

August 26, 2022



Dear friends,

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” That is text from the 19th amendment, certified as part of the U.S. Constitution on August 26, 1920, guaranteeing women the right to vote. On August 26, 1970, in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the 19th amendment, more than 50,000 women marched down New York’s 5th Avenue to demand equality. Their priorities included abortion access, better and more affordable healthcare, and equal access to education and employment. As a result, August 26 is now recognized as Women’s Equality Day in the United States. Of course, progress has been made toward equality over the years, but it’s a shame that the key issues that drove women to march in 1970 are issues women are still fighting for today. Let’s join together – today and every day – to advance the cause of equality.

Until next time, stay safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Bob

small business **SPOTLIGHT**



Downtown Kenosha’s “Sip & Stroll” Provides a Chance to Check Out Dozens of Downtown Businesses

The weather forecast calls for sun and temperatures in the upper 70s. What could be better on a day like that than taking a walk around beautiful Downtown Kenosha, visiting businesses you maybe haven’t tried before, and enjoying a refreshing beverage? On Saturday, August 27, Downtown Kenosha, Inc. will host a Sip & Stroll. Guests will receive a free goody bag with promotional items and coupons; be able to sample 40 different beverages (alcoholic and non-alcoholic); and get to check out dozens of downtown businesses. Games, live music and special offers will also be part of the event. Check in starts at noon at the Wyndham Garden-Kenosha Harborside, 5125 6th Ave. There you will receive your goody bag, a “score card”, and a map of participating businesses. Participants must be 21 or older, and advanced ticket purchase - \$40 each – is required. To buy tickets or to see a list of participating businesses, go to <https://www.unation.com/event/11754672>.

In Case You Missed It



Expected State Budget Surplus Grows to \$5 Billion

Based on revenue collected during the most recent fiscal year, which ended on June 30, 2022, the state’s budget surplus is now expected to be more than \$5 billion, up from the previous projection of \$3.8 billion. The new estimates come from the state’s Department of Revenue and shows the state in “the best fiscal shape” it has been in decades, according to Revenue Secretary Peter Barca.



Evers Announces Tax Cut Plan for New Surplus Funds

Governor Tony Evers has seized on the news of an even larger than expected budget surplus to announce a proposal that includes \$600 million per year in tax relief, a new tax credit for family caregivers, a \$35 cap on the cost sharing of insulin, and a repeal of the state's minimum markup on gasoline requirement. The plan uses just the new surplus funds, leaving the previously-announced surplus of \$3.8 billion for the next budget cycle.

The plan would provide a 10% income tax cut for single filers at or below \$100,000 in income and married-joint filers at or below \$150,000; expand income limits for claiming the Homestead Credit and restore indexing of the credit to inflation, which was eliminated by Scott Walker and the Republican legislature; expand eligibility for the Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit; repeal the minimum markup on gasoline law, which estimates say could save drivers up to \$.30 per gallon; cap the cost-sharing of insulin at \$35; create a caregiver tax credit expenses incurred by a family member while caring for a loved one; and expand the state Child and Dependent Care Credit from 50% of the federal credit to 100%.

Republican leaders have already come out to oppose the plan.



Biden Announces Student Loan Forgiveness and Student Loan Reforms

On Wednesday, after months of deliberations, President Joe Biden announced a massive student loan reform package that includes debt forgiveness for millions and changes to the way loans are paid back in the future.

The big headline is the student debt forgiveness. Biden's plan will forgive up to \$10,000 of federal student loan debt to borrowers earning up to \$125,000 per year (\$250,000 per year for a married couple). Borrowers who also qualified for Pell Grants - which are awarded to students

State Capitol, P.O. Box 7882, Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7882 • (608) 267-8979

Toll-Free Office Hotline: 1-888-769-4724

Email: Sen.Wirch@legis.state.wi.us • Website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen22/news> • Fax: (608) 267-0984
(262) 694-7379

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who display exceptional financial need – can have up to \$20,000 per year forgiven, if they meet income guidelines.

Additionally, the new Biden rules will limit what borrowers with undergraduate loans must pay each month to no more than 5% of their discretionary monthly income; the current rate is 10%. The rules will also guarantee that new borrower earning less than 225% of the federal poverty level will have to make monthly payments by raising the amount of income that is considered non-discretionary.

