Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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State of Wisconsin

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Representative Mark Born, Assembly Chair
Senator Howard Marklein, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Finance
State Capital
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Representative Born and Senator Marklein:

In January of each year, this office conducts a review of the status of the state's general fund and presents its findings to the Legislature. In the even-numbered years, this analysis includes an examination of economic forecasts and tax collection and expenditure data of the current fiscal year, and projections for each year of the current biennium. We have now completed that review.

Based upon our analysis, we project the closing, net general fund balance at the end of this biennium (June 30, 2025) to be $3,152.0 million. This is $439.1 million below the net balance that was projected at the time of enactment of the 2023-25 biennial budget, as modified to: (1) incorporate the 2022-23 ending balance (2023-24 opening balance) as shown in the Annual Fiscal Report; (2) include the fiscal effect of all legislation enacted to date in the current legislative session (2023 Acts 1 to 86); and (3) incorporate the effect of the negotiated agreement between the leadership of the majority party of the Legislature and the UW System, as approved by the UW Board of Regents.

The $439.1 million is the net result of: (1) a decrease of $422.3 million in estimated tax collections; (2) a decrease of $53.2 million in departmental revenues (non-tax receipts deposited into the general fund); (3) a $52.1 million increase in sum sufficient appropriations; and (4) an increase of $88.5 million in the amounts that are estimated to lapse (revert) to the general fund.

The biennial GPR appropriation for the Medical Assistance program is currently projected to end the biennium with a surplus of $56.5 million, according to the most recent quarterly report on the status of the program's budget prepared by the Department of Health Services. Some utilization and enrollment factors are both slightly below budget estimates, and some are slightly above, but on balance the Department anticipates a surplus. This amount is relatively small in relation to the total GPR budget for the program (less than 0.7%), and could change as actual enrollment and program costs vary from current estimates. Nevertheless the general fund condition estimate presented in this memorandum includes the Department's surplus estimate in the total of projected appropriation lapses.

The following table reflects the 2023-25 general fund condition statement, which incorporates our revenue and expenditure projections.

TABLE 1

2023-25 General Fund Condition Statement

	2023-24	2024-25
Revenues		
Opening Balance, July 1	$7,073,240,000	$3,808,230,500
Taxes	21,055,500,000	21,772,200,000
Departmental Revenues		
Tribal Gaming Revenues	0	0
Other	781,892,000	674,013,700
Total Available	$28,910,632,000	$26,254,444,200
Appropriations, Transfers, and Reserves		
Gross Appropriations	$22,710,632,700	$21,052,961,400
Sum Sufficient Reestimates	10,399,300	41,663,300
Transfers to:		
Building Program	1,657,354,900	0
PFAS Trust Fund	110,000,000	0
Local Government Fund	0	1,563,380,000
Innovation Fund	0	303,000,000
Transportation Fund:		
EV Sales Tax	39,300,000	55,100,000
0.25% Transfer	48,112,000	51,700,000
Other	555,523,900	0
Compensation Reserves	311,180,900	397,930,000
Less Lapses	-340,102,200	-468,283,100
Net Appropriations	$25,102,401,500	$22,997,451,600
Balances		
Gross Balance	$3,808,230,500	$3,256,992,600
Less Required Statutory Balance	-100,000,000	-105,000,000
Net Balance, June 30	$3,708,230,500	$3,151,992,600

Table 1 incorporates the fiscal effects of all bills enacted to date in the current legislative session (through 2023 Act 86), and the negotiated agreement between the majority party of the Legislature and the UW System, as approved by the UW Board of Regents. The table does not include the impact of any enrolled bills or bills that are pending before the Legislature.

Review of the National Economy in 2023

This office prepared revenue estimates for the 2023-25 biennium in January, 2023, based on the January, 2023, S&P Global Market Intelligence (S&P Global) forecast for the U.S. economy. The forecast predicted that a mild recession, beginning in the first quarter of 2023, would result in a peak-to-trough decline in real gross domestic product (GDP) of 0.6%. Assuming recovery would begin in the third quarter of 2023, S&P Global projected minimal real GDP growth of 0.5% in 2023, followed by growth of 1.8% in 2024 and 2.0% in 2025. The forecast anticipated that the Federal Reserve's tightening of financial conditions would ease both the tight labor market and high inflation.

