



BRAD PFAFF **STATE SENATOR**

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Sen. Pfaff Column: Onward and Upward: State Budget Makes a Down Payment on Wisconsin's Future

When I ran for State Senate, I pledged to bring western Wisconsin common sense values to the legislature and stand up for hard-working families, rural and urban alike. Whether you prefer the bustle of downtown La Crosse or the idyllic backdrop of rural Ontario, you should have good roads to drive, family-supporting job opportunities, and thriving small businesses on Main Street.

Just over a week ago, I was proud to stand alongside Governor Tony Evers as he signed our state budget. I'm pleased to report that we delivered the largest tax cut for middle class families in state history. \$2 billion will stay in taxpayers' pockets over the next two years. This budget also expands broadband, invests in long-term care, and achieves two-thirds funding for K-12 schools for the first time in two decades. There was a lot that Democrats and Republicans in the legislature didn't agree on, but the bipartisan consensus that we reached makes an important down payment on our future.

I began serving as your Senator just over six months ago and I hit the ground running and got to work. Between January and now, I've hosted four listening sessions, visited countless local businesses, and put hundreds of miles behind the wheel to make sure I'm meeting folks where they're at—from down in Wauzeka and up to Mindoro. The feedback I received along the way informed my advocacy on the budget—because it's more than just a financial document. It's a document that reflects our shared values. I want to share a few concerns I heard and what the budget will do to address these problems.

When our loved ones get to an age where they may need to enter a long-term care facility, we owe it to them to make sure they can live as comfortably as possible without breaking the bank. Due to staffing shortages, the economic impact of COVID, and rising service costs, it's becoming harder for our elders to find a treatment plan that fits them. This budget invests \$356.6 million for long-term care programs—a historic increase in funding. Not only will this benefit the people in need of services, but it will be a lifeline for struggling care facilities. This money will help hire direct care workers, assist personal care agencies, and increase Medicaid reimbursement rates. As a result, facilities will maintain and create new, good-paying jobs and serve more people in our community.

The pandemic exacerbated several overlooked and underfunded issues. An important one, particularly for western Wisconsin, is broadband access. Expanding internet access to every zip code cannot be seen as a luxury—it's a utility that keeps our communities connected and competitive. For the past six months, I've served on the Governor's bipartisan Taskforce on Broadband Access. We recently released a report detailing strategies for successfully expanding high-speed internet access to every residence, business, and institution in Wisconsin by 2025. I'm proud to say that the hard work that went into this report brought us together on this issue, resulting in \$129 million for broadband expansion over the next two years. This was a common-

sense investment that will bring 21st-century technology, job opportunities, and critical infrastructure to every corner of the state.

This budget had its share of missed opportunities. Quite frankly, we need to invest significantly more in K-12 education than what the Joint Finance Committee sent to the Governor. But in voting for this budget, I knew that Governor Evers would use his powerful veto pen to improve the end result of an imperfect document. He did just that when he set aside \$550 million in revenue that our state could use for education. The Governor also wisely allocated \$100 million to K-12 from the American Rescue Plan to fill in the budget gaps.

Although we didn't get everything we wanted out of this budget, I stand by our work. This budget is a necessary down payment on our future that invests in our priorities while providing real tax relief for middle class families.

Our work isn't finished. I will continue to fight for what we didn't achieve. My bill, the CLEAR Act, will invest in remediating PFAS contamination where the budget failed. Senate Bill 439, a bill I've sponsored, will expand BadgerCare to 90,000 more Wisconsinites and bring in over a billion dollars in federal investment where this budget fell short.

These next two years are critical for our state's economic recovery, and this budget is a start, but it will not be the end.

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Senator Brad Pfaff represents the 32nd Senate District, which includes La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford, and southern Monroe County.