

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rodriguez Votes to Send Bipartisan Budget, District Wins to Governor

MADISON – State Representative Jessie Rodriguez (R-Oak Creek) voted early Thursday morning to send a new biennial budget for Wisconsin to Governor Tony Evers’ desk. She issued the following statement:

“In February, Governor Evers proposed a budget that would have increased all-funds spending by 20%, and raised taxes by over \$3 billion. In my district, the overwhelming response to this was to *cut* taxes – *not* to raise them. Everyday Wisconsinites want us to live within our means.

“When I went door-to-door in my district last fall, many of my neighbors were shocked to hear that last session, the governor vetoed tax relief for Wisconsin’s retirees...*multiple* times. This budget, the senior tax cut will allow each senior 67 or older to exempt the first \$24,000 of their retirement income from state income tax (\$48,000 for married couples filing jointly). This tax cut effects the most low-income retirees and exempts almost double the current standard deduction. I’m also excited to exempt our energy bills from general sales and use tax. Wisconsin currently exempts sales taxes from November through April on our energy bills. This budget will add the rest of the year to this exemption, eliminating a five-percent tax tacked onto our gas and electric bills during the summer months. That is a big win in keeping our energy bills lower!

“Keeping our communities safe is another top priority for me and my Republican colleagues. We have made incredible investments in public safety this budget. We are retaining our experienced Assistant District Attorneys and Public Defenders by investing in their pay progression. In addition to investing in these experienced staff, this budget adds Assistant District Attorneys across the state to make sure every county can handle around 80% of their caseloads. This is a vital investment to make sure everyone in Wisconsin is safe, as some counties right now can only handle 50% of their caseloads. This is a massive step in improving our justice system.

“I fought hard in this budget to ensure our state will reimburse Milwaukee County for highway patrol in the county. In every other Wisconsin County, State Patrol is used to patrol the highways. However, State Patrol does not service Milwaukee County. By supporting this bill, the Department of Transportation will provide \$38 million over the course of the biennium to compensate Milwaukee County for this service. \$20 million of that will be ongoing annually after this biennium. The County intends to reinvest those savings in public safety for our communities, which will benefit both the City of Milwaukee and suburban communities like Oak Creek and Greenfield.

“We are also once again making a record investment in public education, as we did last budget. We will be increasing funding for Special Education with the goal of reimbursing costs at 42% in the first year of the biennium and 45% in the second year – ultimately reaching the amount my superintendent in the Oak Creek-Franklin Joint School District asked for. We are also increasing High-Cost Special Education funding with the goal of achieving a 50% reimbursement rate in 2025-26 and 90% in 2026-27 – this is huge. We are providing \$30 million in one-time funding for school mental health programs. Numerous organizations throughout our state go into our schools throughout the day to meet kids where they’re at and talk to them about their life at school and at home with this funding. These investments are critical in enhancing our public schools.

“Our budget retains \$10 million provided in the last budget to the Harbor Assistance Program for a fuel line extension from the Port of Milwaukee to the General Mitchell International Airport, which is new to my district. I’m even more excited for the investment of \$2.2 million to help the City of Oak Creek stabilize the bluff at Lake Vista Park. The City has done an incredible job of securing other funding sources for the project, investing \$140 million since the year 2000 from public and private sources to remediate the pollution and environmental issues at Lake Vista Park. The most recent project helped to prevent further erosion on the unstable bluff. The projected future costs are estimated at \$62 million, and this last \$2.2 million will be the final push they need to stabilize the remaining part of the bluff and move this project forward.

“My constituents voted for divided government, but they did not vote for us to be divided. Neighbors in my community want bipartisan action, with both parties at the table. Ultimately, that’s how this budget was crafted, with much of it having been agreed upon with the Governor. I look forward to this bipartisan budget bill being promptly signed into law.”

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