

Sen. Erpenbach: Governor's leadership moves Wisconsin forward

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CONTACT: Senator Jon Erpenbach
7/31/2019 608.266.6670

WEST POINT, WI – Now that the budget has come and gone, it should be a time that we both remember the missed opportunities, and celebrate the long-overdue and historic investments that were made in Wisconsin. Due to Governor Evers' bold vision for our state, Republicans were forced to confront their failed policies over the last eight years, and come up with solutions to make Wisconsin a place where people want to live, work, and raise a family. Unfortunately, even though Governor Evers took the high road, and signed the budget, after weeks of speculations on whether he would veto the entire budget for missing key people-driven priorities, Republicans are continuing to fight against the people of Wisconsin.

It was announced that the conservative, billionaire-funded law firm, the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty (WILL) is seeking legal action against Governor Evers for using his constitutionally granted ability to use vetoes on the State Budget. The Governor used his partial vetoes to restore priorities of the people of Wisconsin, after many were silenced during the budget process, and even though Republicans voted overwhelming for the budget, they are sending taxpayers into, yet another, long and drawn-out legal process.

The People's Budget was crafted through a vision put forward by the people of Wisconsin. It reflected the priorities of students, families, and seniors, who engaged and asked for change. Everyone was welcome to take part in shaping the budget, regardless of your political affiliations, zip code, or financial situation, and the budget put forward would have benefited everyone in the state.

Unfortunately, Republicans on the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) stripped key proposals from the budget on their first vote during budget deliberations, and continued to cut and remove proposals throughout the budget process. Ultimately, Wisconsin ended with a budget that, in comparison to the People's Budget was less effective, less efficient, and, in many places, financially irresponsible. Today, Republicans are taking things a step farther with an ill-intentioned lawsuit that is aimed at dismantling our ability to work for the people of Wisconsin, and gaining more power for themselves at the expense of Wisconsinites.

Regardless of the continued Republican hissy-fits over lost elections, under the Governor's leadership, Wisconsin is in a better place today than we have been over the past 8 years. In areas such as education, infrastructure, and health care, Wisconsinites will see an increase in investments and steps forward to improve our state for everyone.

For education, we saw the first increase to special education reimbursement in more than a decade. On top of that, Governor Evers was able to restore nearly all of the special education dollars cut from the first year with his veto pen, by adding over \$50 million in new state aid that year alone. Additionally, with the 2019-2021 budget, total school aids will see an increase of over \$500 million compared to the year prior. Our schools have been woefully underfunded, causing tax payers to raise their own taxes in order to make up the difference, and Wisconsin's increased funding will go a long way towards helping our schools and communities succeed.

For transportation, overall spending on Wisconsin's long-neglected roads will see a much-needed increase, while at the same time, lowering our state's borrowing. The funding includes \$465 million for our highways, local roads, and transit aids, with \$320 million going directly for state highway rehabilitation. In addition, these funding increases are not expected to cause any delay in major highway development projects, and our state is ready to get to work on fixing our crumbling infrastructure. Notably, this budget recognizes the importance of returning power to local governments to respond to needs, by increasing funding for local transportation and transit projects. While Governor Evers put forward a bold and innovative plan to fix our crumbling infrastructure, this budget is a big step forward to accomplishing those goals and making Wisconsin work for everyone.

For health care, I continue to be extremely disappointed that Republicans rejected the Medicaid Expansion. The expansion would have been the fiscally-responsible steps towards making sure everyone in Wisconsin had access to the care they need.

However, the Governor was able to make investments in many great programs that protect the people of our state. The budget includes investments in mental health and substance abuse care, increased funding for veterans and seniors, and investments in the health of women and children. Whether you live in rural area or a city, the budget takes everyone into account to protect safety net programs, and invest in communities. Wisconsinites still deserve to get back their federal dollars in order to fund programs long-term and ensure that increased funding will be there for future generations, but the Governor worked hard to make sure Wisconsinites see investments today.

The budget that our Republican colleagues sent to the Governor falls short in many areas, and sacrifices some of the priorities of many Wisconsinites, but it is still leaps and bounds from where we were last year. Republicans missed opportunities to increase the quality of life for many of their constituents, but with the Governor's influence, we were able to work together to improve programs and invest in areas of need. While this could be a time for the celebration of bi-partisanship, with more Republican power-grabs through undue lawsuits, I guess that's just another missed opportunity.