The January, 2023, S&P Global forecast was based on the following assumptions. First, the forecast assumed the Public Health Emergency (PHE) would be extended through mid-June, 2023, and anticipated that the transition of COVID-19 from pandemic to endemic would continue. Second, the forecast incorporated all legislation enacted prior to December 29, 2022, and assumed real discretionary funding would be extended at federal fiscal year 2022 levels. That forecast did not include the economic effects of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (CAA23). Third, strong revenues and federal financial support provided by federal pandemic relief monies and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) would prevent state and local governments from experiencing a fiscal contraction. Fourth, the Federal Reserve was expected to raise its policy rate to a range of 4.75% to 5.00% by March, 2023, and allow its balance sheet to decline by about one-third by 2024. Fifth, the forecast assumed that the existing tariffs between the U.S. and China would remain in effect. Sixth, growth in real, trade-weighted foreign GDP was expected to slow from 3.3% in 2022 to 1.4% in 2023, and foreign measures of inflation were expected to recede from 5.9% in 2022 to 2.3% by 2025. S&P Global assumed that foreign sovereign bond yields would increase from 0.3% in 2020 to 2.7% in 2023, as central banks tightened monetary policy to combat inflation. Seventh, it was estimated that the price of Brent crude oil would ease to $87 by 2024, down from $101 in 2022. Finally, S&P Global assumed that farm prices, which were elevated in 2022, would ease in 2023.

S&P Global's January, 2023, forecast also included an optimistic and pessimistic scenario. The optimistic forecast scenario was that a more robust consumer and business response to the IIJA and a quicker resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict would result in stronger productivity and consumer spending growth, lower energy prices, and increased business fixed investment. In the optimistic scenario, real GDP growth would remain positive throughout 2023. The downside risk to the forecast was that the U.S. would experience a deeper recession in 2023 with weaker consumer spending than assumed in the baseline forecast.

In May, this office reviewed additional tax collection data and S&P Global's May economic forecast. The estimates were revised downward, primarily based on weaker than expected collections for the corporate income/franchise tax, the individual income tax, and the cigarette tax through April, 2023. The May revisions also incorporated S&P Global's May, 2023, forecast for the U.S. economy, which generally reflected expectations of stronger economic growth in 2023, paired with slower growth in 2024 and 2025, relative to January, 2023. The forecast no longer anticipated a 2023 recession. The forecast for real GDP growth was increased accordingly, from 0.5% to 1.2% in 2023, relative to the January, 2023, estimate. However, growth expectations decreased slightly over the remainder of the forecast period, from 1.8% to 0.9% in 2024 and from 2.0% to 1.6% in 2025. Sales of new and existing homes and housing starts in 2023 were revised up significantly, from -26.5% to -15.5% and from -23.4% to -13.9%, respectively. Forecasted 2023 growth was also revised up in May to reflect changes to the following indicators: (a) consumer prices, which were up 0.3 percentage points; (b) personal income (up 1.2 percentage points); (c) nonfarm payrolls (up 1.3 percentage points); (d) economic profits (up 5.3 percentage points); and (e) nominal consumer spending (up 0.6 percentage points). In addition, the unemployment rate was adjusted down from 4.6% to 3.6% in 2023 and from 4.8% to 4.3% in 2024, and adjusted up slightly in 2025.

Several key assumptions in the May forecast differed from those of the January forecast. In May, the PHE was expected to end on May 11, one month earlier than anticipated in the January forecast. The May forecast incorporated the economic impact of the CAA23 (not included in the January forecast) and assumed student loan forbearance would expire on July 1. The new forecast expected the Federal Reserve to raise its policy rate to a range of 5.00% to 5.25% (25 basis points higher than assumed in January). The May forecast anticipated growth of real, trade-weighted foreign GDP and foreign measures of inflation to be higher than assumed in January. Finally, the price of Brent crude oil was expected to decline from $101 per barrel in 2022 to $84 per barrel in 2024 (slightly lower than anticipated in January).

As mentioned, the May forecast no longer anticipated a 2023 recession and assumed positive GDP growth throughout the year. S&P Global now estimates real GDP grew by 2.4% in 2023, exceeding its May expectations by 1.2 percentage points.

The Federal Reserve remained dedicated to returning the inflation rate to 2.0%. In pursuit of this objective, it increased the federal funds rate four more times in 2023 (11 times since March, 2022), to a range of 5.25% to 5.50% by December, 2023. This range is higher than the January, 2023, forecast by 50 basis points. In total, the federal funds rate was increased by 100 basis points over the year. As predicted, the Federal Reserve maintained its plan to reduce its balance sheet by one-third through 2024, by allowing up to $35 billion worth of agency debt and mortgage-backed securities and $60 billion worth of Treasurys it holds to mature each month without reinvesting the proceeds back into the marketplace.

As the federal funds rate increased, the value of existing Treasurys held by banks decreased. Tightening monetary policy contributed to a brief banking crisis that began in March of 2023, when Silicon Valley Bank began selling investments, such as Treasurys, at a loss to fulfill increasing customer withdrawals of cash. This action raised concern among the bank's customers, leading to a bank run and the subsequent failure of Silicon Valley Bank. Signature Bank and First Republic Bank faced similar circumstances and both failed by the end of April. Following these failures, the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Treasury took a number of actions to restore confidence in the banking system, including: (a) providing emergency loans to banks in distress; (b) promising all customers of the failed banks that they would receive all of their deposits back; and (c) hinting at a pause from the federal funds rate increases.

