

Howard Marklein: There is more to the vetoes than meets the eye

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The State Budget was signed into law on July 3, 2019. On that day, Governor Tony Evers also released general descriptions of 78 vetoes that reshaped much of the legislature's intent for the State Budget.

The non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB), Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) and many legislators and their teams have spent hours analyzing the vetoes to fully understand the content and impact of the Governor's decisions. It is a complex process that requires us to cross reference the budget bill with State Statutes and other resources. Read the LFB's analysis [here](#).

I finally feel like I have a relatively firm grasp on the 78 vetoes and I want to share what I learned with you. Several of the vetoes will have consequences for our communities and I am working on strategies to encourage the Governor and his agencies to reconsider legislative intent and the potential impact on you. We have the opportunity to turn some things around and I am working hard to find ways to right-the-ship.

Nearly 19% of the vetoes, worth \$172 million and 34 positions, changed legislative intent and gave unelected bureaucrats in state agencies the ability to decide where the funds will be spent. My biggest concern about this is that the philosophy of the current administration tends to lean toward allocating money and people to Milwaukee and Madison before sending it to rural communities.

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For example, one of the most significant vetoes was to cut \$15 million from funding that was allocated for local roads and to veto all of the language that described how the remaining \$75 million would be distributed to local governments to fix our

roads. This put all of the money we allocated for local roads into the hands of unelected bureaucrats at the Department of Transportation (DOT). They were given carte blanche to spend the money! That's not what we wanted. You elected me to look out for rural Wisconsin and this type of veto takes away my role to represent you.

As a result, my colleagues in the Senate and I have been working hard to clarify our intent for these dollars and we sent DOT Secretary-Designee Craig Thompson a letter to encourage him to follow our original plan.

On Thursday, July 18, 2019, Sec. Designee Thompson announced that the DOT will mostly return to our plan for the remaining \$75 million in the state budget after the Governor's cut. Towns, counties, villages and cities will be eligible for the same percentages of the funding that we approved in the legislature's version of the budget. The biggest differences are the reduced funding and that transit projects and other non-road transportation projects will also be eligible. However, they will only be funded through the allocation for the specific type of municipality that applies.

Our local towns will not be paying for Milwaukee's trolley, but if Milwaukee wants to apply for money to expand the trolley for the upcoming Democratic National Convention, they can do so out of their own allocation. We'll have to watch the city, village and county portions closely to ensure that rural cities, villages and counties do not lose out to their urban counterparts.

While the application process for these funds is still in development, I am hopeful that the communities I serve will be eligible and able to participate in this grant program so that our local roads get fixed. I will continue to work with the DOT and offer my assistance to ensure that the process to distribute these funds is accessible to the people I serve. We need to fix our roads now! This was the entire intent for these dollars all along and I am glad we were able to turn this around.

Another good example of this issue happened in northern Wisconsin. The legislature allocated \$15 million for the Northern Wisconsin Regional Crisis Center to help northern counties with people facing mental health crises. Right now, just like in southwestern Wisconsin, law enforcement in northern Wisconsin has to transport people in mental health crisis hundreds of miles to Winnebago Mental Health Institute because it is the only option. This is not fair to the person who is in crisis. They are taken hours away from their home when they need the support of their

families and friends the most.

We have the same challenges in southwest Wisconsin. I was looking forward to working with several local groups in our counties to watch the roll-out of the Northern Wisconsin Regional Crisis Center to see if we could put together something together for the next budget.

Unfortunately, the Governor vetoed the language to create the center and redirected the \$15 million to expand the Mendota Juvenile Treatment Center in Madison. This completely and utterly contradicts our intent for these funds to help a rural community with a mental health issue and further demonstrates the Governor's proclivity to send funds to Madison instead of rural Wisconsin.

There were other vetoes that made absolutely no sense to me or seemed to be aimed at personal, political retaliation. One of these vetoes cut \$100,000 to fix the section of the Elroy-Sparta Bike Trail that was destroyed in the 2018 flooding. Fortunately, the nature of the veto gave the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) carte blanche to spend it on "trails or parks projects" and I am hoping to turn this back around and get the trail fixed. But I can't figure out why the Governor would veto this project which would be really good for the people in our communities! We need this trail open for economic development and tourism! It would be very sad if this veto happened because of political retaliation.

I am also concerned about the motivation behind vetoing \$3 million that the legislature intended for a Nitrate Testing Program for Private Wells. In the self-declared "Year of Clean Water," the Governor claims that his veto was because the JFC would have to allocate the money once the program was designed and he didn't want to give the legislature funds to "potentially use for other purposes." However, it seems odd to me that the reason for his veto mirrors exactly what several of his vetoes do for state agencies. Why then can agencies spend money "for other purposes"?

I also struggle to understand why the Governor would veto the funding for a school focused on helping students with Autism, a Suicide Prevent Grant for a Hmong organization and funding for the wildly successful Fab Lab program that several of our schools have used to build awesome, cutting-edge educational opportunities for our students. I just can't understand the rationale behind these vetoes.

Again, I am working on strategies to encourage the Governor and his agencies to

reconsider legislative intent and the potential impact on you. I will keep you posted.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have any questions or need assistance with any state-related matters.

- Marklein, R-Spring Green, represents the 17th Senate District.