

State Representative Spencer Black



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Black's Bill Brings Back Environmental Watchdog

Will introduce legislation to restore Public Intervenor office eliminated in 1995

Representative Spencer Black announced today that he will introduce legislation to restore the Public Intervenor – the “environmental watchdog” that worked to protect the public’s right to clean water until the office was eliminated in 1995.

“The system of environmental protection that made Wisconsin a national conservation leader was seriously weakened by the elimination of the Public Intervenor. The Public Intervenor played a key role in protecting Wisconsin rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands,” Black said.

“Simply put, the job of the Public Intervenor was to intervene on the side of the public whenever our water resources were threatened. We must bring back the Public Intervenor in order to protect the resources that belong to all the citizens of the state.”

Black’s bill would restore the Office of the Public Intervenor and return the powers it had before it was dismantled in 1995. The office was established in 1969 under Governor Warren Knowles. It consisted of two lawyers in the Department of Justice whose job was to protect the public interest in Wisconsin’s water resources. The office monitored state agency compliance with state environmental laws and responded to citizen’s complaints about activities that affected water resources.

“The Public Intervenor acted as the citizen’s voice in legal disputes. They were the people’s lawyers. In facing a well-funded corporation or public agency, a citizen might not face much of a chance. Having the Public Intervenor on their side gave the average citizen a fighting chance,” Black said.

“I hear from many citizens who face problems such as a power plant being sited near their home or farm, PCBs being dumped near their house, or a wetland being filled in their community. It used to be that I could refer them to the Public Intervenor. Now, unless they are wealthy, they have no place to turn to for legal assistance,” Black said.

Black noted that the Public Intervenor played a key role in drafting and implementing the laws that protect our drinking water and safeguard water quality in our lakes and rivers. “To safeguard both our quality of life and our children’s future, we must restore the Public Intervenor,” Black said.

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