

Jon Erpenbach: Time to make our older adults a priority

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In Wisconsin, just like many other parts of the country, our population is aging. In the next 30 years, the ratio of Wisconsin residents 65 and older to the entire state population will grow from one in seven, to one in four. The public policies of our state should reflect this fact. Our older communities should not have to keep fighting for the basic structures Wisconsin currently has to help our older adults, the Legislature should be expanding them.

It seems like SeniorCare has been on the chopping block since day one under Governor Walker. While this year he has finally committed to the successful program, the damage of a constantly targeted system has taken its toll. Wisconsin should look for ways to expand our SeniorCare program and actively take a role in prevention of price gouging by prescription drug companies. We want our older adults to be able to afford the medications they need because we know prevention is better for everyone.

While our Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC's) have proven themselves a valuable resource in every county in Wisconsin, they should not have to fight every budget just to keep the doors open. We know that when our senior citizens have help with their medical, housing and care needs they will live better lives. Our ADRC's work on the front lines of elderly and disabled care every day in Wisconsin assisting families and their communities. The Wisconsin Legislature should be looking for opportunities to expand and strengthen our ADRC's to meet the needs we know we will have.

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By enabling our older adults to have affordable healthcare and affordable housing we know they will live higher quality lives and give back to our communities longer. Past cuts to the Homestead Tax Credit specifically hurt senior citizens working to stay in their homes. This modest tax relief program should be expanded so that we make our older homeowners as important as corporations in our communities. Of course, if older adults have access to affordable health care they will work longer and be healthier as they reach full retirement. Wisconsin is looking for employees and if we work to engage older adults with attractions like flexible hours and affordable health care, we have a ready and trained workforce.

We all know that the state budget is about priorities. Our state agencies have been instructed to draft budgets with no increases in any programs and whoever is the Governor at the end of the year will sprinkle their priorities on the next state budget. How about we prioritize our Wisconsin senior citizens? “You get what you get” should not cut it when the state is spending billions on a foreign corporation. Let’s start to think more about how we can better serve those that have served us so well, and stop making them defend themselves every budget.

For more information on any of these senior citizen priorities contact my office at 608-266-6670 or 888-549-0027 or sen.erpenbach@legis.wi.gov

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