



Dear Friend,

As a member of the Joint Finance Committee I have the opportunity to directly debate and analyze the 2015-17 State Budget. After attending public hearings across Wisconsin on the Governor's budget it became clear that this bill is shaping up to be the most unpopular legislation that I have seen in my time in the legislature.

I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues the best I can to provide real opportunity in our state as the budget heads to the Legislature for a vote before getting the Governor's final signature. Here are some of the big items the Joint Finance Committee has taken up so far:

K-12 Education

Public education has long been a priority in Wisconsin. Unfortunately, the proposed budget continues to [undermine our state's longstanding commitment](#). The budget expanded taxpayer-funded private voucher school vouchers, with the Republicans lifting a 1,000-student enrollment cap on the recently created statewide program. Even worse, money for private schools will come directly from the Oshkosh school district's budget, rather than from a separate funding source. The Legislature's non-partisan budget office has projected this will take [\\$600-\\$800 million out of public classrooms](#) statewide over the next decade.

Republicans also have added a provision that would virtually [eliminate teacher licensing standards](#). This change would put Wisconsin's teacher standards below some of the lowest-achieving states in the nation. Under the bill, anyone with a bachelor's degree could be hired and licensed to teach English, math, social studies or science in 6th through 12th grade. For other non-core subjects, any person with relevant experience, including someone who didn't even finish high school, could be licensed to teach. It is my hope that we can fix this before the final budget is passed.

UW System

Republicans also voted for a \$250 million cut to UW System. This will result in roughly a [\\$7.3 million cut to UW Oshkosh](#), the loss of at least 80 positions, and elimination of UW Oshkosh Men's Soccer and Tennis. There were also additional cuts outside the \$250 million for environmental research and research for K-12 education. The budget also deletes all current statutory mentions of tenure and shared governance for UW faculty members, a move that is likely to be a challenging for the university to retain quality faculty.

Natural Resources

Wisconsin's proud tradition of conservation and natural resource protection continues to be eroded in the proposed budget. Reckless cuts to research science and educator positions in the Department of Natural Resources were made targeting the Science Services Bureau, despite provided zero savings to the state's general fund. Critics have warned about the [negative impact this could have on walleye fishing](#), among other things. Stewardship Program funding was partially restored, but at a level lower than it is currently funded at.

The JFC maintained budget cuts that removed all state funding for the State Park System, while reducing nonpoint source pollution grant funding and municipal recycling grant funding. I joined the other Democratic committee members in offering a motion to remove a provision that would sell out naming rights of state parks to for-profit companies, however this was voted down by the Republican majority.

Long-Term Care

Despite widespread opposition from disability advocates around the state, the JFC approved a proposal similar to the Governor's recommendation that effectively [eliminates FamilyCare and the IRIS self-directed program as we know them](#). While the actual details remain uncertain, the proposal sets the table for the shift in delivery of long term care to large, for-profit insurers. On a positive note, the current SeniorCare program was fully restored.

Up next: Transportation, Taxes, and Funding for a new Bucks Arena

The JFC was scheduled to wrap up budget work this week, but is currently in a holding pattern while Republicans [work out disagreements](#) over funding for transportation projects and whether or not to

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provide state bonding for a new arena for the Milwaukee Bucks. The Governor's budget proposes a [record level of borrowing](#) to fund transportation projects.

Once the JFC finishes its work on the budget, the bill will go to the Wisconsin State Assembly and Senate before being signed into law by the Governor.

Thank you again for allowing me to serve you in the State Assembly. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,



State Representative, 54th Assembly District



You can follow my work on the Joint Finance Committee by [liking the WI Joint Finance Committee Democrats Facebook Page](#).

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