

June 25, 2021



Dear friend,

Earlier this week, we observed the summer solstice, also known as the longest day of the year because it is the day with the most daylight. This is also the first official day of summer. For many cultures around the world, the first day of summer is welcomed with celebrations and rituals that recognize the sun's importance to human life. Summer solstice observations take many forms around the world. While summer has officially begun, the real heat is yet to come. On average, there is a one-month lag between the solstice and peak summer temperatures, making July normally the hottest month of the year. I hope that all of you who have gotten yourselves and your families vaccinated are able to get out there and enjoy the beautiful summer weather while it lasts. Stay safe, healthy, and cool.

Sincerely,

Bob

In Case You Missed It

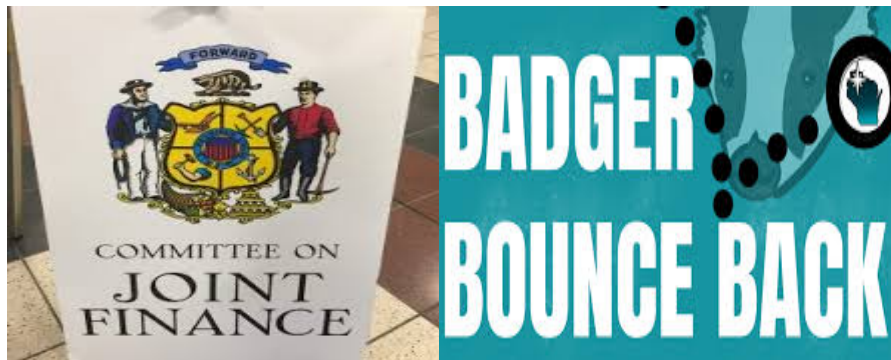
small business **SPOTLIGHT**



Sweet Corner Ice Cream is a Great Place for a Summer Treat



In August 2019, Lauren Recupero opened a small massage studio on Lake Avenue in Racine and quickly gained a loyal following. While she enjoyed the space, she felt that it was time to grow and change. The result was a move to a new expanded space downtown in Monument Square, 524 Monument Square, Suite 204. The more spacious studio has room for a second massage table, and she is looking at offering more services, such as hot stones and couples massages. She has worked CBD oil massages into her practice with clients seeking to ease anxiety or inflammation. Give Laurel Massage Studio a call when you need relief from the stresses of day to day life. Learn more on [Facebook](#) or their [website](#).



JFC-Approved State Budget Leaves Much to Be Desired

With the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) done with its budget work, both houses of the Legislature are set to debate and vote on the JFC-approved budget bill next week. While upcoming briefings by my Democratic colleagues on the committee and the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB) will fill in a lot more detail on how this bill differs from the one proposed by Governor Tony Evers in February, I can already see several areas where the budget we'll be debating has missed the mark. The Republican-controlled JFC got off to a rocky start, eliminating nearly 400 provisions from the proposal the Governor had put forward, many of which were incredibly popular, fiscally sound and good for our

state. These include a full expansion of the BadgerCare Medicaid program, which would have provided health care coverage for 91,000 additional Wisconsinites while saving the state \$1.6 billion over the biennium; legalization of medical and recreational marijuana; an increase in the state's minimum wage; a ban on no-knock search warrants by law enforcement; a whole host of measures to bring down prescription drug costs; expansion of the Homestead and Earned Income Tax Credits; and a move toward nonpartisan redistricting. It initially seemed like the Republicans had created a real problem, as removal of these items was expected to create a \$3.4 billion hole in the budget that the committee would have to make up elsewhere. They were seemingly rescued by new revenue numbers from the LFB, which showed the state was likely to take in \$4.4 billion more than anticipated by 2023, providing a large surplus and more than enough to fully fund some of our most important programs.

That's not the route Republicans on the committee chose, however.



Instead of truly investing in our kids by providing school districts with all of the resources they need, including finally reimbursing special education costs at a fair level, the increase in spending on K-12 education, \$128 million, was proportionally less than the total increase in state spending over the last budget. This was less than 10% of the \$1.6 billion increase that had been proposed by Governor Evers, including more than \$700 million more for special education. In underfunding our neighborhood schools, the GOP put more than \$2 billion in federal education funding at risk, having to come up with a shell game scheme on the last day of budget deliberations in order to secure the federal money.



The committee also could have put some of that surplus towards homelessness prevention. Governor Evers had proposed a more than \$70 million investment to fully fund programs that had been recommended by the bipartisan Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness, chaired by former Republican Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch. Instead, JFC Republicans committed just \$1.2 million to programs combatting homelessness.