The 30-year, conventional, fixed mortgage rate continued to rise with the federal funds rate in 2023. In contrast to historically low mortgage rates in 2020 and 2021 (2.68% in December, 2020), the average monthly rate peaked at 7.62% in October, 2023, the highest rate since November, 2000, and ended the year at 6.82%. High mortgage rates and persistently high house prices, particularly for existing homes, significantly impacted demand for existing houses. Additionally, supply of existing houses was also impacted, as many owners who had previously locked in much lower interest rates on their home loans were reluctant to sell. S&P Global estimates that sales of existing houses declined 19.6% in 2023, generally consistent with the previous forecast.

In response to the tightening of monetary policy and the easing of supply chain issues, the consumer price index (CPI) declined from 5.8% growth in quarter one of 2023 to 3.2% in the fourth quarter. Over the year, the CPI averaged 4.1%, just slightly lower than predicted in May. Growth in food prices eased in 2023, but remained elevated (5.8%). Energy prices declined 4.8% in 2023, as U.S. oil production increased to a record high of 13.2 million barrels per day. Likewise, the price of Brent crude oil eased from $101 in 2022 to $83 in 2023, slightly lower than predicted in May. Core CPI (which excludes food and energy prices) increased 4.8% over 2023, driven (as predicted) by a 6.2% increase in prices for nonenergy services.

The U.S. and Wisconsin labor markets remained strong through 2023, although they loosened slightly as the year progressed. Wisconsin's unemployment rate fell to a record low of 2.4% in April and May of 2023, then rose to 3.3% by December. By comparison, the national unemployment rate declined to 3.4% in January and April, and ended the year at 3.7%. As predicted in May, the national unemployment rate averaged 3.6% for the year. U.S. nonfarm payrolls increased 2.3% for the year, just slightly above the May, 2023, forecast. Personal income increased 5.2%, while wage and salary disbursements increased 6.2%, both growing 0.3 percentage points slower than previously forecasted.

Nominal consumer spending growth eased as inflation began to moderate, but still increased 6.0% in 2023 (1.9 percentage points higher than CPI growth). As such, consumer spending was the primary driver of the economy, contributing 1.5 percentage points to real GDP growth. Despite strikes at General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis, as well as rising interest rates, light vehicle sales increased 12.0% in 2023, exceeding the May forecast for growth by 4.2 percentage points. This increase in light vehicle sales is attributable to improved global supply chains, compared to issues caused by the shortage of computer chips and other manufacturing disruptions seen in the preceding year.

President Biden's federal loan forgiveness plan, which would have provided student loan forgiveness of up to $10,000 ($20,000 for Pell Grant recipients) for qualifying individuals, faced a number of lawsuits and was halted by an injunction issued by a federal court in November, 2022. The Biden Administration requested a ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court, which resulted in the plan being struck down in June, 2023. The Court ruled that the President did not have the authority to instruct the Secretary of Education to cancel such a large amount of consumer debt without authorization from Congress. On June 7, 2023, Congress enacted a law ending and preventing further extensions of the student loan payment pause and interest deferral (which began in March, 2020). Consequently, student loan interest resumed on September 1, 2023, with the first payments coming due in October (three months later than assumed in the previous forecast).

Although it is too soon to tell whether the Federal Reserve's actions have successfully reduced inflation without causing a recession, it can be concluded that the U.S. avoided a recession in 2023. As inflation eased, consumer spending remained steady and unemployment rates remained low. The stock market recovered strongly, with the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average increasing 24.2% and 13.7%, respectively, over the year. In contrast with declines predicted in prior forecasts, real household net worth stayed flat in 2023, up just 0.1% compared to 2022. The University of Michigan Consumer Sentiment index recovered from its record low of 50.0 in June, 2022, but remained low relative to levels seen prior to 2022. In December, 2023, the Consumer Sentiment index averaged 69.7.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine continued in 2023, with significant casualties on both sides. According to the United States Department of State, as of December 27, 2023, the U.S. had provided approximately $44.2 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. In the Middle East, another conflict arose on October 7, 2023, when Hamas, an Islamist militant movement in the Palestinian territory, launched a coordinated land, sea, and air assault against Israel. Both conflicts are ongoing as of this writing.

United States lawmakers had difficulty agreeing on decisions related to debt and spending in 2023, resulting in various bills that delayed such decisions until a later date. The U.S. reached its debt ceiling of $31.4 trillion in January, 2023, and extraordinary measures were taken to borrow funds without breaching the debt ceiling. To address this issue, the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (FRA23), enacted on June 3, 2023, suspended the debt limit through January 1, 2025. Further, to avoid a government shutdown, Congress passed a series of temporary funding bills to fund the government beginning on October 1, 2023. At present, temporary funding is provided to U.S. government agencies through March 8, 2024 (March 1 for certain agencies).

National Economic Forecast

Under the January, 2024, forecast, S&P Global predicts modest GDP growth, supported by an easing of financial conditions. Real GDP growth is forecast to slow relative to 2023, but to continue growing 1.7% in 2024 and 1.5% in 2025. S&P Global believes that a period of below-trend growth is necessary to lower inflation to 2%. While labor markets are projected to remain tight into 2024, the forecast assumes that economic conditions will achieve sustained 2% inflation by late 2025.

