



ROBERT W. WIRCH

STATE SENATOR TWENTY-SECOND DISTRICT

February 19, 2021

NATIONAL CAREGIVERS DAY



Dear friend,

People who provide care for our seniors and other vulnerable individuals are truly unsung heroes. The work is hard, the hours are long, and the pay is often low, for those who are paid at all. They may be family members caring for a loved one and not receiving a paycheck at all. In 2015, the Providers Association for Home Health and Hospice Agencies founded National Caregivers Day, recognized on the third Friday in February, to give recognition and appreciation to those who carry this burden. If you know a caregiver, thank them for their selflessness. It does make a difference to know their hard work is noticed and appreciated. In other news, Governor Evers delivered his Budget Address earlier this week and released his full 2021-2023 budget proposal. There is a lot to unpack there, and I will get into the details more below. Stay safe, and stay healthy.

Sincerely,

Bob

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In Case You Missed It

small business **SPOTLIGHT**



At Kenosha's Duck Duck Goose, Everything Old is New Again



For nine years, Jennifer Wagner and her family have owned and operated this children's shop in downtown Kenosha. They started out as a consignment shop that focused on children's clothing and slowly moved into new items, as well. When Covid-19 hit and changed business practices for many entrepreneurs, the Wagners shifted to solely new products, with a focus on unique and educational toys, offering free local delivery, curbside pick-up and gift wrapping.

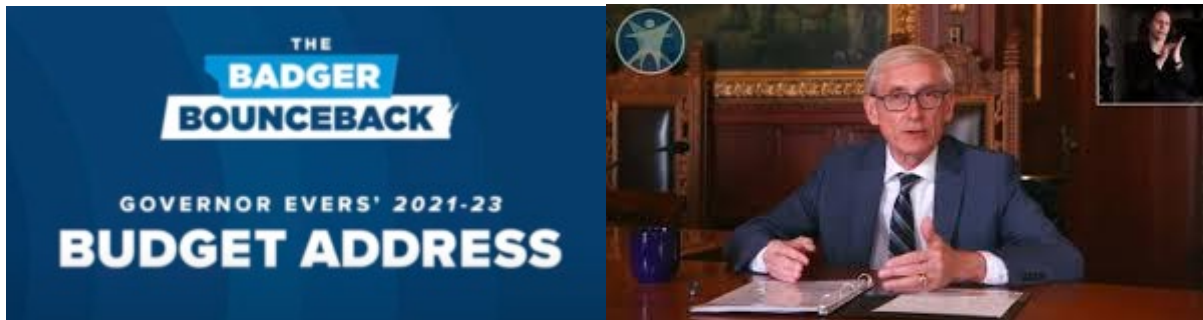
The story of how the store got its name really demonstrates the close-knit, family-oriented nature of the store and its place in the community. Jennifer says that as a young child, her son wanted to beat the world record for longest game of "duck, duck, goose". Jennifer worked with Downtown Kenosha businesses in an attempt to make this dream a reality. While it ultimately fell short, the warm reception Jennifer received from the downtown business community convinced her to open her shop here, and the choice of a name seemed quite obvious. Stop in to Duck Duck Goose or check out their Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/ddgkenosha/>, for more on their various unique products.

Duck Duck Goose
Open 7 Days a Week
(262)653-3905
5811 6th Ave. in Downtown Kenosha



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Governor Evers Makes Big, Bold Proposals for 2021-2023 State Budget

On Tuesday, February 16, Governor Tony Evers delivered his biennial Budget Address, doing so virtually for the first time. The budget put forth by the Governor contains a number of positive, forward-looking proposals. I'll talk a little more in-depth on some of these below, but first let's look at some of the top line issues. The Governor's budget increases K-12 funding by \$600 million over the next two years and puts \$709 million towards special education. A new \$200 million fund would be created to help small businesses impacted by Covid-19. Expansion of BadgerCare would provide healthcare coverage to about 90,000 more Wisconsinites and save taxpayers \$630 million. A renewed commitment to criminal justice reform would, among other things, see 17 year old offenders returned to juvenile courts. The maps drawn by the People's Maps Commission would have to be taken up by the Legislature. The state Family and Medical Leave Act would be expanded, as would the Earned Income Tax Credit. More than twenty new policy solutions would help bring down the cost of prescription drugs. A number of the anti-tenant provisions that were enacted under former-Governor Walker would be rolled back. There is a renewed push for homelessness program funding. An additional \$40 million would be invested in the Safe Drinking Loan Program and Clean Water Fund to help with the replacement of lead service lines. The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program would be renewed for 10 more years, with annual funding increased from \$33.25 million to \$70 million. The collective bargaining changes from Act 10 and the elimination of prevailing wage requirements would be repealed. The minimum wage would be raised for the first time since 2009. It's an ambitious agenda, and it certainly faces an uphill battle in the Republican-controlled Legislature. However, these are proposals that have the support of the people. The next step will see the Joint Finance Committee (JFC), also controlled by Republicans, begin its work on the budget. Last budget cycle, the JFC completely tossed out the Governor's proposal and more or less wrote their own. It's imperative that we let them know that we support the Governor's bold budget. Find a list of JFC members and their contact information at <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2021/committees/joint/2293>.