A big story over the last year has been the backlog of unemployment claims in Wisconsin during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Republicans used every opportunity to paint this as a failure of Governor Evers and his administration, while in actuality much of the problem resulted from the outdated, 50-year old computer system that the state uses to process and pay unemployment claims. Past administrations, including Scott Walker and the Republican majority in the Legislature during his term, were warned about the potential for a system crash if there was a tidal wave of new claims but chose to do nothing about it. You'd think after all of the finger-pointing of the last year that Republicans would surely put some of that surplus into upgrading the system, like Governor Evers has asked, right? Nope. JFC Republicans wouldn't commit one penny of new money toward repairing our desperately broken system.



Finally, with an unexpected \$4.4 billion influx of money, you'd think \$10 million for the Kenosha Innovation Neighborhood project would be a shoo-in, right? Wrong. While Governor Evers had planned to give Kenosha the money for this exciting, regionally-important project, JFC Republicans said, "No."



Instead, they chose the same route they always take – cut taxes for the rich. In the final hours of the committee's budget deliberations, the majority Republicans approved a \$3.4 billion tax cut plan; what they didn't mention was that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the benefits from the plan would go to people making \$100,000 or more per year. Those making under \$24,000 would get nothing.



This isn't to say there aren't some things that I like in the budget bill; a pay increase for personal care workers and increased reimbursement rates for dentists and nursing homes are great and long overdue.

When it comes to the budget as a whole, though, I only get one vote – "yes" or "no".

*A comparative summary of Governor Evers' budget proposal and the one passed by JFC, from the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, is available [here](#).



Advocates for Seniors, People with Disabilities and Mental Illness Say GOP Elections Bills Threaten Their Ability to Cast Ballots

A number of Republican-authored bills that would change, and in most cases restrict, the way eligible voters are allowed to request or return absentee ballots passed the Assembly this week on party-line votes after the same action took place in the Senate earlier this month. Ahead of the Assembly vote, a number of groups advocating on behalf of seniors and people living with disabilities or mental illness expressed their concerns that these bills would disproportionately impact their communities, making it much harder for them to participate in our democratic process. Disability Rights Wisconsin, National Alliance on Mental Illness – WI, Survival Coalition, Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, and the ARC of Wisconsin are just some of the organizations that spoke out on the harm this series of bills would have on the people they represent, some of our most vulnerable populations. These people already face so many barriers in just getting through their day to day tasks, they say; the roadblocks thrown up by these bills are likely to result in some of the them not being able to cast a their ballot or not even trying. People in these disadvantaged communities have as much right as anyone to take part in our democracy, and they arguably have more on the line with each election than the average person; we should be making it easier for them to legally cast their vote, not harder.

You can read more about the Wisconsin GOP's voter suppression efforts [here](#) and [here](#).



Governor Evers Announces \$142 Million for Tourism and Entertainment Industry Grants

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Tourism, live music and entertainment venues were some of the industries hit hardest economically by the Covid-19 pandemic, and they are still struggling to recover. This week,

Governor Evers announced an additional \$142 million allocation to businesses and organizations in these industries. The new grant program will be invested in places like live event venues, movie theaters, summer camps, minor league sports, and hotels and lodging.

Other investments will be made in supporting state tourism and reopening Wisconsin's historical sites. The new grant program is being funded through Wisconsin's share of the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, signed into law by President Biden earlier this year and will be administered by the state Department of Administration and Department of Revenue. Anyone interested in more information about the grants, including the application, can sign up to receive alerts [here](#).



Find Local Independence Day Celebrations

Many local communities are planning a return to usual for the 4th of July celebrations and activities this year. Kenosha and Racine will both hold their traditional parades, and many other events will be taking place in the area, as well. You can find a more comprehensive list of ways to celebrate Independence Day, including parade, fireworks and festivals, [here](#).



CDC Extends Eviction Moratorium One Final Time, through End of July

In order to give local, state and federal governments time to put safety nets in place to avoid an avalanche of evictions, the national eviction moratorium has been extended one last time, through the end of July. Accompanying the extension was guidance from the federal government on streamlining the process of getting the remaining \$47 billion in emergency rental assistance funding into the hands of those who need it. Currently nearly 1 million people say their eviction is very likely in two months, with an additional 1.83 million saying it is somewhat likely during that same period. Anyone needing emergency rental assistance can find more information [here](#).