The 2024 forecast is based on the following key assumptions. First, the forecast assumes that the debt ceiling, which was suspended through 2024 by the FRA23, is raised before the end of 2024, and legislation is passed in time to avoid a government shutdown. FRA23 established statutory caps governing discretionary budget authority through fiscal year 2025, which are assumed to grow at the rate of inflation after 2025. Second, it assumes that state and local budgets have returned to deficit, after having been supported by stimulus relief measures in 2021 and 2022. However, unspent pandemic-era and IIJA funds are expected to mitigate pressures to reduce state and local spending. Third, S&P Global anticipates that the Federal Reserve will: (a) cut its policy rate four times in 2024, beginning in March, to a range of 4.25% to 4.50% by December of 2024, and to a range of 2.50% to 2.75% by early 2026; and (b) continue shrinking its balance sheet by about one third, from a high of $8.97 trillion in April, 2022. Fourth, the forecast assumes that tariffs enacted by the U.S. and China since 2017 will remain in effect. Fifth, it assumes that growth in real, trade-weighted foreign GDP will slow from 2.0% in 2023 to 1.8% in 2024, then rebound to 2.5% by 2026. Foreign CPI inflation is expected to fall to 2.4% by 2026 (from 5.9% in 2022), and foreign sovereign bond yields are expected to grow to 2.8% in 2024 as central banks around the world tighten monetary policy. Finally, it is estimated that the price of Brent crude oil will decline from $101 per barrel in 2022 to $76 per barrel in 2025, increase to $87 by 2027, then rise at roughly the rate of inflation.

The forecast is summarized in Table 2, which reflects S&P Global's January, 2024, baseline outlook. Selected baseline projections are presented in more detail below, with alternative optimistic and pessimistic scenarios discussed thereafter.

TABLE 2

Summary of National Economic Indicators
S&P Global Baseline Forecast, January, 2024
($ in Billions)

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Nominal Gross Domestic Product	$25,744.1	$27,316.6	$28,335.0	$29,385.1
Percent Change	9.1%	6.1%	3.7%	3.7%
Real Gross Domestic Product	$21,822.0	$22,341.4	$22,721.9	$23,063.8
Percent Change	1.9%	2.4%	1.7%	1.5%
Consumer Prices (Percent Change)	8.0%	4.1%	2.7%	2.0%
Personal Income	$21,840.8	$22,965.7	$24,050.8	$25,243.9
Percent Change	2.0%	5.2%	4.7%	5.0%
Nominal Personal Consumption Expenditures	$17,511.7	$18,556.8	$19,276.9	$19,898.1
Percent Change	9.2%	6.0%	3.9%	3.2%
Economic Profits	$3,208.7	$3,209.3	$3,234.9	$3,259.2
Percent Change	9.8%	0.0%	0.8%	0.7%
Unemployment Rate	3.6%	3.6%	4.0%	4.1%
Total Nonfarm Payrolls (Millions)	152.6	156.2	157.4	157.8
Percent Change	4.3%	2.3%	0.8%	0.2%
Light Vehicle Sales (Millions of Units)	13.75	15.41	15.79	16.52
Percent Change	-8.0%	12.0%	2.5%	4.6%
Sales of New and Existing Homes (Millions of Units)	5.718	4.750	4.806	5.433
Percent Change	-17.1%	-16.9%	1.2%	13.0%
Housing Starts (Millions of Units)	1.551	1.406	1.391	1.366
Percent Change	-3.4%	-9.3%	-1.1%	-1.8%

Consumer Prices. CPI slowed to 4.1% in 2023, down from 8.0% in 2022. As predicted, core CPI, which excludes food and energy prices, exceeded overall CPI, growing 4.8% in 2023. S&P Global expects average annual CPI growth to slow to 2.7% in 2024, and return to the Federal Reserve's long-term inflation target of 2.0% by 2025. Core CPI growth is expected to ease more slowly, growing at a rate of 3.0% in 2024 and 2.4% in 2025. The forecast predicts that core CPI growth will again be driven by increases in the price of services, as prices of commodities (goods such as clothing and vehicles) are expected to decline slightly in 2024 and 2025. The average price of new vehicles peaked in 2023 at $45,400, despite the easing of supply chain issues. S&P Global projects that the average new vehicle price will ease to $43,300 in 2024 and $41,100 in 2025.

Personal Consumption. Nominal PCE grew 6.0% in 2023, with growth in spending on services (7.4%) exceeding spending on goods (3.2%). Spending on services made up 66.7% of all consumer spending, still short of its pre-pandemic level (68.6% in 2019). S&P Global projects that the shift from spending on goods to spending on services will continue, with services making up 67.6% of all expenditures in 2024 and 68.3% in 2025.

