to compete fairly for market share with nearby 'wood basket' states like Michigan and Minnesota," Holperin said. "For example, Wisconsin's workers compensation rate for loggers is nearly five times higher than Michigan's. The industry needs a self-insurance program like Michigan's and I'll introduce legislation to get that done."

He said the current sky high workers comp rate, which reimburses loggers who are injured on the job, encourages logging companies to avoid participating in the program or, if they do, creates a competitive disadvantage with companies in nearby states where rates are lower.

Holperin said road weight limits are another issue that may merit attention. "Road weight limits were recently increased for logging trucks, but counties which maintain the roads are very concerned and rightly so about the impact on bridges and highways which are expensive to build and maintain," he said.

The legislature has got to consider a method of providing a financial supplement to localities for extra costs associated with higher weight limits, as well as a better method of discouraging overloads," he added.

Holperin said logging and forestry issues need to get more attention and a higher priority from the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) which currently has jurisdiction over them. "If the DNR can't or won't provide adequate promotion of our forest products issues, maybe we need to consider giving the Department of Agriculture control over most forestry matters," he said.

Holperin said another matter requiring vigilance is the integrity of the Forestry Account, a large (\$87 million) segregated fund used to support various forestry programs including fire suppression. "\$87 million is a lot of money, and given the recent history of 'raiding' various segregated accounts, the north needs a Senator who will fight to protect those funds. I will make defense of the forestry account a top priority," Holperin concluded.