

From: Sen.Pfaff <Sen.Pfaff@legis.wisconsin.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, September 17, 2025 3:39 PM
To: DWD MB WC Advisory Council <WCAdvisoryCouncil@dwd.wisconsin.gov>
Subject: Sen. Pfaff - Sharing Constituent Article

Dear Worker's Compensation Advisory Council (WCAC),

A concerned constituent of Senator Pfaff's has asked us to share an article he was featured in regarding worker's compensation issues for your consideration as you create the next WC Agreed Bill. Please let us know if you have any questions, and the article can be found [here](#) or in the attached pdf.

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FORWARD | GOVERNMENT | HEALTH & WELFARE

As Wisconsin companies saved \$1 billion in rate cuts, severely injured workers haven't had a raise in 9 years

Worker's comp raises have a better chance of passing after the Legislature and governor agreed in the state budget to develop a medical fee schedule.



by Tom Kertscher / Wisconsin Watch
September 4th, 2025

Why you can trust Wisconsin Watch



Jimmy Novy, 77, hangs onto a canopy to hold himself up July 29, 2025, in Hillsboro, Wis. Novy is one of 312 permanently and totally disabled individuals in Wisconsin and has been collecting worker's comp checks from the state since his injury in his late 20s. (Joe Timmerman / Wisconsin Watch)

Reading Time: 8 minutes

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Jimmy Novy grew up on a farm with corn, cattle and chickens in Wisconsin's smallest municipality. Yuba, in the Driftless Area northwest of Madison, covers a third of a square mile. Novy correctly quotes its population in the last census: 53.

In 1967, at age 19, married with a child, Novy got a job at the Rayovac plant in nearby Wonewoc. It made batteries used in walkie-talkies in the Vietnam War.

In his late 20s, Novy learned he had been exposed to manganese, a key component in batteries. He suffered neurological problems that affected his left leg, severely limiting his ability to walk or even maintain his balance.

"The nerves from the brain to my leg, they can't do nothing about that," he said.

With four children to raise, Novy turned to Wisconsin's [first](#)-in-the-nation worker's compensation system. After three years of legal back-and-forth, the state agreed that Novy was permanently and totally disabled (PTD), meaning he was among the worst-off of Wisconsin workers injured on the job. As a result, he qualified for worker's comp checks for life.

But there was no guarantee of how often those checks would increase.



Jimmy Novy suffered neurological problems in his late 20s after a decade handling toxic chemicals at a Rayovac plant in Wonewoc, Wis. (Courtesy of Jimmy Novy)



A now-abandoned factory once housed Rayovac Corp., a battery company at which Jimmy Novy suffered a workplace injury in his late 20s. The site is seen July 29, 2025, in Wonewoc, Wis. (Joe Timmerman / Wisconsin Watch)

Now 77, widowed, remarried and using hearing aids and a cane, Novy hasn't seen an increase in his \$1,575 monthly worker's compensation check — nor have the other more than 300 other PTD recipients — since 2016.

"I can't make it," Novy told Wisconsin Watch in mid-July. "I got \$8 left in my checkbook right now to last me through the last week of the month."

"The wife buys food and stuff, otherwise I'd be starving to death," he added.

Had Novy's worker's comp payment kept pace with inflation, which rose 34%, he would have received nearly \$21,000 more over the past nine years, according to calculations by University of Wisconsin-Madison economist Menzie Chinn.

Meanwhile, Wisconsin employers have seen their premiums for worker's compensation insurance decrease 10 years in a row, saving them \$206 million in the past year and over \$1 billion since 2017, according to the Wisconsin Hospital Association, which is part of the state Worker's Compensation Advisory Council.

Twenty-three states, including Illinois, Michigan and Minnesota, provide automatic cost-of-living raises for PTD recipients. In Wisconsin, raises have been provided only when they are included in a wide-ranging worker's compensation "agreed bill," proposed every two years, and only if the bill becomes law.

That moment might be at hand.

The advisory council has recommended raises for PTD recipients in the next agreed bill, which is being drafted.

The bill still has to be approved by the Republican-controlled Legislature and signed by Democratic Gov. Tony Evers.

Making history, creating PTD raises

In 1911, Wisconsin became the first state to adopt a comprehensive worker's compensation law that was upheld as constitutional. Before that, the burden was on the worker to prove that a job injury was the employer's fault. Now it's a no-fault system. Workers injured on the job can receive regular payments based on their salary, plus coverage of medical bills to treat their injuries.