S&P Global anticipates that nominal PCE growth will ease to 3.9% in 2024 and 3.2% in 2025, as inflation continues to slow. Sales of light vehicles increased 12% in 2023, and are projected to continue growing 2.5% in 2024 and 4.6% in 2025. Supported by modest growth in real disposable income, real (inflation-adjusted) PCE is projected to grow 1.8% in 2024 and 1.2% in 2025.

Employment. The national unemployment rate averaged 3.6% over 2023, consistent with the May, 2023, projections, but improved by 1.0 percentage point compared to the January, 2023, projections. S&P Global now expects the labor market to remain tight until late 2024, at which point conditions will begin to ease. The unemployment rate is projected to increase to 4.0% in 2024, 4.1% in 2025, and peak in 2027 at 4.4% (equal to S&P Global's estimate of the full-employment rate). Overall, average annual nonfarm payrolls are expected to remain relatively flat through 2025, growing just 0.8% in 2024 and 0.2% in 2025. S&P Global estimates that the U.S. labor force participation rate increased slightly to 62.6% in 2023, and will peak at 62.7% in 2024 before beginning a gradual decline through the rest of the forecast period.

Personal Income. Personal income grew 5.2% in 2023, slightly less than previously expected (5.5% in the May forecast), stemming from slower growth in wages and salary disbursements of 6.2% (compared to 6.5% forecast in May). Going forward, personal income is expected to continue growing, increasing 4.7% in 2024 and 5.0% in 2025. S&P Global projects that wage and salary disbursements will grow at a slightly slower pace of 4.5% in 2024 and 3.8% in 2025.

Real disposable income growth turned positive in 2023 (4.2%), after declining 6.0% in 2022, and is expected to continue increasing 2.7% and 2.9% in 2024 and 2025, respectively. Real household net worth remained flat (0.1%) in 2023 and is projected to grow 4.0% in 2024, supported by a 12.0% increase in household holdings of equities (such as stocks and bonds). Real net worth is projected to decline 0.3% in 2025, as inflation slightly outpaces growth in household financial assets.

Housing. Housing starts declined 9.3% in 2023, improved from the 13.9% decline estimated in May, 2023. The average price of existing homes remained flat in 2023 (higher than the previous forecast of an 8.4% decline), whereas the average price of new homes declined 4.8% (lower than the

May, 2023, estimate of -1.9%). Overall, sales of new and existing homes declined 16.9% in 2023, driven largely by the decline in existing home sales.

Going forward, S&P Global estimates a continued decline in housing starts in 2024 (-1.1%) and 2025 (-1.8%). Sales of new and existing homes are expected to remain relatively flat in 2024, increasing just 1.2%, and experience a stronger recovery of 13.0% in 2025. S&P Global anticipates that as mortgage rates decrease, the inventory of existing homes offered for sale will increase. The average price of existing homes is projected to grow 4.7% in 2024 and 7.9% in 2025.

Monetary Policy. As mentioned, the Federal Reserve increased the federal funds rate four times in 2023, with the last increase (25 basis points) occurring in July. The Federal Reserve continued to monitor the inflation rate and economic activity through the rest of the year and determined further rate increases were not necessary in 2023, remaining cognizant of lags with which monetary policy affects such indicators. In addition, the Federal Reserve reduced its balance sheet of agency debt, mortgage-backed securities, and Treasurys by $838 billion in 2023, to approximately $7.7 trillion.

It is anticipated that the Federal Reserve will not increase the federal funds rate in 2024. S&P Global now expects that the Federal Reserve will begin lowering the federal funds rate (by 25 basis points) in March, with three more reductions to follow in 2024. It is estimated that the rate will be lowered to a range of 4.25% to 4.50% by December, 2024.

Business Investment. S&P Global estimates that growth in nominal nonresidential fixed investment grew 8.2% in 2023, higher than the May, 2023, estimate of 6.5% growth. Growth in 2023 was led by investment in structures (19.1%), particularly in manufacturing (73.2%), followed by investment in intellectual property products (6.3%), and equipment (4.4%). The forecast anticipates that growth in nominal nonresidential fixed investment will slow to 3.2% in 2024 and 2.8% in 2025.

Inventories increased by an estimated $37.3 billion (1.3%) in 2023 (from quarter four of 2022 to quarter four of 2023), up significantly from the $8.2 billion decline estimated in May, 2023. Going forward, S&P Global anticipates that inventories will continue to increase another $25.2 billion in 2024 and $62.8 billion in 2025.

International Trade. Net exports contributed 0.51 percentage points to real GDP growth in 2023, as the slight increase in nominal exports (0.9%) and the decline in nominal imports (3.5%) improved the U.S. balance of trade. The volume of both imports and exports was lower than anticipated in the previous forecast.

S&P Global predicts that growth in imports (4.0%) will exceed growth in exports (3.8%) in 2024, resulting in a trade deficit of $847.0 billion in 2024 ($40.3 billion more than in 2023). This deficit is expected to lessen to $774.3 billion in 2025, with exports increasing 6.2% compared to a 3.0% increase for imports. As such, net exports are expected to detract 0.06 percentage points from real GDP growth in 2024, before contributing 0.15 percentage points to growth in 2025.

