

# One Wisconsin Now: Republican legislators rejecting student loan refinancing themselves attended college at one-fifth the cost today

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*Cost of Their Own Schooling May Explain Ignorance of Student Loan Debt Crisis, But it Doesn't Excuse Their Refusal to Help*  
 MADISON, Wis. — All 12 Republicans members of the state legislature's Joint Finance Committee this week voted to reject a Democratic plan to allow the state's nearly one million student loan borrowers the chance to refinance their student loans. The no voting legislators all attended college between 1966 and 1991, well before the explosion of student debt, perhaps explaining their failure to understand the crisis. But, according to One Wisconsin Now Executive Director Scot Ross, there's no excuse for their indifference to Wisconsinites with \$19 billion plus in student debt.

"The Republicans who rejected refinancing went to college for a tiny fraction of the cost today," said Ross. "That might explain their ignorance of the impact student loan debt has on the lives and finances of borrowers. But it's no excuse for turning their backs on a common sense solution to help nearly one million Wisconsinites who worked hard to get their educations and took on the personal responsibility to pay for it."

The budget amendment would have adopted the provisions of the *Higher Ed, Lower Debt Act* (2017 Assembly Bill 143 and Senate Bill 91) to create a state authority to help borrowers to refinance their student loans at lower interests rates, extend an existing state tax deduction to include student loan payments and provide additional information and loan counseling to borrowers.

Ross noted that the student debt crisis has worsened in Wisconsin in recent years. Since 2011, with Republicans in complete control of state government, Wisconsin has risen to fifth highest in the nation in the percentage of college graduates with student loan debt.

According to the most recent statistics, seventy percent of Wisconsin students matriculate with an average debt load of nearly \$30,000.

According to information on past and current college costs collected by One Wisconsin Now, Sen. Leah Vukmir, who has repeatedly opposed student loan refinancing, would pay 2,400 percent more per year now to attend Marquette University than when she graduated in 1980. A four-year degree when Vukmir attended cost \$6,300, while today four years would cost \$157,320.

Research on other committee members found the following:

**Rep. John Nygren (Co-Chair)**

Attended University of Wisconsin-Marquette, 1983

Then: \$865 yearly

Now: \$2,375 yearly

**Rep. Dale Kooyenga (Vice-Chair)**

Graduated Lakeland College, 2000

Then: \$11,980 yearly

Now: \$25,410 yearly

**Rep. Amy Loudensbeck**

Graduated University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991

Then: \$1,946 yearly

Now: \$10,488 yearly

**Rep. Mary Felzkowski**

Graduated University of Wisconsin-River Falls, 1986

Then: \$1,437 yearly

Now: \$7,940 yearly

**Rep. Mark Born**

Graduated Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, Minnesota), 1998

Then: \$15,940 yearly

Now: \$43,590 yearly

**Rep. Mike Rohrkaste**

Graduated Michigan State University, 1980

Then: \$1,536 yearly

Now: \$14,114 yearly

**Sen. Alberta Darling (Co-Chair)**

Graduated UW Madison, 1966

Then: \$220 yearly

Now: \$10,488 yearly

**Sen. Luther Olsen (Vice-Chair)**

Graduated University of Madison, 1973

Then: \$508 yearly

Now: \$10,488 yearly

**Sen. Sheila Harsdorf**

Graduated University of Minnesota, 1978

Then: \$762 yearly

Now: \$14,224 yearly

**Sen. Howard Marklein**

Graduated UW-Whitewater, 1976

Then: \$524 yearly

Now: \$7,680 yearly

**Sen. Tom Tiffany**

Graduated UW-River Falls, 1980

Then: \$677 yearly

Now: \$7,940 yearly

**Sen. Leah Vukmir**

Graduated Marquette University, 1980

Then: \$1,575 yearly

Now: \$39,330 yearly

**TOTAL:**

Then: \$37,970, Average: \$3,164

Now: \$183,579, Average: \$15,298