

The Wisconsin budget: divided government, compromise, and 78 vetoes

GUEST OPINION

By Rep. Barbara Dittrich

Throughout the biennial budget process, my constituents have urged me to find ways to work together with Governor Evers regarding our state's two-year spending plan. While I have reminded them I am not a member of the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) and had no mechanism to vote on individual items included in the budget, I have listened to people all around the 38th Assembly District as they shared their priorities, ideas, and expectations of the 2019-2021 state budget. I have shared these comments with members of JFC and leadership as they crafted the budget and endeavored to find a way to build on the responsible budgeting of the last 8 years.

In his first budget, dubbed the People's Budget, the newly elected governor had created a liberal wish list, increasing spending nearly \$6 billion and in the process raising taxes by more than \$1 billion. Senate and Assembly Republicans worked together to find ways to continue to build on the gains made in the last 8 years, ensuring our state remains on track with the lowest unemployment rate and lower taxes, while keeping in mind the challenges faced in area of transportation.

To that goal, JFC sent the Wisconsin budget to Governor Evers. This budget funded the state's priorities without runaway government spending or massive tax increases. However, Governor Evers chose rhetoric and pandering to big cities instead of fairly tackling the issues facing our state.

As a representation of the entire state, the governor had a responsibility to the entire state, not just specific areas or cities. This is why I am sharing my disappointment in his actions and feel it is important to remind individuals of the gains that survived Governor Evers' veto pen.

The Wisconsin budget, as passed by the Legislature and ultimately signed by the governor, was able to hold the line on tax increases and new spending as proposed by the governor. At the same time, it increases the largest actual dollar amount to public education so schools have every opportunity to achieve student proficiency. Other conservative gains remained untouched including voter ID, the UW tuition freeze, increased funding for our nursing homes and personal care workers, doubled the rainy day fund, and maintained funding for repair of our state highways and roads among other topics.

However, certain changes were made by Governor Evers; 78 changes that will ultimately undermine the progress of our state and promote division among specific areas of our state. The governor's vetoes strip the funding of work and job-training requirements for parents with schoolaged children. This comes at a time when our state has had 16 months straight of 3% or below unemployment. He also robbed local communities of nearly \$15 million in road aid while at the same time dedicating \$75 million for a DOT fund that can only be used for transit in Milwaukee and

to pay their fair share into the child welfare system, forcing the rest of the state to pay \$14 million for the city. In a time when experts and professionals are calling for increased access for mental health resources, Governor Evers slashed provisions for suicide prevention, mental illness, and substance abuse via telehealth. This is of particular concern for the 38th Assembly District as we lead the way on some of the state's strongest organizations on the front lines battling these growing issues.

Especially given the compromises with the governor and hurdles overcome by JFC and Legislature in drafting the Wisconsin budget, I am saddened to see Governor Evers cave to politics as usual, surrounding himself with Democrat legislators that did not vote for a compromise but cheered at the obstructionism and favoritism in the final product. It is important to remember that having the governor's seat does not make one a dictator. Split government means that compromise requires both sides to give a little bit. Sadly, the only attempts to work together came on the part of the Legislature. However, I remain hopeful that the Assembly Republican caucus will continue to discuss ways we can keep our state on track despite the partisan politics and misplaced priorities.

(Barbara Dittrich represents the 38th Assembly District.)



Madison if he wishes. In a further **Dittrich**
burden on the rest of the state, the
governor eliminated a requirement
for Milwaukee