Corporate Profits. Corporate before-tax book profits decreased by an estimated 0.2% in 2023, and are forecast to grow 3.4% in 2024 and 2.0% in 2025. Economic profits, which are adjusted for inventory valuation and capital consumption at current cost (and are not affected by federal tax laws), were unchanged in 2023 (3.4 percentage points less than forecasted in May). S&P Global forecasts that economic profits will increase 0.8% in 2024 and 0.7% in 2025. The current forecast assumes that the effective federal corporate tax rate for all industries was 13.7% in 2023, and will decline slightly to 13.6% in 2024 and 13.4% in 2025.

Under current law, the temporary 100% bonus depreciation provision enacted by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 will continue to phase out, with the bonus depreciation percentage declining to 80% in 2023, 60% in 2024, 40% in 2025, 20% for 2026, and 0% for property placed in service after 2026. S&P Global predicts that this phase-out will increase the after-tax cost of capital, reducing investment spending in the coming years under the forecast. However, Congress is currently considering legislation to extend this bonus depreciation provision.

Fiscal Policy. The federal budget deficit is expected to decrease from $423.8 billion in federal fiscal year 2023 to $378.6 billion in 2024, then increase to $410.1 billion in 2025. S&P Global estimates that spending by the federal government contributed 0.25 percentage points to real GDP growth in 2023, but will contribute just 0.06 and 0.03 percentage points in 2024 and 2025, respectively. State and local government spending contributed 0.41 percentage points to GDP growth in 2023, and is projected to contribute another 0.19 percentage points in 2024 and 0.02 percentage points in 2025.

Alternative Scenarios. S&P Global's January, 2024, forecast also includes an optimistic scenario and a pessimistic scenario. Under the optimistic scenario, S&P Global assigns a 15% probability that productivity and consumer spending will be stronger than assumed in the baseline. It assumes that the banking sector continues to support the economy through credit growth. An easing in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and in the conflict in the Middle East will allow for lower energy prices, with the price of Brent crude oil falling $2 lower than the baseline in 2024. Real GDP grows 2.4% in 2024 and 2.0% in 2025, 0.7 percentage points and 0.5 percentage points above the baseline, respectively, in part due to reduced uncertainty over a government shutdown in 2024. Consumer spending increases 2.6% in 2024 and 1.8% in 2025, compared to 1.8% and 1.2%, respectively, in the baseline forecast, partly due to lower energy prices and strong credit expansion. Under the optimistic scenario, strong demand and elevated cash flows allow business fixed investment to increase 1.9 percentage points more than the baseline in both 2024 and 2025.

Under the pessimistic scenario, to which S&P Global assigns a 30% probability, a shallow recession occurs as tightening lending standards, due to balance sheet issues in the banking sector, restrain spending and production. It assumes that higher energy prices result from a worsening in the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, affecting businesses and households. Real consumer spending grows only 0.6% in 2024 (including a decline during the first half of the year) and 0.9% in 2025, compared to 1.8% and 1.2%, respectively, under the baseline. Real GDP grows 0.9 percentage points and 0.3 percentage points slower than the baseline in 2024 and 2025, respectively. Under the pessimistic scenario, business fixed investment declines each year (-0.2% in 2024 and -0.8% in 2025) compared to growth under the baseline. The unemployment rate rises to 6.2% by mid-2025, and the price of Brent crude oil averages $103 in 2024 and $92 in 2025, $20 and $16 higher than the baseline, respectively. In response, the Federal Reserve lowers the federal funds rate more quickly than in the baseline, reaching a range of 0.50% to 0.75% by mid-2026.

General Fund Taxes

Table 3 shows general fund tax revenue estimates for 2023-24 and 2024-25. The previous estimates are the general fund tax estimates included in Act 19, adjusted to reflect subsequent law changes.

TABLE 3

Projected General Fund Tax Collections
($ in Millions)

	2022-23 Actual	Previous Estimates 2023-24	Previous Estimates 2024-25	Revised Estimates January, 2024 2023-24	Revised Estimates January, 2024 2024-25
Individual Income	$9,414.7	$9,613.9	$10,073.7	$9,540.0	$9,910.0
General Sales and Use	7,456.1	7,639.5	7,816.9	7,605.0	7,810.0
Corporate Income/Franchise	2,748.5	2,679.4	2,807.2	2,590.0	2,715.0
Public Utility	401.2	374.0	370.0	405.0	408.0
Excise					
Cigarette	444.7	418.6	405.2	413.0	397.0
Tobacco Products	88.3	91.0	93.0	89.0	90.0
Vapor Products	7.1	7.7	8.5	8.0	8.8
Liquor and Wine	69.4	68.9	70.2	71.0	74.0
Beer	8.3	8.1	8.2	7.5	7.4
Insurance Company	223.1	236.0	246.0	224.0	232.0
Miscellaneous Taxes	112.6	103.0	111.0	103.0	120.0
Total	$20,974.0	$21,240.1	$22,009.9	$21,055.5	$21,772.2
Change from Prior Year		$266.1	$769.8	$81.5	$716.7
Percent Change		1.3%	3.6%	0.4%	3.4%