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Evers' Budget Makes Big Investments in K-12, Special Ed

Continuing his run as a pro-public education Governor, Gov. Evers has recommended near-historic new investments, particularly in special education. The proposal - \$600 million more for K-12, \$709 million more in special ed funding - would restore the state's historic two-thirds funding commitment to public schools and achieve special education reimbursement rates of 45% in FY2021-2022 and 50% in FY2022-2023. Two-thirds funding was once a bipartisan achievement that has recently been rejected by legislative Republicans. Additionally, the Governor has called for more than \$54 million in funding for student mental health programs and supports. Children's mental health problems, already a serious issue, have been made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic, so this investment is more important than ever.



Budget Takes Step Forward in Fight Against Economic Inequality

One thing the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted, and exacerbated, is the disparities between the “haves” and the “have nots”. This can take many forms - income, wealth, access to healthcare, health outcomes, business viability. Governor Evers' budget would be a solid step forward in addressing some of these issues. The state minimum wage, unchanged since 2009, would be increased to \$10.15 per hour. This would help not just those low-wage workers currently earning less than this; it has been shown that a minimum wage increase provides a raise for those up the pay scale, as well. In our state and country, no one working hard full-time should struggle to keep the lights on, a roof over their head and food on the table. This would be real progress. Expansion of BadgerCare, covering 90,000 more of our friends, family and neighbors, will give those people access to medical care that they need, lower costs for all of us by reducing uncompensated care, and save the state \$630 million in tax dollars over the biennium, which can be used for other programs or as tax relief to Wisconsin families. Small businesses, hurt disproportionately by the ongoing pandemic, will have access to a \$200 million fund to help keep them going while they get back on their feet. Enhancements to the Earned Income Tax Credit and Homestead Credit will benefit low-income families and seniors.



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Evers Budget Makes Justice Reform a Priority

The Governor spent a good portion of his budget address discussing the need for justice reform and reducing racial disparities in the justice system. The address included a pre-recorded video featuring Racine's own Carl Fields. The Governor's budget makes a wholesale investment in improving and realigning the juvenile justice system, including moving 17 year old offenders back to juvenile courts and finally closing Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake. The current justice system puts a strain on the state, our communities, and Wisconsin families, both in financial and human terms. We keep throwing money at the problem with diminishing results. The Governor's budget would take several steps toward continuing a reduction in our state prison population. Among other changes, a doubling of funding for Treatment Alternatives and Diversions will help reduce recidivism and costs while giving certain non-violent offenders the tools to succeed.



Preserving our Lands and Natural Resources for Generations to Come

Governor Evers recognizes that a love of nature and the outdoors is a part of the soul of Wisconsin, and we need to continue to protect and preserve our land, water and wildlife for future generations. The

Governor has proposed reauthorizing the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program for ten years and increasing the state's investment from \$33.25 million per year to \$70 million. The Knowles-Nelson

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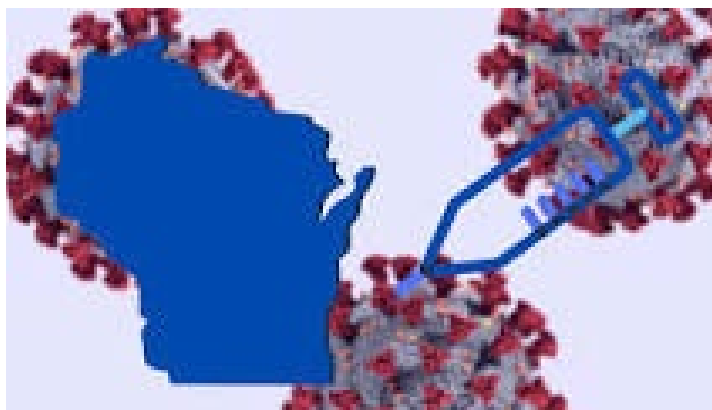
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Stewardship Program was started in 1989 and was always a bipartisan priority, as evidenced by its name, coming from former Wisconsin Governors Warren Knowles, a Republican, and Gaylord Nelson, a Democrat. Budgets from 2011-2019 enacted steep funding cuts and limits on new land purchases, which handcuffed the program's ability to achieve its goals. Governor Evers' proposal will help return the stewardship program to the shining example it had been.



