



Dear Neighbor,

I would like to thank you once again for the opportunity and privilege to represent you in our State Capitol.

Our state and community face many challenges during this legislative session. I have been focused on supporting policies that improve Wisconsin's economic and fiscal climate while protecting vital state services. In this e-newsletter, I want to update you on some of the important issues surrounding Governor Walker's 2011-2013 budget. I have serious concerns with the massive shift in Wisconsin's priorities that has occurred over the past six months and am disappointed with many of the inexplicable decisions in the state budget recently signed into law by Governor Walker. However, I will continue to work with my staff and colleagues to encourage responsible changes that move Wisconsin forward.

Please do not hesitate to contact my office toll-free at **1-888-534-0054** or via e-mail at **[rep.hintz@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:rep.hintz@legis.wisconsin.gov)**.

Sincerely,

Gordon Hintz  
State Representative-54th Assembly District

## **2011-2013 STATE BUDGET**

Throughout the 2010 state election cycle and during the past six months, we have heard about the financial challenges facing Wisconsin. Wisconsin and 48 other states have been challenged by revenue shortfalls caused by the global economic recession.

Even in difficult financial times, a budget should serve as a planning document and establish the priorities for the state. It should provide a blueprint on how to address our state's challenges. How will we meet our long-term economic needs? Educate our workforce of tomorrow? Take care of our most vulnerable citizens? Keep our communities safe and our environment protected?

Governor Walker's budget ignores many challenges confronting Wisconsin while it pushes an ideological agenda contrary to Wisconsin values. It was expected that this budget would include spending cuts. But it was shocking to see Walker's budget change the state's priorities in ways that hurt middle-class families and undermine our quality of life.

## **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

Global economic competition makes education and job-training more important than ever. While not perfect, Wisconsin's public education system has been a major strength of our state and its quality is reflected in our workforce today. Thus, it is hard to understand Governor Walker's massive cuts amounting to \$1.6 billion in public K-12 education funding while we see increased funding to expand unproven private voucher and virtual schools. The shift and priority to privatizing public education in Wisconsin is one of the biggest concerns I hear from constituents.

The mandated cuts in teacher compensation passed in the budget repair bill may reduce costs for local school districts. However, they have also led to a record level of retirements and to an immeasurable loss of morale among dedicated educators who feel unfairly attacked and disrespected. It is hard to imagine this will benefit our children.

## **WORKFORCE NEEDS**

Employers throughout our state stress the importance of our technical college system, which prepares our workforce for complex, technical and constantly evolving jobs. In fact just three weeks ago, Pinnacle Machine, LLC in Appleton told me they would hire 10 machinists on the spot if they walked through the front door. Yet, the Walker budget cuts technical college funding by 30%. Cuts like this were made so that a few large national corporations could be given tax breaks totaling \$46.8 million for the re-opening a loophole which allows them to avoid paying state taxes. The proposed cuts are not only short-sighted, but may irreparably harm our children's education and the state's economic future.

## **STATE HEALTH CARE PROGRAMS**

Wisconsin always has taken care of its most vulnerable citizens with bipartisan support for healthcare programs that assist seniors, children and struggling families (SeniorCare, BadgerCare and Family Care). Each of these programs now faces devastating cuts, partial elimination, and waiting lists. These reductions come just months after the Governor pushed for a tax exemption on Health Savings Accounts for the 1.6% of Wisconsin citizens who have them at a cost of nearly \$50 million in state revenue.

Governor Walker's budget directs the Department of Health Services (DHS) to drastically change the BadgerCare family planning program, which currently serves 57,000 men and women each year. These provisions include the elimination of coverage for men, reducing income eligibility from 300% to 200% of the federal poverty level, and requiring women under age 18 to notify their parents if they are receiving family planning services. Additionally, Republicans in the legislature chose to push a

misguided assault on men and women in Wisconsin who receive family planning services through Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin. I realize that the issue of abortion is a sensitive one that stirs strong emotions. However, this shortsighted decision jeopardizes funding for the clinic in Oshkosh that currently serves more than 2,000 patients annually and provides nearly 500 cervical cancer screens per year. The Oshkosh clinic does not provide abortion related services but still faces elimination of funding due to this decision.

### **LOCAL SERVICES**

While Governor Walker repeatedly mentions giving local government the tools to balance their budgets and fund services, he severely restricted local governments to make their own funding decisions by imposing strict levy limits. This is troubling because it takes away options for local governments who still have to provide core services such as law enforcement, trash pickup and snowplowing. Local decisions should be left to the local level and they should not be forced upon them by the Governor and the Legislature looking to pass budget problems to local government.