In total, these amounts are $422.3 million lower than the previous estimates. The percentage difference is 1.0% lower. The majority of the reduction (99.3%) is attributed to lower projections for individual income taxes, which are $237.6 million lower than the previous forecast, and corporate income/franchise taxes, which are $181.6 million lower. The remaining $3.1 million reduction is comprised of reduced estimates for sales and use taxes, insurance premiums taxes, and excise taxes on cigarettes, tobacco products, and beer, offset by increased estimates for utility taxes, miscellaneous taxes, and excise taxes on vapor products and liquor.

Individual Income Tax. Total individual income tax collections were $9,414.7 million in 2022-23, an increase of 2.2% over the prior year. Actual revenues in 2022-23 were 0.4% ($35.3 million) lower than this office's previous estimates. Based on preliminary collections information through December, 2023, total year-to-date income tax collections are higher by 2.3% ($99.0 million) than such receipts during the same time period one year ago.

Over the remainder of 2023-24, individual income tax revenues are projected to increase by 0.6% relative to the same time period in the prior year. A significant factor impacting this deceleration is the income tax rate reductions enacted under 2023 Act 19, the 2023-25 biennial budget act, which lowered the marginal rates for the two bottom brackets from 3.54% and 4.65% to 3.50% and 4.40%, respectively, beginning in tax year 2023. In addition, the individual income tax withholding tables were last updated on January 1, 2022, since which time significant inflation has occurred. While the taxable income amounts applicable to each bracket are adjusted each year for inflation (8.3% adjustment for tax year 2023), no such indexing has occurred in the withholding tables since 2022. As a result, wages that have merely grown with inflation in the interim would inaccurately suggest, for withholding purposes, that a comparatively greater amount of tax is owed. All else equal, these two factors are expected to create higher refunds when taxpayers file their tax year 2023 individual income tax returns in 2023-24.

An additional factor projected to increase 2023-24 refunds is the resumption of student loan payments (first due in October, 2023). Under federal and state law, student loan interest is deductible from gross income. Student loan repayments, and the accrual of interest on those loans, had been paused for eligible loans since March, 2020. The resumption of student loan payments in October of 2023 is expected to increase deductions taken for the interest on those loans when affected borrowers file their state income tax returns in 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Preliminary data on estimated payments made in January, 2024, suggest that such collections will be lower than those in January, 2023. Historically, January is a significant month for estimated payments, so these lower preliminary collections to date reduce the overall individual income tax estimate in 2023-24. On an annual basis, individual income tax revenues are projected to increase by 1.3% to $9,540.0 million in 2023-24, which represents a decline of 0.8% relative to the prior estimate.

In 2024-25, total income tax collections are estimated to increase by 3.9% to $9,910.0 million, which is 1.6% lower than the previous estimate. This decline relative to the prior estimate is primarily attributable to altered assumptions for capital gains realizations throughout 2024, which are now expected to be weaker than previously forecast.

General Sales and Use Tax. State sales and use tax revenues totaled $7,456.1 million in 2022-23, which was an increase of 6.8% over the prior year. Sales tax revenues are estimated at $7,605.0 million in 2023-24 and $7,810.0 in 2024-25, constituting annual growth of 2.0% in 2023-24 and 2.7% in 2024-25. These estimates represent revenue decreases of $34.5 million in 2023-24 and $6.9 million in 2024-25, relative to the prior estimates. The decreased estimates are based on lower than previously anticipated 2022-23 collections ($23.9 million less than the previous forecast) and lower sales tax collections year-to-date. Sales tax collections through December, 2023, are just 1.7% higher than the same period in the prior year, below the 2.5% growth for 2023-24 previously estimated and lagging behind S&P Global's estimates of taxable consumer spending. As such, the revised estimates have been lowered in each year.

Corporate Income/Franchise Tax. Corporate income/franchise taxes were $2,748.5 million in 2022-23, which was 7.1% less than collections in the previous year. Corporate tax revenues are projected to continue to decline to $2,590.0 million in 2023-24 (a decrease of 5.8%), and then increase to $2,715.0 million in 2024-25 (an increase of 4.8%). Compared to previous estimates, this is a downward revision of $89.4 million and $92.2 million in 2023-24 and 2024-25, respectively.

The estimate for 2023-24 primarily reflects year-to-date corporate estimated payments, which declined notably (5.8%) compared to the same period through December of last year, as well as a sharp decline in year-to-date pass-through entity tax payments made by partnerships (down 39%). Overall, corporate tax collections are 8.3% lower through December, 2023, relative to the previous year. The estimate also reflects the fiscal effects of law changes enacted to date (including provisions of federal tax law), such as changes made to state and federal law impacting awards for the state supplement to the federal historic rehabilitation credit. Based on anticipated growth in before-tax book profits, and adjusting for law changes, collections are forecast to increase by 4.8% in 2024-25.