More Budget News and Details

These are just a few parts of the Governor's proposed budget. To read a more detailed and in-depth analysis, you can visit the Department of Administration's Executive Budget page, <https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/2021-23%20Executive%20Budget.aspx>. You can also find a nonpartisan analysis of the Governor's budget proposal by the Legislative Reference Bureau at https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lrb/010_2021_budget_bill_analysis.pdf.



Covid Vaccine Updates

Kenosha County operates a Covid-19 Vaccine Call Center. The call center is open to people who don't have access to schedule a vaccination appointment online. These people can call (262)605-6799 to speak with someone who will walk them through the appointment process, if they are eligible. The online list of Kenosha County Covid vaccine providers is still available, at <http://bit.ly/KCCCOVIDHub>, as well.

People in Racine can sign up for email updates on vaccination progress at <https://crchd.com/covid-19-vaccine>.



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Local Covid Testing Options

There are a number of options locally for anyone looking to get tested. Your primary health care provider is always an option, but there are many community testing sites available, as well.

CVS Pharmacy: Drive-through testing available at CVS in Kenosha (3710 57th Ave.) and Racine (3915 Durand Ave.); advance registration required at <https://www.cvs.com/minuteclinic/covid-19-testing>

Froedert South: Drive-through testing is available to those who qualify after completing an initial phone evaluation at (262)671-7777 between 8 am and 4:30 pm Monday-Friday

Kenosha Community Medical Center: A drive-through testing site at the former Chase Bank, 5506 Seventh Ave., is open to patients who complete a quick registration process at <https://www.kenoshachc.org/covid-19-resource-center/>. Testing is conducted Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 8 am to 4 pm.

Old Kenosha Fire Station No. 3: Free, drive-through testing will be offered during the following hours at the former No. 3 Fire Station, 2121 Roosevelt Rd., Kenosha: Tuesdays, 2-6 pm; Thursdays, 2-6 pm; Saturdays, 9 am - 1 pm. This testing is being offered in a partnership between locally-owned Modern Apothecary, the Wisconsin DHS, and the Kenosha Fire Department. An appointment and preregistration is strongly encouraged, with appointment times available at <https://modernapothecary.10to8.com> and registration available at <https://register.covidconnect.wi.gov>. Anyone who lives or works in Wisconsin, ages 5 and over, can be tested.

Festival Hall in Racine: Each Thursday, January 7 - March 4, from 9 am to 5 pm, at Festival Hall, 5 Fifth St., Racine. Pre-registration at <https://register.covidconnect.wi.gov> is encouraged.

To find other testing sites in the state, visit

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/community-testing.htm>.

UW System schools statewide, including Parkside, have been provided with a limited number of rapid-result Covid-19 tests. These tests provide results in 15-30 minutes. The tests are free of charge and

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available to the public, and you don't have to have symptoms to get a test. A positive rapid test will need to be confirmed with the regular Covid-19 test but will provide you some guidance on whether or not you need to quarantine during that period. Registration at <https://www.doineedacovid19test.com> is required. The tests are administered in De Simone Gym in the SAC on the Parkside campus Monday-Thursday, 9 am - 5 pm, and Friday, 9 am - 1 pm. Testing is expected to last at least several weeks.

<https://www.uwp.edu/explore/news/surge-testing.cfm>



Bill Exempting PPP Loans from State Income Tax Becomes Law

With businesses, particularly small, local businesses, struggling to survive the Covid-19 pandemic, a bipartisan bill making federal Paycheck Protection Loans deductible under Wisconsin's tax code has passed both houses of the Legislature and been signed into law by the Governor. I was happy to be able to support and vote for this bill, which will provide almost half a billion in tax relief for Wisconsin business owners.



Governor's Special Session on Unemployment System Modernization Results in Bipartisan Legislation

By now, everyone has heard about the problems with the state's outdated, 1970s-era computer system for processing and paying unemployment insurance (UI) claims. The system was a major contributor to the claim backlog that took much of the last year to sort out. It's been a known fact for years that the system needed an update; in fact, a 2014 audit report from the Legislative Audit Bureau warned that the system was not equipped to handle a spike in claims, such as occurred at the start of the pandemic. Then-Governor Scott Walker and the Legislature's Republican majority refused to do anything to fix the situation. In January of this year, Governor Tony Evers called a special session of the Legislature to advance a plan to modernize the system. Initially, Republicans again balked. Well, they have finally



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come around, negotiating a deal with the Governor. On Thursday, the Senate took action on the resulting bill, which passed overwhelmingly. The Assembly is expected to approve the legislation next week, paving the way for the massive project to get underway.

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