

## **Building Wisconsin's Workforce with College Affordability**

*By Senator Brad Pfaff*

I want to grow our economy. To do this, we need to make education and job training more affordable. Our technical colleges and universities play a crucial role in preparing workers to meet the needs of today and tomorrow's economy, but higher education needs to be available and affordable.

As the first from my family to attend college, I know firsthand some of the fear and anxiety students face, but something different today than when I went to school is the overwhelming dread of high cost and debt.

Recently, my Democratic colleagues and I introduced two key proposals to help make college more attainable for more Wisconsin families.

The Wisconsin Tuition Promise, modeled after UW-Madison's successful Bucky's Tuition Promise program, provides "last-dollar" gap funding to students from middle-class families after all federal grants and scholarships are applied, ensuring that any Wisconsinite with the drive to succeed can attend a UW school without being held back by cost.

The College Savings Fairness Act (CSFA) addresses another gap in our system: fairness for borrowers. While Wisconsin's tax code rightfully rewards families who can save for college through Edvest accounts, it offers no comparable relief to those who must take out loans. The CSFA changes that by allowing a tax deduction for student loan repayments, leveling the playing field for borrowers.

Here in western Wisconsin, we know our state's greatest strength is our people, the students at our universities and technical colleges, the families working hard every day to make ends meet, and the employers searching for talented workers to build our future.

That's why college affordability isn't just a higher education issue; it's also a workforce issue. When we make college more accessible, we're investing directly in Wisconsin's economic well-being. Nearly 90% of in-state UW graduates stay in Wisconsin five years after earning their degree. Today's students are tomorrow's nurses, teachers, police officers, engineers, and small business owners — the backbone of our state's economy.

With more than 164,000 students enrolled across the UW System and 287,000 students enrolled in Wisconsin Technical Colleges, our campuses are Wisconsin's talent pipeline. By making college both more affordable and easing the burden of student loan debt, we're helping Wisconsin build the workforce it needs to remain competitive.

When we invest in our students, we invest in the future of our workforce and Wisconsin. When opportunity is affordable, Wisconsin can thrive.