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Joint Finance Passes the Right Budget for Wisconsin

Last week, I was proud to join my Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) colleagues in passing a budget that is good for all of Wisconsin. It responsibly invests in our economic recovery while not overspending our means or frivolously including a wish list of policy items.

As we listened to feedback from constituents around the state, we invested in the right priorities for Wisconsin that will support our small businesses, middle-class taxpayers, parents and important industries such as health care, agriculture and tourism.

Some highlights of those investments include:

Health Care: This industry was on the frontlines during the pandemic. Our budget provides investments for those who care for our most vulnerable, including direct and personal care workers, a 12% increase in reimbursement rates for our nursing homes and authorizing enough positions so dementia care specialists can have a presence in each county of the state.

Taxes: This budget cycle, the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau re-estimated revenues \$4.4 billion dollars above what was previously announced. Instead of pumping this money into more government programs, we decided to give it back to the taxpayers through a \$3.4 billion tax cut. This will result in an average of \$1,200 in savings for the median family and millions of dollars in tax relief for our main street employers.

Education: JFC made the necessary investments to meet the requirements to secure \$1.5 billion in federal funding for K-12. On top of that, we reached two-thirds funding for our schools and provided significant investments in special education, youth mental health programs and high cost transportation aids.

Agriculture & Natural Resources: I was proud to lead my colleagues in adopting robust investments that will help these important industries now and into the future. This includes adopting my version of the comprehensive agriculture export program, which directs the Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection in coordination with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to create a plan and achieve a 25% increase in dairy, meat, fish, crop and other agricultural product exports by 2026. Additionally, we included funding for the meat processor program, dairy processor program and for farmer mental health.

On the natural resources side, we reauthorized the Warren Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, which has supported important projects such as the Camp Grow project in Green Lake. JFC also provided resources for the producer-led watershed program and county conservation staffing grants so farmers can share and implement best practices to avoid soil erosion and nutrient runoff.

Tourism: Although the Department of Tourism is a relatively small department, it has a huge impact supporting over 200,000 jobs throughout the state. I was proud to vote to approve

additional marketing dollars for the department and to provide them funding to continue the Office of Outdoor Recreation which promotes our beautiful natural resources.

Transportation: Infrastructure programs are critical in helping our local municipalities complete projects across the state. JFC voted to include additional funding for the Local Road Improvement Program, which helps improve seriously deteriorating county highways, town roads and city and village streets. We also included an increase for General Transportation Aids and the State Highway Rehabilitation Program, all while including the lowest bonding level in decades.

For a full overview of what was included in the budget, my office published a Ballweg Budget Bulletin following each executive session, which can be found on my website.

In completing this budget, we built our rainy day fund to \$2 billion and continue maintain a healthy balance in the state's general fund. I look forward to once again voting to approve this budget on the Senate floor and having Governor Evers sign it into law.

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