STATE AFFAIRS
WISPOLITICS
Wisconsin's Premier Political News Service

Jon Erpenbach: Everyone in Wisconsin deserves clean drinking water

Posted on Thursday, Oct 31, 2019

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

WEST POINT – From the very beginning of Governor Evers' term, he made his priorities clear by declaring 2019 the Year of Clean Drinking Water. During his State of the State address in January, he promoted investing millions of dollars to address water quality, from replacing lead service lines, to addressing manure contamination in Wisconsin. Many of our communities face challenges that threaten their health and safety due to polluted drinking water. That's why Democrats are committed to strengthening clean water protections and addressing this public health crisis.

While Governor Evers proposed a bold budget that reflected the voices of the people, who simply want clean and safe drinking water, there is still a long road ahead. Every Wisconsinite should be able to drink water from their tap, but for a lot of people, that is not the reality.

Legislative Democrats recently introduced a list of priorities – "Forward Together." This agenda includes many of the areas that Democrats will be focusing on this fall, including clean water. Below are the Democrat's top priorities for clean water:

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. Get the app or access via desktop.

– Replace lead pipes to ensure clean drinking water

– Promote sustainable water management practices for family farms

– Help homeowners fix contaminated wells

– Limit runoff pollution from large industrial farms

– Prevent toxic PFAS contamination

The 2019-2021 budget invests more than $32.65 million in improving water quality throughout our state. While these investments are essential, there is still more we can do. More than two-thirds of Wisconsin residents use groundwater for drinking water, through a private well or public water system, and it is our job to enact standards and regulations to protect that supply.

One of the ways that the Governor invested in improving water quality around the state was through increasing bonding authority for Soil and Water Resource Management. While Republicans cut his proposal, he was still successful in increasing bonding by $7 million. This program, which is administered by DATCP, provides assistance to farmers to implement conservation practices and reduce pollution from agriculture. This protects our natural resources and increases long-term farm profitability.

Additionally, in July, Governor Evers signed an executive order relating to addressing lead poisoning in Wisconsin. This came after Republicans drastically slashed Governor Evers' proposal to address lead exposure and prevent poisoning from the budget, by over $21 million and eliminated $40 million to replace lead water lines throughout the entire state. The executive order directs the Department of Health Services (DHS) to address this crisis in a robust and comprehensive way through a multi-pronged approach, and to promote collaboration among departments and community organizations to prevent, treat, remove, abate, and survey lead efforts.

There is not a single, simple solution to address our water quality issues. However, I am confident that we will be able to work across the aisle to protect this basic right. Everyone deserves to have access to clean drinking water, regardless of where they live, or where their tap water comes from. There is still a far way to go, but the important thing is that, under Governor Evers, we are moving forward.

– Erpenbach, D-West Point, represents the 27th Senate District.