

WISCONSIN SENATE DEMOCRATS

FALL 2015

# BADGER BLUEPRINT

GROWTH • INNOVATION • OPPORTUNITY

[#WIBadgerBlueprint](#)



# GROWTH

## Investing in Wisconsin's Public Schools

Our public schools continue to achieve and overcome despite the historic cuts that have been made. In order to restore the funding cuts to Wisconsin's public schools, Senate Democrats would accept the federal Medicaid funding and reinvest the savings into our education system.



## Improving Quality Public Education

Investing in public education is a top priority for Senate Democrats. Focusing on proven initiatives is the best way to improve the quality of our children's education. Expanding successful early childhood programs, improving access to four year-old kindergarten, and establishing in-school wrap-around services will help to get Wisconsin back on track.



## Boosting Morale at Our Public Schools

Wisconsin's dedicated teachers and school staff are one of our state's greatest assets. Yet, Republican leaders in Madison have stripped them of important resources, created uncertainty with new state mandates, reduced staffing levels, and severely harmed morale in schools across the state. To address these challenges, Senate Democrats would restore the funding cuts to public schools giving teachers the support they need to help our children succeed. We will also address compensation for long-term substitute teachers to address problems created by Wisconsin's growing teacher shortage.





## Making College Affordable

Over the years, increases in tuition and fees coupled with deep cuts in state funding for higher education have made it nearly impossible for students to work their way through school. According to recent figures, total student loan debt for Wisconsin residents is \$19,304,275,000. It is time for innovative, commonsense solutions that will provide real relief for Wisconsin's 800,000+ student loan borrowers. That is why Senate Democrats continue to promote innovative and cost-effective solutions like the Higher Ed, Lower Debt Bill which will allow student loan borrowers to deduct loan payments from their income taxes, enable borrowers to refinance student loans at lower interest rates, and increase financial literacy by providing students and parents with additional information about student loans.

Senate Democrats will also establish a Wisconsin College Application Week where application fees are waived for in-state students applying to Wisconsin's public colleges and universities.

# GROWTH

## Supporting University of Wisconsin Campuses

The University of Wisconsin System is a key economic engine for our state. By helping to educate and prepare workers for successful careers, our UW schools help to boost family incomes and encourage the growth of Wisconsin's high-tech, knowledge-based economy. Senate Democrats will restore the \$250 million cut to the UW System, retain top-notch faculty and researchers, and make college more affordable for Wisconsin families.



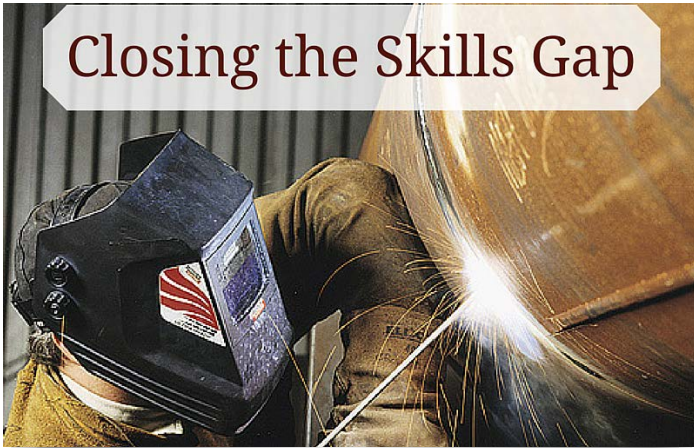
# GROWTH

## Addressing Worker Shortages and Closing the Skills Gap

Our unemployed neighbors and friends want to work. Wisconsin is facing a skills gap with thousands of available private-sector jobs and a workforce that isn't equipped to fill these positions. To address this problem, Senate Democrats will invest in our technical colleges to end waitlists for high-demand programs and expand access to apprenticeship and worker-training programs. We would also improve workplace safety protections to make high-demand jobs more desirable and rewarding.



