

Patrick Testin: State budget makes key investments

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When the budget process began, I made it a point to say that the process doesn't just involve elected officials – it's important that the public is involved as well. I've conducted twenty listening sessions and talked with hundreds of people in the last few months, and I believe we've crafted a budget that makes strong investments in the people of Wisconsin.

First and foremost, we're investing in the future of young people. This budget increases K-12 education funding by a record \$639 million over the next two years. We're putting money in the classroom where it does the most good, and helping children learn to think and preparing them to meet the challenges of the workforce.

In addition to investing in people, this budget invests in the technology that connects us. School superintendents, hospital administrators, and small business owners have all emphasized to me the need for increased funding for broadband expansion. This budget allocates an additional \$15.5 million to the Rural Broadband Expansion Grant Program and a further \$7.5 million to the Technology for Educational Achievement (TEACH) Program. This grew out of a bill that I authored with Senator Marklein and the Assembly members of the Rural Wisconsin Initiative, and its inclusion in the budget is a big win for the Western and Central parts of our state.

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Rural health care also came to the forefront in this budget. Once again, I worked with my colleagues in the Rural Wisconsin Initiative – legislators like Ed Brooks,

Romaine Quinn, Nancy VanderMeer, and Scott Krug – to prioritize our rural health care workforce. We inserted two proposals that each create \$1 million matching grant programs – one for the training of Advanced Practice Clinicians, the other for the training of Allied Health Professionals. This ensures that we caring for the wellbeing of all Wisconsinites.

Overall, I'm proud to support this budget. However, there are areas that I believe need further attention, and for which I will continue to advocate. While this budget does increase local road aids, I think the legislature could do more to help improve our transportation infrastructure, especially at the local level. Dave Ross, the new Secretary of DOT, is working to make the department leaner and more efficient, which will cut costs in the long run, but I do want to see a greater investment in the future.

At the local level, I am thrilled that we were able to secure funding for upgrades to Alexander Field in Wisconsin Rapids. Since taking office in January, I've worked with Rep. Scott Krug and Mayor Zach Vruwink to get this done for Central Wisconsin. Expansion means a lot to the economy in both Wood and Adams counties. Along the same lines, I am proud that this budget invests in WIST – the Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Technology – at UW-Stevens Point. WIST provides research, lab services, and education for use in the private sector, and this funding allows them to expand the services that they offer to our community.

This budget is fair to the people of Central and Western Wisconsin; it meets our needs today, and lays the groundwork to address tomorrow's challenges.

Testin, R-Stevens Point, represents the 24th Senate District.