

# ‘UpFront’: LeMahieu, Johnson debate transportation funding, Medicaid expansion

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With the Republican-controlled Joint Finance Committee preparing to wrap up work on the state budget, Sens. LaTonya Johnson and Devin LeMahieu on Sunday’s episode of “UpFront” debated the committee’s actions on transportation funding and Medicaid expansion.

The JFC last week scrapped Gov. Tony Evers’ proposed 8 cents-per-gallon gas tax increase, instead approving a \$95 increase in the title transfer fee, pushing it to \$164.50, and a \$10 increase in the annual registration fee for cars.

LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, told host Adrienne Pedersen that with an increasing shift to hybrid and electric vehicles, the gas tax isn’t a long-term solution to funding transportation.

“Raising the gas tax may be a short-term fix, but we’re looking for long-term fixes for our transportation infrastructure in the state of Wisconsin, and a fixed fee increase like this provides that long-term stability,” he said on the program, which is produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

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LeMahieu also noted that under Evers’ plan, the gas tax would adjust with inflation without giving lawmakers a chance to weigh in on any increases.

Johnson, D-Milwaukee, said a gas tax increase spreads the cost to both drivers from Wisconsin and those who visit from other states.

“Proposing a title fee, that just sticks that cost to Wisconsin residents,” Johnson

said, adding that the fee increases may be difficult to pay for those with low or fixed incomes.

Johnson said under the GOP's plan, the title transfer fee will be the same regardless of the vehicle's value, while a gas tax depends on how much people drive.

The two also addressed Evers' proposed Medicaid expansion, which JFC Republicans removed from the budget.

Johnson said under Medicaid expansion the state would bring in \$1.6 billion more in federal funds while saving the state \$324 million. She said under Republicans' plan, the state will spend \$300 million more in state funds and bring in \$1.2 billion less from the federal government.

"This is our opportunity to use money that Wisconsinites have already paid in taxes and to provide those services that are most needed," Johnson said.

LeMahieu noted the state has consistently ranked in the top five in health care quality the top 10 in the percentage of those with insurance.

"Just expanding welfare ... I don't think is in the best interest of Wisconsin," he said.

He noted Republicans put an addition \$60 million into Medicaid reimbursement and increased pay for nursing home and personal and family care workers.

"We think we've provided a great solution to make sure the neediest in society have that coverage that they need," LeMahieu said.

Also on the program, Gov. Tony Evers and first lady Kathy Evers in a joint interview addressed women in politics and other issues.

Kathy Evers is chairwoman of a committee that planned the state's celebration of its 100th anniversary of ratifying the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. The event will be held today from noon to 3 p.m. at the Capitol.

"You look back 100 years, or even 70 years beyond that, at how women have worked very hard to try to get the right to vote," Kathy Evers said. "We have to keep that legacy going. We still have issues of people having the right to vote and we want to make sure that the legacy of women's suffrage continues within Wisconsin and make sure that everybody has the right to vote."

Asked about the relatively large number of women on his staff, Tony Evers said he's hired women throughout his career.

"They have been a rock," he said. "I'm very pleased with the opportunity I have had to give women voice, and frankly, power and authority, to do really important and incredible things."

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