The move comes after years of tuition increases, shrinking buying power of federal grant programs, and exploding student debt. Since 1980, the total cost of both four-year public and four-year private college has almost tripled, even after accounting for inflation. Federal support has not kept up: Pell Grants once covered almost 80% of the cost of a four-year public college degree for students from working families but now only cover a third. According to the federal Department of Education, the typical undergraduate student with loans now graduates with nearly \$25,000 in debt.

Middle- and lower-class borrowers struggle with high monthly payments and skyrocketing balances, making it harder for them to get ahead through buying homes or cars, saving for retirement or starting small businesses.

Finally, the President extended the moratorium on student loan payments and interest through December 31, 2022.

Republican leaders have condemned Biden's plan. However, many of them have, in the past, supported loan forgiveness programs for businesses and wealthy individuals. Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester), for example, received a \$297,000 federal Paycheck Protection Plan loan for his business, Robin J. Vos Enterprises, in April 2020; that loan was forgiven in December 2020.



U.S. Department of Justice Joins Lawsuit by Disabled Voters over Ballot Access; Federal Judge Appears Ready to Side with Voters in the Case

On Wednesday, federal judge James Peterson hinted that he will soon issue an order siding with a group of Wisconsin voters with disabilities who have sued in order to be able to get help from others when returning absentee ballots. The order would protect the rights of voters with disabilities in Wisconsin after the Wisconsin Supreme Court decision earlier this summer that prohibited voters from having someone else return their absentee ballot. After the Court's decision, voters with disabilities and advocates for those with disabilities were outraged, saying that the decision would essentially disenfranchise them. Last week, the U.S. Department of Justice took the rare step of intervening in the case, filing a brief in favor of the voters with

disabilities that argues federal laws protect ballot assistance. Peterson said that he wants to have the issue settled before the November election.



EdVest College Savings Program to Reduce Fees

Saving for college is about to get a little easier and cheaper for Wisconsin families. The state's EdVest 529 College Savings Plan is reducing its fees by 14%. The Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) negotiated the fee reduction as part of a three-year contract extension with EdVest program manager TIAA-CREF Tuition Financing, Inc.

EdVest is a tax-advantaged investment, meaning contributions to an account may qualify for a state income tax reduction of up to \$3,560 per contributor, per beneficiary, per year. Additionally, earnings are tax-free when used for qualified education expenses, including tuition and fees, books, laptops and more. Funds can be used at any accredited public or private university, college, technical college, community college, or professional school nationwide and many abroad, and toward the cost of apprenticeships registered and certified with the Secretary of Labor. Find out more at <https://www.edvest.com/>.



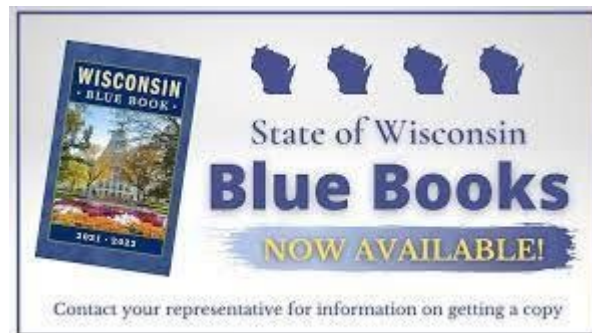
Take My 2022 Legislative Survey

It's very important to me as a legislator to hear what you think about the important issues of the day. I've put together a survey on a variety of topics that I am hoping you will take the time to complete. You can find an online version of the survey at <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/22/wirch/surveys-and-petitions/2022-legislative-survey>.



EIGHT MORE Free Covid Tests Available

With Covid cases again on the rise, the Biden administration has is offering households eight additional at-home Covid tests, free of charge. You can order the eight tests at <https://www.covidtests.gov/>; you can also use this site to find nearby testing locations. The administration had previously made four at-home Covid tests available per household; you can still claim those using the same link if you haven't already done so. Additionally, because of actions by President Biden and Governor Evers, your health insurance provider may be required to cover up to eight at-home rapid tests per month.



Reserve Your Copy of the 2021-2023 State of Wisconsin Blue Book

The latest edition of the State of Wisconsin Blue Book has arrived. If you would like to have a copy sent to you, contact my office at (608)267-8979 or sen.wirch@legis.wisconsin.gov. These books are free and contain interesting and valuable information about our state's culture, history and government.