Wisconsin's system has received high marks for getting injured workers back on the job quickly and for worker satisfaction in health care for their injuries.

The money for worker's compensation checks comes from worker's compensation insurance companies and from employers who are self-insured for worker's comp. No tax dollars are involved.

About 21,000 people annually receive Wisconsin worker's comp checks, the vast majority of them for a temporary period. Only about 500 people receive PTD benefits, and only 300 of them, like Novy, are eligible for raises.

That's because the 2016 agreed bill limits raises, known as supplementary benefits, only to PTD recipients injured before Jan. 1, 2003.



Wisconsin Watch's Tom Kertscher explains how permanently and totally disabled workers haven't seen a raise to their worker's compensation benefits in nine years. He also talks with Jimmy Novy, 77, who grew up on a farm in Yuba, Wisconsin, and became severely disabled after his job at the local Rayovac company exposed him to manganese. (Video by Trisha Young / Wisconsin Watch)

How PTD raises are decided

The process that determines whether PTD raises are granted is not unlike the bargaining that an employer and a union do to reach a contract. Both sides have priorities, and there is horse trading and eventually compromise, at least on some issues.

The Worker's Compensation Advisory Council is composed mainly of five representatives from management and five from organized labor, though it also includes nonvoting members representing insurance, health care and the Legislature.

Every odd year, the council develops a bill proposing multiple changes to worker's comp. The process typically takes months of negotiations, said John Dipko, the council's non-voting chair and administrator of worker's compensation for the state Department of Workforce Development.

If approved by the Legislature and the governor, the bill becomes law the next year.

That process has produced 11 PTD raises since 1972. The 2016 raise put the maximum PTD payment at \$669 per week.

'The most severely changed'

Circumstances have left PTD recipient Scott Meyer better off financially than Novy, but delays in raises have forced Meyer to dip into savings and, as his health conditions worsen, worry about the future.

Meyer grew up outside of Milwaukee, playing in the woods and farm fields of rural Washington County. He was a member of the hockey team at West Bend West High School.

In 1993, at age 19, Meyer was working on a loading dock when a co-worker backing a semi-trailer pinned Meyer between the trailer and the dock. Meyer closed his eyes and tried to remain calm, thinking his right leg was broken.

"One of the paramedics in the ambulance thought that I was unconscious and said to the other paramedic that this was going to be his first fatality call," Meyer recalled. "And I immediately then knew that something more major had happened."





Scott Meyer in 1992 in his West Bend West High School hockey uniform. (Courtesy of Scott Meyer)



Scott Meyer in 2023 with his dog Luna near their home in Frisco, Colorado. (Courtesy of Lynn Meyer)

Meyer underwent multiple surgeries, spent more than a year in the hospital and dropped to under 100 pounds. He was left a paraplegic.

Though unable to work, Meyer became an Alpine skier in Colorado, where he now lives, competing in the 2014 Paralympics in Sochi, Russia.

Meyer, 51, said he receives about \$2,300 per month from worker's compensation – nearly \$370 per month less than what he was paid on the job in 1993.

Meyer, who owns a condominium with his wife, a mental health therapist, said he has been able to live comfortably only by preserving savings, including from a one-time payout he received from his former employer for his injury. But with no raises in nine years, he has had to dip into savings to get by.

Earlier this year, both Novy in an email and Meyer in a video asked the Worker's Compensation Advisory Council to recommend raises for PTD recipients.

"These are people whose lives are the most severely changed and are legitimately dependent upon these funds," Meyer told Wisconsin Watch. "We're talking about pennies on the dollar to the kind of money that is in the system."

The process that results in PTD raises involves negotiations on a variety of worker's compensation issues. That has made the road to another raise rocky in recent years.

Delayed raises and a possible breakthrough

The Worker's Compensation Advisory Council's agreed bill for 2018 would have raised the maximum weekly PTD payment to \$711 from \$669 and made more PTD people eligible for raises. But the bill also proposed a "fee schedule," generally opposed by health care organizations, to limit how

much health care providers can charge for worker's comp care. The bill did not pass the Legislature.

Since then, the labor side of the advisory council continued to propose PTD raises, while the management side continued to seek a fee schedule. Wisconsin is one of only a handful of states without one. The two sides did not agree to include PTD raises in their 2020, 2022 and 2024 agreed bills.

A key barrier was cleared when a fee schedule for worker's comp was included in the 2025-27 state budget adopted in July.

