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# Legislators' plates are piled high

## Economy at top, but voter ID, gun issues also on menu

By [Patrick Marley](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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**Madison** — The economy will dominate the state's next legislative session, but other issues - such as requiring voters to show ID at the polls and allowing people to carry concealed guns - will also get increased attention with Republicans controlling all of state government.

Republicans are unanimous in saying their top goals are creating jobs and righting the state budget, but acknowledge there is broad support among them for the bills on voter ID and concealed weapons.

The GOP has been shut out of the past two-year session because Democrats controlled the Assembly, Senate and governor's office. With the Nov. 2 elections, voters handed all three to Republicans for the first time since a brief period in 1998.

The Republican dominance of state government sets the stage for them to roll back a number of changes approved since last year by Democrats. Those include laws that allow the early release of some inmates, set requirements for sex education in public schools and give rights and benefits to gay couples.

Republicans have passed the bills on concealed weapons and voter ID before, but Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle vetoed them. Doyle didn't run for re-election, and Republican Governor-elect Scott Walker supports both measures.

Walker plans to call a [special session](#) on jobs in January, and after that the Legislature will turn its attention to a two-year budget that will face a shortfall of as much as \$3.3 billion. Republicans have promised to fix it without raising taxes.

Senate Republican Leader Scott Fitzgerald of Juneau has said the first bill introduced in his house will be the one on [showing ID at the polls](#). Otherwise, lawmakers are putting all their focus on bills that will help the economy, and other bills likely won't come up until later in the session, he said.

Here's a look at some measures likely to get attention:

**Voter ID.** Republicans passed the bill requiring voters to show ID at the polls three times while they controlled the Legislature during Doyle's first term, but Doyle vetoed it each time on the grounds that it would make it harder for the poor, elderly and minorities to vote.

Republicans say the requirement isn't onerous and would cut down on voter fraud. Democrats counter there is no evidence of widespread voter fraud.

**Concealed carry.** Wisconsin and Illinois are the only two states that don't allow people to carry concealed guns, and changing Wisconsin's law is a top priority for gun rights activists.

Doyle twice vetoed bills allowing carrying concealed weapons, and an effort to override the vetoes narrowly failed. Republicans wrote those bills in a way to get as much support as they could in an effort to get the two-thirds majority needed for an override.

Now, they will need just a simple majority because Walker backs the right to carry concealed guns. That could mean the next bill will include fewer restrictions than in the past on where guns can be carried.

**Immigration.** Rep. Don Pridemore (R-Hartford) has written an [Arizona-style bill](#) that would require people suspected of crimes in Wisconsin to prove they were legally in the U.S. or be turned over to immigration authorities.

His bill is narrower in scope than Arizona's controversial law, but Fitzgerald has said he expects a separate bill that exactly mirrors Arizona's law to be introduced.

**Sex ed.** Starting this fall, schools that have sex education courses must ensure their classes are comprehensive and include age-appropriate information about birth control. That change meant school districts could no longer offer abstinence-only courses, though they could decide to drop sex ed altogether.

Republicans want to change the law to give local officials the ability to set the curriculum, as they could in the past.

**School choice.** Republicans have long championed Milwaukee's voucher program, which allows students to attend religious and other private schools at taxpayer expense. The program is capped at 22,500 students, and Republicans favor removing that limit. Just under 21,000 students are in the program this year.

Also, the Legislature could expand the program beyond Milwaukee. "I think there's enough momentum to do something like that," Fitzgerald said.

**Indian mascots.** A law approved in May makes it harder for schools to keep Indian team names, mascots and logos.

Mukwonago High School was ordered earlier this month to [change its name](#) from the Indians, becoming the second school in the state to have to do so.

The law allows a resident of a school district to file a complaint with the state over race-based team names and logos that the resident believes promote pupil discrimination, stereotyping or harassment. The district must then prove its name and logo do not do that.

Sen. Mike Ellis (R-Neenah), the incoming Senate president, said he wants to change the burden of proof so the person who complains has to prove the team names are discriminatory.

**Early release.** The last state budget allowed certain inmates to be released from prison early, which

Republicans argued would endanger the public.

Rep. Scott Suder (R-Abbotsford), the incoming Assembly majority leader, said his house would be "reforming and possibly repealing early release."

**Payday loans.** Under a new law, payday loans will be limited to a maximum of \$1,500 and loans secured by auto titles will be banned as of Jan. 1.

Before the law passed, Wisconsin was the only state that didn't regulate the short-term loans that can cost borrowers 500% or more in annual interest.

Industry officials hope they can [reverse the law](#) now that Republicans are in control, but there is no guarantee of that. Some of the Republicans who voted against the Democrats' bill did so because they thought it was too weak, not because they thought it restricted the industry too much.

**Same-sex couples.** Democrats this session began giving health insurance and other benefits to the same-sex partners of state employees. They also created domestic partnership registries that same-sex couples could sign up for to gain some of the rights afforded married couples, such as hospital visitation rights.

Republicans objected to both provisions and could attempt to repeal one or both.

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