

# Robyn Vining: GOP prefers the special interest budget, not the people's budget

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Last week, the co-chairs of the Joint Finance Committee Sen. Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) and Rep. John Nygren (R-Marinette) released a memo announcing that their first motion on the 2019-20 state budget would discard 131 important provisions from the Governor's budget, including the popular and fiscally responsible Medicaid expansion. This is a blatantly partisan move from the Republicans, and one that does not reflect the will of the people.

I ran for office to represent the people of my community. When I knocked on doors, I heard people's distrust of politicians and the influence that special interests held over them. I made a promise to my constituents that I was going to fight for their interests. Sometimes that means rejecting the efforts of the big corporate donors who are working against the will of the people, and this is one of those times.

So why are the Republicans doing this? Who are they serving?

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People's lives should not be a partisan issue. 70% of people support Medicaid expansion in Wisconsin, according to the most recent Marquette University Law School poll. We have heard this support time and time again in the JFC public hearings and our own budget listening sessions across the state. We are listening to the people - that's why this is the People's Budget and that's why it includes Medicaid expansion.

By rejecting the Medicaid expansion, they are rejecting Medicaid coverage to 82,000 additional Wisconsinites, \$1.6 billion of federal dollars for healthcare investments, and state savings of \$324 million. In fact, the Journal Sentinel just reported that the Governor's plan provides \$836.7 million in additional health spending at no cost to the state. This is a good deal for Wisconsin.

In Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties alone, 26,000 more people would be covered under Medicaid and \$776 million of new investments would go to healthcare services if we expand. These are new investments in mental health, dental care, lead abatement, and postpartum coverage for new mothers.

The \$1.6 billion in federal grants is not revenue from a new tax, but rather money we have each already paid in federal taxes, and we are simply bringing that money home. Right now, Wisconsinites are subsidizing surrounding states with our federal taxes. The People's Budget brings that money home both in the form of Medicaid expansion, and the federal grant programs which go to fund healthcare investments.

It's important to note that without accepting Medicaid expansion, we can't make the crucial investments into healthcare that our state and our people are asking for. These investments would include the Healthy Women, Healthy Babies initiative, which seeks to improve birth outcomes in our state, and to protect the lives of mothers. Without the funding for this initiative, Wisconsin will continue with the worst infant mortality rates in the nation, and some of the worst maternal mortality rates, both disproportionately more common for people of color.

Republicans have made it clear that they prefer special interests over the people's interests. Their rhetoric disguises this preference by calling it "privatization," but we're not fooled. They want the Special Interest Budget, not The People's Budget.

As Lt. Gov. Barnes said at the press conference last week in Milwaukee, this is not just a failure for the budget, but a moral failure for all Wisconsinites who deserve access to quality and affordable healthcare. A budget is a moral document, and if our budget doesn't serve the needs of our people, versus the special interests, then we have failed our people.

I urge my colleagues across the aisle to reconsider their position - keep Medicaid expansion in the budget. I urge our communities to keep contacting their legislators to let them know that the people want Medicaid expansion and the people want a

budget that's for them. We have to make Wisconsin work for the people, because we represent the people - not the special interests.

Call your state legislators in support of Medicaid expansion at 1-800-362-9472.

- *Vining, D-Wauwatosa, represents the 14th Senate District.*