**Legislative Update:** Joint Finance Committee Begins Work on Budget, Election Bills Move, May Floor Session, Federal COVID Money, and unemployment numbers/Job available

1. Budget Season is beginning
	1. We are in an incredibly strong financial position and will continue on the positive trend.
		1. BUDGET SURPLUS: projected >$2 Billion surplus to end this fiscal year.
		2. DHS submitted a report on the [condition of the Medicaid budget](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/jfc/200_reports/2021_01_04_health_services_overall_condition_of_medicaid_benefits.pdf). DHS now predicts the fund will end 2019-21 budget with a $614.8M GPR surplus. In September, DHS predicted a surplus of $289M GPR.
		3. Rainy Day Fund:
			1. Projected to transfer $231 Million in 2020-21 FY
			2. TOTAL in Rainy Day Fund: $993.9 Million
				1. **Almost $1 Billion** in the Rainy Day Fund, the largest in state history.
		4. Reasons for surplus/strong numbers
			1. Prudent budgeting. Republicans passed a responsible budget (that Evers signed) and that set us on strong footing. Now we’ve realized the benefits of responsible budgeting
			2. Being quick to challenge the Shutdown Orders in May
				1. If our economy had been locked down for an extended period of time like other states, we’d see much less favorable numbers.
			3. Thanks to nearly a decade of Republican reforms and a responsible budget passed by Legislative Republicans, we’re in a much better spot than anticipated a few months ago
2. Joint Finance Committee – Crafting a responsible budget – investing core priorities like schools, roads, and health care while respecting taxpayers.
	1. May 6th – Removed items
		1. 384 items – 191 identified as non-fiscal policy by the LFB.  193 identified by legislature.
		2. Medicaid Expansion
		3. Legalization of Marijuana
		4. County Conservation Staff for Climate Change
		5. Equity programs and positions
		6. Ending reforms like Act 10, Right to Work, Prevailing Wage
		7. Massive tax increases
		8. Drivers Licenses for illegal immigrants
		9. Redistricting reforms
	2. May 6th – returned to the base budget that Governor Evers Signed and supported.
		1. Closed 16 agencies – standard budget adjustments
		2. Lapses reduced the Base by $430 million
		3. Cut all of Evers spending (~10% increase) and Tax increase (>$1billion)
		4. LFB says JFC actions would results in $2.5 Billion surplus in this budget (up from original estimates of $2 billion)
	3. May 13th
		1. Veterans Affairs $1,000 more for each county for County Veteran Service Officer grants.  Total increase in funding = $76,200/year.
			1. $16,540 in seed money for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum to promote the USS Wisconsin, a Columbia Class submarine that is located in Norfolk, VA – named for our state.
			2. Increased funding cap for the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars to receive up to $175,000 to help veterans with seeking disability benefits and other assistance.
			3. [$10 million for DVA to respond to future disasters](1.%09%2410%20million%20for%20DVA%20to%20respond%20to%20future%20disasters.) or pandemic or other emergency at our veterans homes.  During COVID, it became apparent that the Governor was not prepared to lead and take care of our Veterans homes.  The agency will be able to spend these funds only if needed in the future.
			4. $100,000 to support activities to reduce veteran suicide.
		2. Cut 10 positions
		3. 23 or 62 agencies are now complete
3. Federal money
	1. New federal guidance came out this week
		1. 10 of the 11 bills under our Responsible Stimulus Plan are allowed under the new guidance – the Governor vetoed them all cited concerns over federal guidance for many
		2. Only Aid to households is explicitly disallowed.
	2. [There was a reduction in the amount of money coming to Wisconsin](https://spectrumnews1.com/wi/milwaukee/news/2021/05/12/evers-promises-to-preserve-grants-in-face-of-less-stimulus) from the Federal Government – reduced by $700M (Now only $2.5 Billion)
		1. We can’t depend on the federal government to keep their promises, also why we shouldn’t expand meidcaid
	3. The Governor has not been willing to meet with Legislative Leaders to discuss the federal money
	4. Without a plan from the Governor, how could we ask State taxpayers to fund things that could be funded through federal money?
4. Election Bills – PASSED Senate in May Floor Period
	1. [The Senate Passed four (6) election integrity bills this session](http://www.thewheelerreport.com/wheeler_docs/files/051221stroebel.pdf)
		1. “Zuckerbucks” bill which prevents outside money from flowing to municipalities.
		2. Online publication of WEC minutes – transparency, accountability
		3. Expands Venues for bringing election law violations – allows neighboring DA to file charges if they feel state elections law were violated.
		4. Established stronger protections for election and recount observers to guarantee access and clear sight.
		5. Ban ballot harvesting – Democracy in the Park
		6. Clarify how ballots can be “cured” – only the voter can clarify their ballot, not municipal clerks alone.
		7. **TRACK all the bills with our Election Integrity Dashboard**
			1. [Elections.WisSenGOP.com](https://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/republicans/election-bills)
	2. The Legislative Audit Bureau audit of the state election processes is on-going. We’re excepting results of some of their finding in May
		1. We have done audits of our election systems in the past
		2. We conduct routine audits of state programs all the time to ensure both process and fiscal soundness. An audit of our election system would help to identify problems and possible reform opportunities.
		3. We can use this audit to restore the electorate’s faith in the process.
	3. We continue to want to make is easy to vote and hard to cheat
	4. Public confidence and fair elections
5. National Police Week
	1. May 9th-15th is National Police Week. Please take this opportunity to thank a police officer for everything they do to keep our communities safe and remember to keep these brave men and women in your prayers, not only this week but every week.

Unemployment Rates hold steady: We have more to do.

1. February unemployment rates (BLS) were recently announced. Wisconsin’s rate holding steady and is currently at 3.8% (March 2021) **(same as last month)**
	1. While other states saw a measurable dip, Wisconsin held steady over the end of the year.
	2. We’re still ahead of the Federal rate – 6.7%
	3. Neighboring states: Iowa – 3.1%; Minnesota – 4.4%; Michigan – 7.5%; Illinois – 7.6%
2. [Local rates](https://jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/wits_info/downloads/Publications/PressRelease/local.pdf) rose slightly as well: (most recent numbers as of 3/2021)
	1. Manitowoc County: 4.6% 🡪 4.7%
	2. Sheboygan County: 3.8% 🡪 3.7%
	3. Calumet County: 3.6% 🡪 3.6%
3. **Jobs available:** Almost 100,000 jobs available in Wisconsin – [Job Center Website](https://jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/wits_info/downloads/Publications/PressRelease/local.pdf)
	1. Employers are desperate for workers.
	2. Many Employers are offering signing bonuses
	3. General federal benefits seem to be preventing workers form getting off the sidelines.
		1. We are working with employers to make sure that people will have incentives to return into the workforce.
4. UI Backlog
	1. Many people are still stuck in the adjudication process.
	2. We’re working to prod the Evers Administration to focus more resources on addressing this important issue facing so many of our friends and neighbors.
	3. If you’re dealing with delays with your DWD claim, please email my office at Sen.LeMahieu@legis.wi.gov. My office will assist you with expediting your contact with the agency.

Reminder: Support Local Businesses

* Please remember to support your local businesses during this challenging time. Observe CDC guidelines, be respectful of others, and make the extra effort to safely shop local whenever possible.

Reminder: If you’d like to receive a vaccine, please check the DHS website and search “COVID-19 vaccine” to get information or call your primary health care provider. If you’re still having trouble, please feel free to contact my office for assistance.

Thank you for having me!

# Contact Me

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