



I have seven school districts in my Assembly District. UW-Whitewater and UW-Rock County both serve many constituents.

Education is the most important issue in this budget, the issue we've heard most about, critical to the success of young people, learners of all ages, and our economy.

Yet in this budget, Republicans are slashing funding for UW System and draining money out of our local public schools.

Republicans claim that they have restored public school funding for all Wisconsin public school students. Untrue.

\$1.3 billion has been cut over the past three budgets.

Throughout that time, we have forced our schools and communities to absorb devastating cuts, resulting in fewer teachers, more crowded classrooms, and fewer enriching learning experiences.

As local taxpayers have stepped up to support their public schools by referendum, their taxes have gone up to replace state funding that has gone down.

This budget makes the situation even worse.

DPI has estimated that more than half of Wisconsin public school districts will receive less general aid in the 2015-16 school year than they did for the 2014-15 school year.

Not only are Republicans not even funding our schools to keep up with inflation, they are cutting.

Three school districts that I represent highlight these cuts:

The Beloit Turner School District is losing almost \$275,000.

Albany and Juda, two small rural school districts like so many in our state, will suffer cuts of \$142,000 and \$40,000, a 6% cut in the case of Albany.

I've been in these schools and talked to these superintendents, teachers, and students about the effect of these cuts.

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On top of these cuts, the Republican budget siphons off taxpayer money to private schools at a rate that should alarm everyone in this great state.

This plan could move up to \$800 million, as in just less than a billion dollars, from Wisconsin's public schools and give it to unaccountable private voucher schools over the next decade.

Beloit School Superintendent Tom Johnson, in a letter to parents and families, sums it up by saying that this budget "sends a clear message to Wisconsin's residents that public education is no longer of importance."

It's clear the top priority for Republicans is paying back private-school campaign contributors.

Now I wish I could stop there, but unfortunately, Republicans didn't stop with K-12 education.

Once our kids dig their way out of whatever is left of our public schools under this budget, Republicans have another surprise waiting for them: they have gutted our higher education system, the UW System, by a quarter of a billion dollars.

The UW System is this state's key economic engine, having an impact of over \$15 billion annually.

If we cut \$250 million, how much future economic activity have we forfeited at a time when Wisconsin is already 38th in the US in job growth?

Cuts of this magnitude only make it harder for students to graduate on time.

We will have fewer professors and academic instruction positions, not to mention current professors who will leave after being stripped of tenure, stripped of shared governance, and having their work ethic berated by our state's Republican leaders.

We will have fewer class offerings, meaning it will be harder for those students studying computer science, studying engineering, studying nursing - it will be harder for them to graduate and quickly get into the workforce where they are so desperately needed.

Of course, more time in college means more student loan debt as well.

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State Capitol: PO Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708 (608) 266-1192
Toll-free: (888) 534-0045 FAX: (608) 282-3645 E-mail: Rep.Spreitzer@legis.wisconsin.gov
Follow me on Twitter @RepSpreitzer or at Facebook.com/RepSpreitzer



How much more can we stack the deck against students?

These cuts will mean real damage to people's lives.

UW Colleges and UW Extension are each scrambling to adjust to a multi-million dollar cut, while being careful not to say anything that will incur the wrath of Republicans in the legislature.

Many of the students at our 2 year UW Colleges are the first in their families to go to college.

Where students used to walk in to an advisor's office on campus and discuss their academic plan, they may now have to call a central office and be placed on hold until the entire system's one advisor is able to talk.

But if economics doesn't convince you, if flesh and blood doesn't convince you, how about politics?

These cuts face overwhelming opposition. More than 70 percent of Wisconsinites oppose these cuts.

Listen to your constituents - vote against these unnecessary budget cuts that will do serious, long-lasting damage to our students and our economy.

Now I know we've heard a lot about what a tough budget this was, how we didn't have enough money and we had to make cuts.

But it's simply not true.

Set aside the fact that Republicans created this budget mess by slashing revenue in the past based on rosy projections that didn't pan out.

Even now, an easy solution is within our grasp.

Unfortunately, every Republican in this body has already voted to reject this solution.

Simply by accepting federal Medicaid dollars, money Wisconsin residents have already paid, we can gain \$360 million over the next two years.

This will increase access to healthcare for 85,000 Wisconsinites.

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But more importantly, it would easily restore the entire \$250 million cut to UW, while allowing us to invest an additional \$100 million in our public schools.

For reasons I don't understand, but that must have something to do with Governor Walker's presidential politics, Republicans just rejected this common-sense solution to save education in Wisconsin.

So let's give them another chance.

Let's refer this budget to the Education Committee and bring it back to the floor after it has been amended to protect the bright future that our students deserve.

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