

Rep. Pope and Sen. Bewley: GOP sparsity proposal long on political cover, short on solutions

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Republicans who voted to cut aid to their own school districts are engaging in a round of damage control with their proposal to restore half of their cut to the budget's proposed sparsity aid, Democratic leaders pointed out today.

"GOP budget-writers took the summer off, delayed budget action on K-12 education until the deadline for sparsity aid payments had passed and then cut sparsity aid proposed in the original budget before passing the bill," said Rep. Sondy Pope (D-Mt. Horeb).

The Democrats noted that legislation circulated by Sen. Howard Marklein and Rep. Jeff Mursau would not fully restore the sparsity aid increase Sen. Marklein voted to cut as a member of the Joint Finance Committee (JFC), and it would only apply to one year of the current budget. In addition, the bill does nothing to restore much-needed relief for low spending rural districts. A provision to increase the revenue limit for these districts was inserted into the budget by JFC, in response to outcry from district administrators, but was ultimately vetoed by Governor Walker. Democrats hope to provide assistance to these districts by raising the Low Revenue Limit Ceiling with a bill of their own in the coming days.

Pope and Bewley highlighted that Democrats in each house of the Legislature voted for a plan that would have improved on Governor Walker's sparsity aid proposal while the GOP voted to slash the aid. The legislators pointed to figures from the

Legislative Fiscal Bureau showing that the 2017-19 state budget devotes the 2nd lowest percentage of general spending to schools since 1995. Public school students and their communities deserve better.

“Last month Republicans cut \$3 million in proposed sparsity aid from schools in Northwest Wisconsin alone but managed to find \$3 BILLION for one foreign corporation,” Sen. Janet Bewley (D-Delta) said. “They had better options at every single turn and have realized their mistake too late.”

Bewley and Pope recently released the Democratic plan to improve sparsity aid - LRB 4521/1 - as an alternative to the Republican half-measure that was announced earlier this month.