Public Utility Taxes. Revenues from public utility taxes totaled $401.2 million in 2022-23, $10.2 million higher than previously estimated, and are estimated at $405.0 million in 2023-24 and $408.0 million in 2024-25. Year-over-year, these amounts represent an increase of 0.9% in 2023-24 and 0.7% in 2024-25. Relative to the previous estimates, these estimates reflect an increase of $31.0 million in 2023-24 and $38.0 million in 2024-25.

The higher overall utility tax estimates are primarily attributable to increased estimates for taxes on private light, heat, and power (PLHP) companies and telecommunications companies. PLHP company tax collections in 2022-23 exceeded the prior estimate by $11.1 million, partly resulting from the actual 2023 tax assessment exceeding estimates by $18.7 million. A higher 2023 tax assessment impacts collections for both 2022-23 and 2023-24. In addition, estimates of growth in sales of electricity and natural gas by Wisconsin PLHP companies in 2023 have improved since the previous forecast, further increasing estimates for both 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Since enactment of 2019 Act 128, which provided an exemption from the telecommunications utility tax for certain property providing broadband internet service in rural areas beginning with property installed in 2020, the value of remaining taxable personal property has declined each year. However, the 2023 tax assessment for telecommunications companies exceeded previous estimates by $11.8 million, driven by an unexpected increase in the value of taxable personal property. This information has led us to revise up our estimates of the future value of taxable personal property held by telecommunications companies, therefore increasing tax estimates over the biennium.

Finally, the Department of Revenue (DOR) has recently determined that, as a result of the personal property tax repeal under 2023 Act 12, the gross revenues utility tax collected from car line companies would be considered federally prohibited. In response, DOR plans to refund $0.4 million of 2023 payments to all taxpayers in 2023-24 and no longer collect the car line company utility tax in 2024-25. This determination was not considered during deliberations of Act 12.

Excise Taxes. General fund excise taxes are imposed on cigarettes, liquor (including wine and hard cider), other tobacco products, vapor products, and beer. Total excise tax revenues in 2022-23 were $617.8 million, of which $444.7 million (72.0%) was from the excise tax on cigarettes. Total excise taxes declined 5.6% in 2022-23, driven by declines of 7.8% and 6.5% in cigarette and tobacco products tax revenues, respectively. Total excise tax revenues are estimated to decrease by 4.7% to $588.5 million in 2023-24 and by 1.9% to $577.2 million in 2024-25. Compared to the previous estimates, these amounts are lower by $5.8 million in 2023-24 and $7.9 million in 2024-25.

Cigarette tax revenues are estimated at $413.0 million in 2023-24 and $397.0 million in

2024-25, constituting annual revenue declines of 7.1% and 3.9%, respectively. These estimates are lower than previously forecast by $5.6 million in 2023-24 and $8.2 million in 2024-25. These revisions are largely due to lower than anticipated year-to-date growth in sales of cigarette packs (-7.8%), and a persistent downward trend in annual revenues.

Insurance Premiums Taxes. Insurance premiums taxes were $223.1 million in 2022-23, $3.9 million lower than previously estimated. Revenues are projected to increase to $224.0 million in 2023-24 and $232.0 million in 2024-25 (growth rates of 0.4% and 3.6%, respectively). Compared to previous estimates, this revision is $12.0 million lower in 2023-24 and $14.0 million lower in 2024-25. The new estimates reflect: (a) that actual collections for 2022-23 were lower than had been originally forecast; (b) a decline in year-to-date collections (1.4%) compared to the previous year despite a forecasted increase in national spending on insurance premiums; and (c) trends in historic premiums tax collections.

Miscellaneous Taxes. Miscellaneous taxes include the real estate transfer fee (RETF), municipal and circuit court-related fees, and a small amount from the occupational tax on coal. Miscellaneous tax revenues were $112.6 million in 2022-23, of which 87.8% was generated from the RETF. Total miscellaneous tax collections in 2022-23 represented a decline of 17.0% from the prior fiscal year, largely due to rising mortgage rates, which limited both supply of, and demand for, houses. Miscellaneous tax revenues are estimated at $103.0 million in 2023-24 and $120.0 million in 2024-25, which is higher than the previous estimate by $9.0 million in 2024-25. The revised estimate in 2024-25 reflects improved housing market indicators, as compared to the May, 2023, forecast. A combination of a larger volume of existing homes offered for sale and higher existing home prices than previously projected is expected to increase the total RETF collected in 2024-25.

This office will continue to monitor state revenues and expenditures and new economic forecasts, and notify you and your colleagues of any further adjustments that may be necessary.

Sincerely,

Bob Lang

Robert Wm. Lang
Director

RWL/lb
cc: Members, Wisconsin Legislature