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**Ethics forms detail lawmakers’ travel, including trips to Poland, Taiwan**

Wisconsin lawmakers last year headed to Poland for a trade mission and Taiwan for meetings with foreign dignitaries with other Midwestern legislators, according to their latest economic interest filings.

Others reported hitting a series of U.S. destinations, ranging from Los Angeles to Lake Buena Vista, Fla., and Washington, D.C., for a variety of conferences, events and speaking engagements.

The travel was detailed in the 2018 economic interest statements for all 132 lawmakers who were then serving in the Legislature. The reports, requested and reviewed by WisPolitics.com, showed 44 lawmakers reported more than $149,000 in speaking fees and travel expenses. That total, though, could be inflated as the check found instances where lawmakers may have misreported the costs of their trips.

There are two columns under the honoraria section of the form: one is for “expenses value” for lodging, meals and other expenses. The other is for the “honorarium amount,” which can include compensation for presenting a talk, participating in a meeting or publishing work about issues initiated by or affecting state government or state agencies, according to the Ethics Commission.

Some lawmakers listed the same dollar figure under both columns in the section, an indicator that the files could be filled out incorrectly.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos topped the Legislature in his travel totals, logging $16,300 for eight different conferences or expenses from groups last year. His sum is slightly higher than the honoraria he listed in calendar year 2017 — $13,481, per past reporting.

Vos made several domestic trips, including to Los Angeles for the National Conference of State Legislatures legislative summit in late July. He also hosted the State Legislative Leaders Foundation’s National Speakers Conference annual meeting in Milwaukee in late August.

The Rochester Republican is currently the president-elect of the NCSL and serves as vice chair of the SLLF. A Vos spokeswoman said that he was proud to represent Wisconsin in bipartisan organizations and noted that his positions require frequent travel.

Lawmakers are able to accept travel expenses to go to conferences, meetings, talks or other events relating to official business, according to the Ethics Commission forms. They’re then required to list transportation, meals, lodging or honoraria with a total value of $50 or more.

A handful of lawmakers — including Reps. Joel Kitchens, R-Sturgeon Bay, and Scott Allen, R-Waukesha, as well as Sen. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua — were among those who traveled to Taiwan last August.

The trip, which was covered by the Taiwanese government, included other lawmakers from Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota, according to Kitchens’ office. Each day consisted of meetings with officials from various government entities, including the Mainland Affairs Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Republic of China Legislature and the Ministry of Foreign Trade.

Kitchens and Allens’ SEI forms showed the cost of the visit was $7,529. Tiffany’s form didn’t list the cost; rather, he filed it under the form’s “entertainment and gifts” section, which must be listed if the value is more than $50.

Those three weren’t the only ones who traveled internationally last year. Reps. Cody Horlacher, R-Mukwonago, and Ken Skowronski, R-Franklin, Sen. Dan Feyen, R-Fond du Lac, and then-Rep. Peter Barca, D-Kenosha headed to Poland in October to promote trade and economic growth between the country and Wisconsin.

The trip included discussions with the U.S. ambassador to Poland, tours of area businesses and meetings with local elected officials, per Skowronski’s office.

“Trades missions such as this between states, elected officials and businesses are paramount to fostering strong relationships and economies between trade partners,” a staffer for Skowronski wrote in an email.

Barca, now Revenue secretary, didn’t initially have the trip listed on his SEI form. But an agency spokeswoman, whom WisPolitics.com contacted after hearing he was among those who traveled there, said it was omitted in error and the form has since been corrected.

The trip, which the forms showed cost around $2,000, came about after the governor of Lublin province personally invited the four lawmakers, and that government picked up the tab. Skowronski’s office said the state jobs agency was also notified of the trip and assisted in preparations, but wasn’t directly involved and no WEDC officials were able to attend.

In the state Senate, Feyen logged the highest honoraria over 2018, listing $5,393 in expenses for a total of four trips: the Poland trade mission; an October Foundation for Government Accountability-sponsored seminar in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., “focused on the workforce, welfare reform and healthcare reform,” per his office; a September National Conference of State Legislatures gathering in Denver for broadband and cable policy meetings; and a June Lakeland College seminar on “Economics for Elected Officials” in Sheboygan.

Rep. Lisa Subeck, D-Madison, topped her party in the Assembly, while Sen. Lena Taylor, of Milwaukee, led her chamber’s Democrats.

Subeck listed six different conferences or travel on her form, totaling $3,578. They included: a July policy summit organized by the Public Leadership Institute in Washington, D.C.; a National Council of Environmental Legislators forum in Los Angeles later that month; a September Great Lakes Legislative Council and Water Policy Task Force meeting in Erie, Pa.; and a November National Foundation of Women Legislators board meeting in D.C.

Taylor, meanwhile, logged $3,221 in total expenses for the year including: trips to the annual Women in Government national legislative conference in June; the Urban Agriculture Academy Conference in July; and the National Black Caucus of State Legislators legislative conference at the end of November. Michelle Bryant, Taylor’s chief of staff, said the senator attended these conferences in order to “stay current” on relevant topics.

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