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INFORMATIONAL COLUMN

BUDGET COMPROMISE SHOWS BIPARTISANSHIP, HELPS WORKING FAMILIES

MADISON - The people of Wisconsin finally saw the light at the end of the long budget tunnel this past weekend. For the past couple of months, leadership in the state Assembly and Senate have been locked in a budget stalemate, but in a conference call on Friday night, I was informed a good-faith agreement between Governor Doyle and leadership in the state Assembly and Senate had finally been reached.

The compromise budget funds our priorities of education, the economy, health care and the environment, while holding the line on growth of taxes and spending. I am very pleased that the leadership of both parties was able to put aside their partisan differences and moves the state forward with a common set of priorities. Reaching this compromise was important for the people of the 46th Assembly District and the state of Wisconsin.

Failing to pass a budget has clear implications. Without a budget, Wisconsinites would be saddled with everything from property tax increases to higher college tuition bills to numerous public safety risks. Fortunately, the budget deal calls for an increased state property tax credit on homeowners' bills, which is expected to completely offset the \$200 in taxes the average homeowner would have faced without a compromise.

As of the printing of this column, we are scheduled to go on the floor tomorrow to vote on this budget, which is expected to have passed by the time you read this article.

These are some of the important details in the compromise budget:

Education: Funds the state's statutory commitment of 2/3 funding of K-12 education and significant gains for the University System. The compromise calls for an investment of \$159 million in the university - including full funding for the UW Growth Agenda. This budget helps make higher education more affordable for working

families by protecting tuition assistance programs, such as the Wisconsin Higher Education Board Grants and fully funding Veteran's Tuition Remission.

Health Care: The proposal includes Governor Doyle's proposal of BadgerCare Plus, which expands health coverage to all children, ensures that 98 percent of Wisconsin's citizens have access to health care and offers expanded health education and prevention programs which promote healthy lifestyles.

Environment: The budget compromise protects the state's Stewardship fund which purchases environmentally sensitive lands to protect our state's most precious natural resources for the future. The compromise also calls for \$30 million in funding for Renewable Energy Grants.

Fiscal Responsibility: The budget will end with a reserve of \$65 million. And with a rainy day fund of \$55 million, the state will have a total of \$120 million in reserve.

During negotiations it is essential to have both sides make an honest effort toward give-and-take compromise. While this budget may not have everything everybody wanted, it is an honest effort toward finding common ground for the people of the State of Wisconsin.

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