Days later, the advisory council proposed raises for current PTD recipients and made more PTD recipients eligible for raises.

Worker's comp recipient Scott Meyer's video request to the state for a raise.



Jimmy Novy smokes a Wrangler cigar on his porch July 29, 2025, in Hillsboro, Wis. (Joe Timmerman / Wisconsin Watch)

Under the 2026 agreed bill, the injury date for PTD recipients to be eligible for raises would change from Jan. 1, 2003, to Jan. 1, 2020 — making an estimated 210 more people eligible for raises.

The bill would also raise the maximum weekly benefit for PTD recipients to \$1,051 from \$669 effective Jan. 1, 2026.

And it would add raises each Jan. 1, though those amounts would not be set until shortly before they become effective.

For individuals, the raise amounts would vary based on when they were injured.

For example, a PTD recipient injured in 1985 and receiving \$535 a week would get a 57% increase to \$840. The increase would amount to nearly \$16,000 per year.

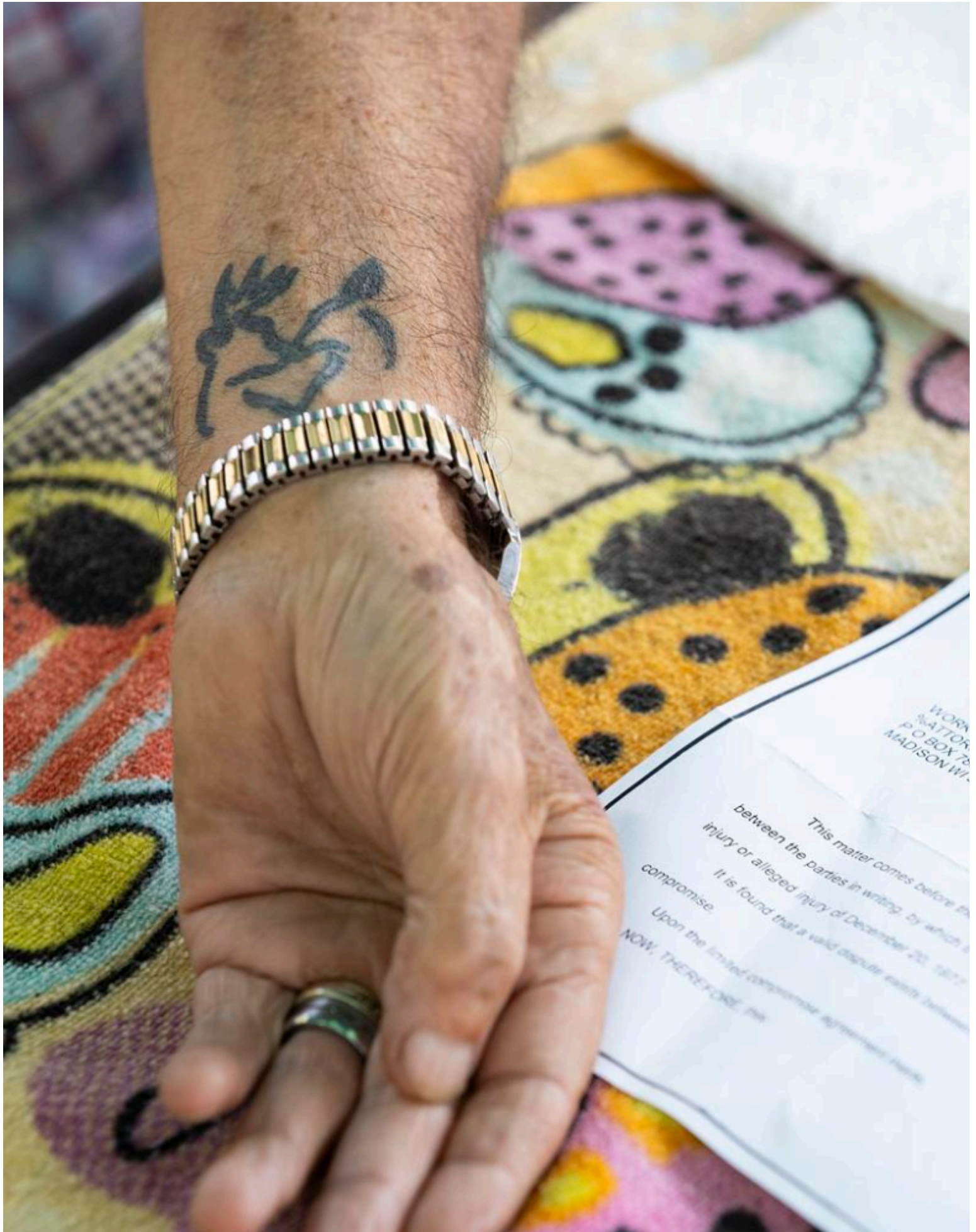
Once it's drafted, the new agreed bill would need a final vote from the advisory council, which is expected in September. Then the bill would be submitted to the labor committees of the state Senate and Assembly.