## Closing the Skills Gap



## Growing our Rural Communities

In addition to expanding broadband capacity across the state, Senate Democrats would also work to leverage state incentives for workers to boost our rural communities. The Grow Wisconsin Bill would provide student loan reimbursement for individuals who move into rural counties after graduation. By encouraging talented young families to work in underserved areas of the state, we can boost rural economic development while growing the local tax base in rural communities.

## Expanding Transitional Jobs Initiatives

The transitional jobs program has been a successful bridge to employment in Milwaukee. We propose to expand the program and meet existing demand in both Milwaukee and other high needs areas of Wisconsin. This is a proven way to create jobs and get the long-term unemployed into predominantly private sector jobs with very little red tape.

It meets a real need and demand right now, while providing meaningful job skills and experience to people who have faced significant barriers to employment. This program is a win-win for both employers and job seekers.



# GROWTH



## Preserving Wisconsin's Public Lands

Wisconsin has a proud tradition of protecting our lakes, rivers, forests, hills, prairies, and shorelines. Maintaining healthy pristine lands is crucial to our state's tourism industry and the revitalization of our rural communities. Senate Democrats want to improve infrastructure in our rural areas while maintaining clean air and water necessary for communities to thrive. Instead of the state selling off state land, we would preserve the land we own now and expand protection areas. Additionally, we would restore the funding to our world-renowned state parks for current and future generations to enjoy.

## Making Our Communities A Safe Place to Live

Communities in Wisconsin are facing an increase in violence and this year's death toll in Milwaukee is already twice what it was at this point in the year during the last four years. Building safe communities starts at the neighborhood level by ensuring that neighborhoods can grow high-performing schools, stable businesses, and good jobs. Senate Democrats would start by funding our public schools, increasing access and affordability to continuing or higher education, and looking at changes that are needed in our criminal justice system. We cannot be complacent. Every community has unique struggles and it is up to all of us to confront them. We must listen to community members and find solutions to improve firearm and public safety.



## Keeping Wisconsin Land, Air, and Water Clean

Nearly 2.1 million Wisconsinites live in areas with air quality that is considered unhealthy and more than 100,000 Wisconsin kids are suffering from pediatric asthma. That's why Senate Democrats would improve the state's air quality monitoring and work with businesses on cost-saving fixes to air quality concerns.



# INNOVATION

---

---

## Creating Economic Opportunities for All Communities

As Wisconsin continues to lag behind the rest of the nation in economic growth and job creation, Senate Democrats recognize the need to help communities in our state attract investments and spur economic development. To address these challenges, we need to modernize the state's tax incentives to leverage investments and infrastructure improvements in economically distressed communities that continue to struggle with high unemployment and limited growth opportunities. The ripple effect of infrastructure development and capital improvement projects will be a catalyst for jump-starting investments in economically challenged communities across Wisconsin.

## Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Wisconsin currently ranks dead last in the nation for start-up businesses. The question is, how can our state encourage more of these entrepreneurial ventures? Senate Democrats are committed to removing unnecessary barriers to creating start-up companies. We also support the expansion of educational opportunities and mentorship training to teach Wisconsinites how to turn their dreams of starting their own business into reality. By leveraging available federal funding, partnering with private investors and increasing collaboration between schools, colleges and the business community we can encourage innovation and collaboration to spur start-up growth.

## Leveraging Innovative Collaboration to Enhance Community Development Funding



We believe that good ideas come from many different sources. We want to encourage the sharing of creative proposals for redeveloping and growing Wisconsin's communities by creating a Public Investment Partnership Plan. This idea, inspired by a similar proposal in Burlington, Vermont, will create a transparent and interactive grant funding competition designed to generate new ideas, encourage cooperation, and engage the public as we work to re-invest in our communities.