Oshkosh City Manager Mark Rohloff has said state budget cuts will mean the city may not provide the same level of service in 2012 as it did in 2011 due to an estimated cut of \$803,949 in the state budget. "We always try to find ways to maintain services even as taxpayers' appetite for more taxes decreases," Rohloff said. "But people may note an impact on services more so this year than in past years when we've dealt with deficits." (*Oshkosh Northwestern, June 24, 2011*)

While unpopular property taxes remain a concern for everyone, the Governor has decided that local governments should not be able to determine their own service needs and make their own financial decisions by freezing property tax levies. However, property taxes will be increasing for those who can least afford it. In a budget filled with few winners, one of the biggest losers will be the recipients of the Earned Income and the Homestead tax credits. These targeted anti-poverty programs, which assist low income individuals with their income and property taxes, were cut by \$41.3 million and \$8 million respectively.

### **CONSUMER PROTECTION**

While I am pleased Governor Walker removed a provision that would have re-established a commercial bail bonds industry in the state, I am deeply troubled by the way his budget enables other predatory lending practices that undermine the economic security of those struggling to make ends meet. Specifically, I am upset by the removal of the state ban on the auto title lending and the watering down of predatory payday lending regulations, which were passed with bipartisan support only a year ago. Additionally, Governor Walker and Republican leadership have not provided any explanation why they chose to eliminate protections for renters in foreclosure cases that I drafted into law in 2009. Instead of receiving a reasonable two month notice for eviction due to foreclosure, families can now be kicked out in 24 hours or less through no fault of their own. None of these changes help balance the budget or benefit anyone other than the special interests who lobbied for their change.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

The recently passed state budget raids millions from Wisconsin's renowned Stewardship Fund, used to preserve and protect land, and shifts it to other state programs. This makes it more difficult to preserve our state's unique natural resources for future generations. The budget also cuts state funding for public transit programs and for Focus on Energy, an immensely popular and successful program that has been utilized by nearly 100,000 Wisconsin businesses. The Office of Energy Independence is also eliminated in the budget.

## **FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND FUTURE DEFICITS**

While there have been numerous sound bites on Wisconsin having a "*balanced budget*" and a "*surplus*" for the first time in years, reality paints a far different picture. Despite the claims that Wisconsin is financially broke, the Governor and Republican Legislature somehow found \$212.2 million for tax cuts in next year's budget. Choosing to pass budget problems on to local government and school districts and freezing or eliminating programs in order to pay for unaccountable tax cuts is a choice that comes with a price. These tax cuts will likely shift even more of the tax burden onto families and small businesses.

The major financial problem with the 2011-2013 budget is that certain tax cuts included in the budget cost the state \$73.4 million in 2011-2013 but escalate to cost \$533.6 million by the 2019-2021 biennium. By building in tax cuts beyond the years you are budgeting for, you are building in a structural deficit (difference between expenses and revenues) for the future. This is the direction that our federal government in Washington, DC has gone the last 10 years.

Without changes to our criminal justice system and corrections policy, we know as a state we have future spending commitments well above what we spend now calculated at an additional \$1.1 billion annually in prison costs by 2019. The 2011-2013 budget cuts revenue by \$325.6 million in 2019 alone, while doing nothing to reduce or curb those future expenditures. In fact, not only is this Governor doing nothing about these future costs, he supported the repeal of the earned release program used in states like Indiana and Texas aimed at curbing our corrections spending long-term. This makes this budget one of the least fiscally responsible budgets and hardly sets a "platform" for our future in Wisconsin.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

The past six months have been a challenge for Wisconsin as recent decisions and actions made by the Governor and the Legislature have been met by a significant backlash from a broad section of the public. Throughout the crafting of this budget, my intention was to attempt to work together to address some of the more alarming provisions of this bill and reduce some of the negative impact on Wisconsin families. Along with my Democratic colleagues, I worked to reverse the worst of Gov. Walker's budget priorities with a series of amendments that would have shifted funding back to public schools rather than

private schools, restored vital job training for displaced workers, ensured continued access to affordable health care, protected local control and ensured a more transparent and honest government. Unfortunately, measures that should have easily passed with bipartisan support were rejected along party-line votes.

While this budget takes Wisconsin in a direction that significantly impacts the opportunity and quality of life for many Wisconsin families, I intend on working as hard as possible to continue to advocate for the people I represent. I am scheduled to meet with the Governor's office this week and look forward to finding ways to work together in a more respectful way going forward. I look forward to any continued feedback you may be willing to offer on issues or future policies effecting Wisconsin residents.

Again, thank you for allowing me to serve you in the State Legislature. Please do not hesitate to contact me regarding these or any other item of interest to you.

Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July!

**UPCOMING SCHEDULE:**

*Fourth of July Parade* – July 4<sup>th</sup>, 9am Downtown Oshkosh, beginning at intersection of Main Street & Otter, then north on Main Street to Irving. Then east on Irving Avenue to the Menomonee Park.

*Office Hours* – July 22 10:00am-Noon, Oshkosh Senior Center

*Oshkosh Saturday Farmer's Market* – (Tentatively) Saturdays 8am-12:30pm, Downtown Oshkosh, 400 & 500 Blocks North Main Street (Depending on my schedule, I have been tabling at the market and meeting with constituents)