Council management representatives didn't reply to calls and emails requesting comment. Wisconsin AFL-CIO President Stephanie Bloomingdale, the lead labor representative, said she understands the frustration over delayed raises. But she said the advisory council system, with management and labor hashing out worker's compensation issues, provides stability.

Without it, "it would be up to the Legislature, and the whims of the political winds would determine the policy," she said.

Dipko, the DWD administrator, said the department is sympathetic.

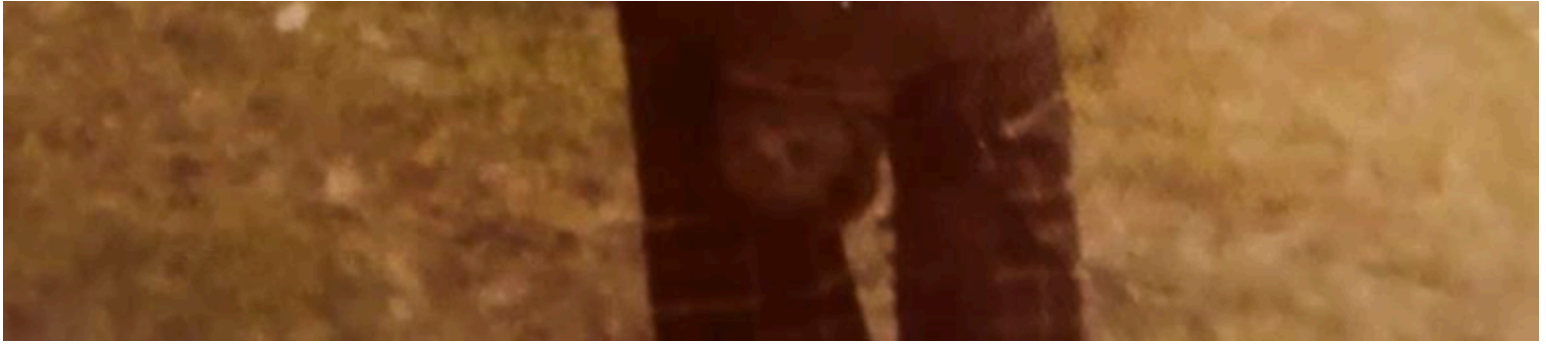
"We agreed that an increase is overdue," he said.





Jimmy Novy holds out his arm to show his new tattoo on July 29, 2025, in Hillsboro, Wis. He has been collecting worker's comp checks from the state since his injury in his late 20s. (Joe Timmerman / Wisconsin Watch)





An archival photograph of Jimmy Novy, one of 312 permanently and totally disabled individuals in Wisconsin who haven't seen a raise in their supplemental income since 2016. (Courtesy of Jimmy Novy)

After waiting this long, Novy isn't sure what to think. He's happy he and wife share a \$125,000 brick house they own "with the bank," as he puts it, and for his monthly \$1,635 Social Security check, which increases each year. But he has filed for bankruptcy three times, most recently in 2020. He feels that at this stage of his life, he should be more secure, and a raise in worker's comp would help.

"The Legislature should be — forget Republican, Democrat — just vote for what's good," he said.

"I can't see how come they can't give us a little raise every year," he added.

How to express your opinion

The Legislature later this year is expected to consider a bill that recommends changes in state law on worker's compensation, including providing raises to the permanently and totally disabled. Here is contact information for the two labor committees:

The chair of the [Senate Committee](#) on Government Operations, Labor and Economic Development is Sen. Dan Feyen, R-Fond du Lac: Sen.Feyen@legis.wi.gov; 608-266-5300.

The chair of the [Assembly Committee](#) on Workforce Development, Labor and Integrated Employment is Rep. Paul Melotik, R-Grafton: Rep.Melotik@legis.wisconsin.gov; 608-237-9122.

Tell us what you think

To comment on this story, or to suggest other stories to Wisconsin Watch, contact reporter Tom Kertscher: tkertscher@wisconsinwatch.org.



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