

Evers says his budget will include 'building blocks' for reducing prison population

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Gov.-elect Tony Evers, who said during the campaign he wanted to reduce the state's prison population, will put "building blocks" in his budget to work toward that goal.

But he told WisPolitics.com it's unlikely his budget will include a target for reducing the number of prisoners in Wisconsin.

Evers also said in the interview he has questions if a new prison is needed to replace the correctional facility in Green Bay.

Various proposals have been floated in recent years to replace the prison, which opened in 1898 and houses more than 1,000 inmates, about 300 above capacity. Advocates of a new prison also argue the aged facility requires more staff than a modern correctional facility would.

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"All I can say is somehow we have to connect the dots," Evers said. "If our goal is to reduce the number of incarcerated adults in the state and juveniles in the state, do we need a new prison? I'm not sure that question has been answered yet."

Evers said he can't yet offer specifics on the "building blocks" he plans to include in the budget, because his team hasn't finished it.

Still, he noted the growing bipartisan calls across the country to reform the corrections system.

“I think our budget will try to address that,” Evers said. “But the thing that’s encouraging to me is there is a lot of impetus around this. If Kim Kardashian and Donald Trump can help do that at the federal level, we should be able to figure that out here.”

In announcing cabinet picks so far, Evers has often mentioned looking for people who can “connect the dots.” He said prison reform is a prime example of that, because it involves education, economic development and housing, among other things.

“That involves almost every part of state government,” Evers said. “If we’re going to have a justice system that works, we have to have people that understand how to connect the dots.”

Evers also said he:

*Plans to ask GOP legislative leaders for permission to introduce his budget in late February or early March. Guvs typically introduce their budgets in mid-February, but first-termers are often given an extension.

Evers said he expects his budget to: fully fund the Department of Public Instruction request he submitted as state schools superintendent; expand Medicaid; include the 10 percent middle-class tax cut he campaigned on; and find more resources for roads.

“I believe we can get there,” Evers said.

*Met with Foxconn executives last month to establish communications in a goal of having more transparency in the state’s incentive package for the company. Evers said he plans to continue meeting with company executives to “make sure we have an ongoing system of communications.”

Evers said he continues to have concerns about WEDC’s “stumbles,” but that’s “not something that’s going to impact Foxconn.”

Evers also told WisPolitics.com that his first budget won’t propose scrapping the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. after he called during the campaign for a new approach.

Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, called that news “encouraging.”

But in a statement, he raised concerns about comments Evers made in other media interviews today about possible tax hikes.

“With Republican leadership in the Legislature, our state’s tax burden is at a 50-year low – we will continue in our commitment to keeping taxes low for hard-working families and making sure that Wisconsin stays open for business,” Fitzgerald said.

Listen to the full interview:

https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/120610_002a/s-PcW3t

See more on Evers’ WEDC comments:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2019/interview-evers-budget-wont-propose-scapping-wedc/>