

Republican Budget Full of Missed Opportunities for Wisconsin

GOP Falls Far Short of Governor Evers' Plan

By Representative Gordon Hintz

When balancing a household budget, families make the most with the resources they have through two methods: saving money, and increasing dollars coming in. We cut coupons, send in for rebates, and take on extra work if we fall short. The more focused the budget is on sticking to priorities and staying disciplined, the more successful the final result is.

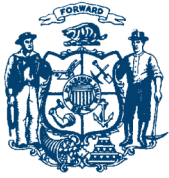
The biennial budget Governor Evers introduced in February was pragmatic and aggressive in addressing our state's most pressing issues. It was a proposal that followed through on the many commitments Governor Evers made to the people of Wisconsin when they elected him last November.

The cornerstone of the Governor's plan, just like his promise during the campaign, was Medicaid expansion. By expanding Medicaid, Wisconsin could leverage federal dollars that are currently going to 37 other states, saving our taxpayers nearly \$325 million out of our general fund, and then drawing down an additional \$1.6 billion in additional federal funding. From there, as Governor Evers likes to say, you have to connect the dots.

The first benefit of Medicaid expansion is, of course, more accessible and affordable health care for all Wisconsinites. Even better, the savings created by Medicaid expansion frees up a huge chunk of state dollars to fund public K-12 education, tech colleges and the UW System. This second reason is why the vast majority of other states, controlled by both Republicans and Democrats alike, have used Medicaid expansion as the centerpiece of their budgets. It maximizes resources and saves taxpayers money.

Last week, the Republican legislature took up and passed their version of the state budget. Unfortunately, for purely partisan political reasons, Republicans continue to make Wisconsin an outlier with Medicaid expansion. Not only does this decision send federal tax dollars from Wisconsin to our neighboring states, it makes it harder for us to compete in other areas as well. Here are just a few examples of missed opportunities:

- **Department of Health Services:** The Republican budget would spend over \$300 million MORE in state taxpayer dollars and draw down \$1.2 billion LESS federal dollars than the Governor's budget.
- **Department of Public Instruction:** The Republican budget fails to make the needed investments to cover the actual cost of special education by providing \$509 million less than the Governor, reducing resources for every classroom. Republicans also fell short of their pledge to have the state provide two-thirds of the funding for our public K-12 schools.
- **UW System:** Because of the budget hole created by removing the Medicaid expansion, Republicans chose to slash over \$60 million from the UW System than the Governor's proposal. I appreciate Republicans support for the Governor's capital budget investments in UW infrastructure, but what good is investing in new buildings if you're not investing in the learning that occurs inside?



- **Department of Transportation:** Wisconsin's roads rank as some of the worst in the country. That's why the Governor proposed a sustainable plan that did not rely on raiding the state's general fund (\$1.4 billion since 2011) to pay for transportation expenses. In a surprise to many, Republicans instead increased fees, one of the least equitable options, while giving drivers from Illinois and Minnesota a free ride. Going forward, this means a \$95 increase in title fees alone for Wisconsin drivers.

In this era of divided government in Wisconsin, compromise and collaboration is needed. While the budget process left a lot to be desired, the reality is the election of Governor Evers and support for his agenda was successful in moving Republicans to increase investments in some areas beyond the levels of the Walker years. But the bottom line is that their objection to the Medicaid expansion was political, and not a rational policy position. Opposing a solution simply to thwart a new Governor from accomplishing a promise he was elected to fulfill hurts our state. A budget is about priorities, but it is also about managing taxpayer resources efficiently and effectively. That represents a missed opportunity that "The People's Budget" would have better addressed going forward. Wisconsin deserves a better.