# INNOVATION

## Measuring the Return on Investment for State Tax Incentives

Senate Democrats are committed to improving state government operations. Just like any business, we need to make sure that Wisconsin's financial resources are being utilized in an efficient and effective manner. To maximize the impact of Wisconsin's limited public resources, Senate Democrats would require Return on Investment (ROI) reports for all state tax incentives. By providing a clear understanding of the ROI from tax incentive programs, elected officials and the public can make informed decisions about how best to target job creation and economic development investments.



## Exploring Innovative Solutions to Transportation Funding

Senate Democrats are ready to support a sustainable, long-term transportation funding solution that ensures investments in infrastructure improvement projects across Wisconsin. States across the country have created innovative and effective transportation financing mechanisms to meet the needs of their modern economies and we should learn from these success stories.

Senate Democrats would work with transportation stakeholders to build support for traditional user-based funding options and enact innovative funding solutions to invest in local road improvements projects, modernize our ports and airports, enhance Wisconsin's passenger and commercial rail network, and improve access to affordable transit options. We would also re-invest in the state's bike and pedestrian paths and facilities and reestablish the Complete Streets law which allowed bike and pedestrian facilities to be expanded with other road projects.



# INNOVATION

---

---

## Modernizing Voter Rights and Registration for the 21st Century

Wisconsin must modernize our voter registration system. By implementing automatic registration, updating records when voters move, improving online access to view and update registration records, and creating a safety net to correct errors on or before Election Day, we will make voting convenient and more efficient for state taxpayers while improving accuracy and election integrity. Senate Democrats would also restore the option for municipalities to hold in-person absentee voting on weekends and allow 16 and 17 year olds to pre-register.



## Reforming the Corrections System and Reducing Recidivism

The prison population in Wisconsin has more than tripled since 1990 and Wisconsin leads the nation in black male incarceration rates. This is a massive cost to the state and prison spending in Wisconsin now exceeds spending for the UW-system and K-12 education. Providing resources for reducing recidivism will save the state in the long-run. Additionally, we would examine alternatives to incarceration such as drug treatment and mental health courts, day report centers, and universal screening.

Job and housing discrimination are the largest barriers that people face when returning home after jail or prison. Senate Democrats would prohibit employers and landlords from discriminatory hiring or housing practices and would expand economic opportunities for at-risk youth and communities with high-unemployment.



# INNOVATION



## Crowdsourcing to Improve Emergency Responses

Traditional 911 procedures no longer empower citizens to immediately report emergencies. Crowdsourcing 911 allows citizens to utilize text messaging and social media to connect to emergency dispatch. This plan will cut costs and shorten the time that it takes for public safety agencies to respond to emergencies.



## Promoting Broadband Expansion

Broadband accessibility is an important factor for economic growth and expansion in today's economy. Improving broadband access in rural communities and increasing bandwidth in urban areas will encourage business growth, foster entrepreneurial activity, and attract new investment in areas that need it the most. Broadband accessibility is also a critical component for tele-medicine, which is becoming increasingly utilized by Wisconsin's health care providers.

Senate Democrats want to build on the work of the LinkWisconsin Broadband Initiative to spur broadband expansion and improve access for all Wisconsin communities.



# OPPORTUNITY



## Investing in Wisconsin

After years of Republican policies that have subsidized corporate outsourcing, Senate Democrats want to return those jobs to our state. With proposals to end state subsidies to businesses that outsource jobs, prioritize Wisconsin-made products for state purchases and construction, and accept federal funding for job-creation initiatives, we would get Wisconsin back on track.

## Making Childcare More Affordable

Rising childcare costs are a major concern for families across the state. Wisconsin has been ranked as one of the 10 least affordable states for childcare and it is time that we address this burden on working families. Senate Democrats would implement an income tax credit to alleviate the cost of childcare and allow parents to pursue their careers.

## Rewarding Hard Work

To grow local businesses and create new jobs in Wisconsin, we would prioritize Wisconsin workers. From policies to ensure that workers earn a family-supporting wage to paid leave when a family member falls ill, Wisconsin families are Senate Democrat's first priority. We know that by growing the middle class and expanding economic opportunities, families will drive local business growth through increased consumer demand and workplace productivity.

