

Amy Loudenbeck: A tale of two budgets: Wisconsin vs. Illinois

Posted on Tuesday, Jul 2, 2019

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We call it the Madison “bubble” – a place where the minutiae of Wisconsin politics plays out all day, every day.

When I come home to the state-line area, I don’t miss the bubble.

Sure, I think about politics when I’m home, and I still talk about politics. I must confess, when I watch the news at home, sometimes I tune in to a Rockford station to see what’s happening outside the bubble.

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Illinois just wrapped up its annual budget in early June and a major infrastructure investment package was signed in late June. Wisconsin is in the final stages of our biennial budget process; the budget has passed, has been sent to the Governor and we are awaiting his signature.

The contrast between the budgets of Illinois and Wisconsin could not be more stark.

In order to fund government operations and pay for infrastructure, Illinois approved significant tax and fee increases – a total of \$2.1 billion already went into effect on July 1, 2019, with another \$2.5 billion authorized.

Meanwhile, the Wisconsin budget contains new, significant investments in the priorities we all share such as health care, education, and infrastructure without raising taxes. In fact, it includes income tax cuts and property tax relief totaling over \$376 million and when you add in the marketplace bill that we passed along

with the budget, it adds up to over \$500 million.

The Wisconsin budget does include modest increases in vehicle registration and title fees so we can use more cash from the segregated transportation fund to pay for roads and rely less on borrowing. If you drive a regular gasoline fueled car and keep it, your increase will be \$10 per year for registration fees. Light duty trucks, some SUVs, hybrid/electric vehicles, and newly titled vehicles will see slightly larger increases.

In Illinois, the gas tax just doubled to 38 cents a gallon, with permission for certain counties and the city of Chicago to collect more gas taxes. Registration costs will increase across all types of passenger vehicles, ranging from an extra \$50 per year for a standard automobile to an additional \$200 per year for an electric vehicle.

Despite all these revenue increases, Illinois still does not have a balanced budget for the 19th year in a row. Their Rainy Day Fund is negligible and they are sitting on a mountain of unpaid bills.

In Wisconsin, our state finances are strong, our pension system is fully funded and our 2019-2021 budget includes a Rainy Day Fund deposit of \$290 million for a total balance of \$617 million!

Illinois has once again opted for a spending plan that grows government with increased taxes. Meanwhile, the Wisconsin budget includes tax relief, responsible investments, and doesn't unnecessarily grow government.

As the Vice-Chair of the Joint Finance Committee, I can attest to the work the Legislature did to craft a budget that benefits all of Wisconsin; a budget that invests in people, not programs, and focuses on areas of agreement that benefit all of our citizens. This budget reflects the priorities of Wisconsin as a whole, as well as the unique needs of individual districts served by our members.

It is my sincere hope that the Wisconsin budget is approved quickly and without significant changes. That way, both Wisconsin and Illinois residents can set politics aside, get out of their bubbles, and enjoy all the great things that a Wisconsin summer has to offer.

-Loudenbeck, R-Clinton, represents the 31st Assembly District consisting of eastern Rock and western Walworth counties.