

‘Majority’ Party Again Ignores Will of the Majority

By Senator Melissa Agard (D-Madison), Senate Democratic Leader

Show me any budget, and I can tell you the priorities of its creator. Governor Evers proposed a budget that was crafted with input from ordinary people who make our state great and included provisions that the majority of individuals support – expanded health care access, legal cannabis, common-sense gun safety reform, paid family leave, student mental health assistance, PFAS standard development, and so much more.

Unfortunately, just last week, Wisconsin Republicans removed more than 500 items from the Governor’s budget proposal. And even worse, Democrats on the Joint Finance Committee won’t even be able to mention these items during budget deliberations.

Stifling debate and ignoring the will of the majority is an insult to the democratic process and a dereliction of lawmakers’ duty to the State of Wisconsin. I ask you, can Wisconsin Republicans, insulated by their gerrymandered districts, continue to call themselves the ‘majority’ party when they block the will of the majority time after time?

Governor Evers’ budget expanded health care access by accepting federal dollars to cover more individuals on our state’s Medicaid program, BadgerCare. The provision, supported by 70% of Wisconsinites, would expand health care coverage to 90,000 individuals and save our state \$1.6 billion over the next two years. The Republican-controlled Joint Finance Committee removed this from the budget.

The Governor’s budget fully legalized cannabis for responsible adult use, a change that would generate \$154 million in tax revenue alone each year and has the support of 69% of Wisconsinites. Republicans removed this proposal from the state budget.

Governor Evers created an automatic voter registration system in his budget – an initiative that would encourage participation in our electoral process and is supported by more than 60% of Wisconsinites. The Joint Finance Committee removed this provision from the budget.

The Governor’s budget would have allowed Wisconsin to join the growing list of states that have enacted a paid family and medical leave (FMLA) program – a proposal supported by 73% of individuals. Ignoring the will of the majority again, Republicans removed this popular provision from the 2023-25 state budget.

Governor Evers’ budget included common-sense gun safety policies like universal background checks, the creation of an extreme risk protection order process (Red Flag Laws), grants for suicide and violence prevention, and tax exemptions for gun locks and safes. Again, policies that have garnered a significant amount of support by Wisconsinites, including universal background checks favorability nearing 90% in Wisconsin, were removed from the state budget by legislative Republicans.

The Governor’s budget was packed with initiatives that are incredibly popular in Wisconsin, and it’s his prioritization of these issues that contributed to his successful reelection campaign. From

cutting taxes for individuals making less than \$100,000, capping insulin copays, and investing \$235 million to promote mental health in schools to setting statewide PFAS standards and repealing Wisconsin's private sector "right-to-work" law, the Governor's budget was created prioritizing the needs of all Wisconsinites. Unfortunately, Republicans again removed each of these provisions from consideration in the state budget moving forward.

We cannot afford to continue ignoring the needs of our state. With a \$7 billion surplus, our state can and should do more to support the people that live here. The Governor's budget made sustainable and meaningful investments to improve the lives of the folks living here and to make Wisconsin a place that people want to live, work, and play.

The 'majority' party may continue to ignore the will of the majority, but my Democratic colleagues and I certainly will not. We will listen to the voters and unapologetically advocate for the needs of all Wisconsinites. We are prepared to introduce these popular proposals as standalone legislation and fight like hell to move them through the legislative process.