No one should face the impossible choice between caring for their health, earning a steady paycheck, or keeping their job. However, more than one million private sector workers in Wisconsin – 46% of our workforce – must make this decision every time illness strikes. Healthy families make for strong healthy communities. At a time when many in our state are struggling to make ends meet, the Earned Sick Days Act will provide greater economic and financial security for Wisconsin's working families. In addition, Senate Democrats plan to make sure that women have the supports they need in the workplace that will allow them to remain productive employees through temporary pregnancy accommodations.





## Securing Our Future

Wisconsin is in the midst of a retirement crisis. According to a recent study, over 42% of working Wisconsinites over the age of 45 reported that their employer does not offer a retirement plan and 65% of those surveyed reported that they are likely to put off retirement as long as possible yet they wish they had planned for retirement earlier in their lives. Senate Democrats would create the Wisconsin Private Retirement Security Board – a separate, independent entity charged with offering low cost plans with strong investment returns to provide every participant with a guaranteed monthly retirement benefit.

## Protecting Safe Drinking Water

Seventy percent of Wisconsin citizens depend on groundwater for their drinking water. Unfortunately, Wisconsin has seen an increase in water contamination and the growing risks could end in a public health crisis in communities across the state. In order to protect our drinking water, Senate Democrats would create a quality groundwater management plan that anticipates future problems and puts in place policies to prevent them.



## Expanding Paid Family Medical Leave Options

Senate Democrats would implement a voluntary Family Medical Leave Insurance initiative to better help families care for a sick loved-one. The initiative would allow employees to take family leave to care for anyone covered under current law plus grandparents, grandchildren, siblings, and any eligible employee who has a family member deployed overseas by the military. Under the program, employees pay for the benefit by contributing a certain percentage of their check into a trust fund which would be determined by the Department of Workforce Development in consultation with the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance.





# OPPORTUNITY



## Expanding Access to Affordable Health Care

Access to quality, affordable health care is essential for Wisconsin families who are working hard to make ends meet. That's why Senate Democrats support the expansion of BadgerCare in order to provide access to affordable care for an estimated 81,000 additional state residents. This common sense plan would also save state taxpayers an estimated \$345 million which could be used to support public schools, prescription drug assistance for seniors, or long-term care for people with disabilities. Thirty states, including all our Midwest neighbors, have already enacted similar health care expansion plans and it's time for Wisconsin to share in the benefits of greater health care access and security.

## Lowering Health Care Costs

Wisconsin has the fourth highest health care premium cost in the nation. To combat these high costs, Senate Democrats would strengthen our state's rate review process to reduce the price of health insurance plans and side with consumers instead of the health insurance industry. The rate review process would increase public involvement and transparency by requiring insurers to give consumers at least 60 days notice of rate increases, requiring rate increases be published publically, and requiring prior authorization from the WI Office of the Commissioner of Insurance before an insurer can implement rate increases.



## Improving Reproductive Health Care Access and Affordability

Senate Democrats would protect the rights of patients and their physicians to access and provide comprehensive health care services based on medically accurate information. Wisconsin women, men and families deserve affordable access to reproductive health services and the freedom to make their own medical decisions in consultation with their physicians or other health care providers.



OPPORTUNITY



## Combating Elder Abuse

Elder abuse is a growing problem in our state and across the nation. To address this issue, we would implement a standardized protocol and software for reporting and investigating allegations of abuse statewide. This would ensure that the Dept. of Health Services' resources are being used in the most efficient and effective way possible while still allowing local flexibilities.



**Senate Democrats are committed to listening to people throughout Wisconsin and advancing solutions to improve the lives of hardworking families in every community across our state.**

**Share your story, ideas and feedback at:**

**[Wlbadgerblueprint.com](http://Wlbadgerblueprint.com)**

