

Budget bill provides some long-awaited school aid

The state budget package approved recently by the Joint Finance Committee would provide long-awaited financial help to the Northland Pines, Phelps and Three Lakes school districts in the next two years.

State Sen. Tom Tiffany (R-Hazelhurst) delivered the good news to school administrators last week — a package that includes a new categorical state aid payment of \$75 per pupil, higher transportation aid for sprawling districts with sparse enrollment, and new national forest aid that goes directly to schools.

The first part of that plan would mean increased state aid totaling \$105,000 to Northland Pines, \$40,000 to Three Lakes and about \$19,000 to Phelps. The budget bill also would authorize the three districts to increase their levies by another \$75 per pupil within the state revenue cap system.

Pines and Three Lakes would receive even more help under a revamped transportation aid system that takes enrollment sparsity into account, giving more help to districts that spend more than 150% of the state average on student transportation. With the state average at \$403 per student and Pines at more than \$900 per student, the district could receive an additional \$230,000 in aid.

Lastly, national forest payments that for years have been delivered to town and city government entities will be rerouted to school districts. The payments are funded with 25% of the stumpage revenues that come from annual timber sales. Towns and cities will be kept financial whole in the transition with the help of state forestry monies.

We believe Tiffany had a great deal to do with delivering the message to lawmakers in Madison about the struggle of property-rich, income-poor school districts throughout the state. Under the current school aid formula, area districts receive little state equalization aid because of inflated property values in areas of low student population.

The proposed budget bill provides some financial relief that area school administrators have been fighting to get for many years. It should help all three districts stretch their referendum dollars further in the years ahead.

Tomlanovich won't be an easy sheriff to replace

Vilas County and the law enforcement community lost one of its own and one of its best last week, as first-term Sheriff Frank Tomlanovich died following a short illness.

At age 61, Tomlanovich had already dedicated 34 years of his life to law enforcement, starting with the Eagle River Police Department before taking a sheriff's deputy position in 1979. He worked his way up the ranks, patrolling as a deputy for 15 years.

He served as detective sergeant for 16 years, helping handle some of the biggest criminal cases in the county's history. He was professional but quiet, staying out of the spotlight and steering clear of politics. To his credit, he didn't abuse his authority.

Tomlanovich won't be easy to replace, for he had the respect and admiration of his staff as a true law enforcement professional.

Behind the editorial 'we'

Members of the Vilas County News-Review editorial board include Publisher Kurt Krueger, Editor Gary Ridderbusch and Assistant Editor Anthony Drew. __PUBLIC__