



TODD NOVAK

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Guest Column from Rep. Todd Novak (Dodgeville)

Rep. Novak Votes Yes on State Budget July 26, 2019

This week, the State Assembly passed the legislature's version of the budget. Before I cast my vote, I mailed out my legislative survey asking for your input. Your response didn't surprise me. Residents of the 51st Assembly District are stewards of their environment, believe in the need to invest in public education and access to health care, and understand that our rural transportation projects just as important as projects in urban areas in our state. I believe this budget addresses these issues and more while being stewards of the taxpayer and the limited resources we have available.

The budget adds \$156 million for local road projects made up of \$90 million increase for the Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP) and a \$66 million increase for county and municipal general transportation aids. Funding for the LRIP provides reimbursement to local governments or up to 50% of the project cost and is funded at three times what is currently allocated. In addition, \$320 million more is included for State Highway Rehabilitation.

Our public schools will see an additional \$500 million in funding that includes a \$604 per pupil increase over the biennium. Funding for mental health will double with an additional \$12.5 million investment along with an additional \$96 million for special education funding. These additional resources for special education will achieve a 30% reimbursement rate by the second year. A majority of the superintendents in my district who contacted me agree that this is a pro-kid budget and are supportive of our plan.

A \$1.6 billion investment in healthcare includes a \$30 million increase for nursing homes, \$37 million increase for personal care workers, and \$27 million for direct caregivers in family care. The budget also includes continued funding for Wisconsin's Healthcare Stability Plan which I was proud to author last session. Passed in 2018, this program has lowered premiums by 10% across our state.

As Chair of the Water Quality Task Force, I was pleased to see some progress made with an additional \$1 million investment in Producer-Led Watershed Grants, \$475,000 for County Conservation Staff, and \$400,000 for our Well Compensation Grant Program. There is room for additional investment in these areas which will be included in our policy recommendations at the conclusion of the task force. This budget also reauthorizes the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund.

Finally, the capital budget invests \$1 million in infrastructure upgrades for Yellowstone State Park as well as \$44 million to expand broadband in our rural communities.

This budget not only funds these essential priorities, but provides a tax cut aimed at middle-class families. As your independent voice, I believe this budget strikes a compromise with the executive branch, and I am proud to support this legislation.