

Editorial

## **Green and frugal public buildings**

Smart legislation to require green building practices in major new and renovated state buildings has strong bipartisan support for good reason.

House Bill 1272 and a companion measure, Senate Bill 5509, pull legislators of different mind-sets toward a common goal, the construction of public facilities that maximize energy efficiency, water conservation and other environmental virtues. The legislation's bipartisan strength was reflected in yesterday's lopsided House approval of the measure. It's worthy of similar support in the Senate.

The bills require major state projects be designed, constructed and certified to a national standard of the U.S. Green Building Council. The council has four rating levels: certified, silver, gold and platinum. The legislation seeks the silver level.

This approach looks at five key areas: sustainable sites, energy and atmosphere, water efficiency, green building materials and indoor air quality.

The legislation also applies to local school districts, but gives them the option of using another compatible and complementary set of design and construction standards for school projects.

Promoters say past results show improvements in everything from higher student test scores in better-lighted, better-ventilated classrooms to increased worker productivity and teacher retention.

If skeptics have doubts, they can take heart that modestly higher costs upfront are rapidly repaid by lower utility and water bills. Green buildings save money.

Perhaps the genius behind the whole approach is the flexibility built into the system. Designers and builders are given a menu of 69 options or points spread over the five key focus areas. To qualify for silver certification, the building must tally 33 points. Those choices can be tailored to local conditions and goals.

Republican support for the bill has zeroed in on this flexibility and the not-so-subtle underlying message of governmental accountability for tax dollars. A little tree-hugging squeamishness resulted in official references to "green buildings" being deleted.

The legislation appropriately tracks results to see they live up to advance billing, and calls for audits.

Going green pays a variety of dividends. Both political parties should support that.

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