

Howard Marklein: It's Simple: Use Medicaid surplus to continue COVID-19 operations

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As we near the end of 2020, Wisconsin faces the stark reality that Federal funds for COVID-19 operations in our state will not be funded unless the Federal governments acts. The likelihood of Congress reaching an agreement before the Christmas holiday is bleak.

The Wisconsin State Senate has come up with a simple, efficient and effective plan to take care of Wisconsin and cover our needs until the Federal government takes action. We need to use our significant surplus in Medicaid funds to continue testing, tracing and COVID-19 operations in January.

This plan is simple because the Medicaid program currently has a projected surplus of \$269 million by the end of March 2021, even with increased expenses for the state. We generally know how much we need to continue operations to test, trace and take care of Wisconsinites in January and we have plenty of funds to do this without taking funding from other priorities.

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We know that it will cost us \$7 million to continue funding the National Guard's testing operations through January. We also know that the state is sending approximately \$13 million to county public health departments for tracing each month. The field hospital at State Fair Park in Milwaukee County is another possible expense, even though it is significantly under-utilized right now. As of this writing

(12/4/20), there are eight (8) patients receiving care at this facility.

This plan can be executed easily and efficiently. The Governor and one of his agencies simply need to request funding from the legislature's Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) in a 13.10 motion. The committee convenes, discusses the request and votes on the proposal and any changes the committee seeks to make. Then the funding is allocated.

This plan does not need to go through the full legislative process. It does not require legislation, a hearing, an executive session and floor sessions in both houses. It is extremely efficient and effective as we face the stark reality that funding for these operations will end in less than a month.

Both Governor Tony Evers and the State Assembly have proposed detailed, complicated legislation that includes much more than this simple response. While many of these ideas and provisions have merit and should be done, they are not as urgent as providing the funding necessary to continue taking care of our citizens.

I believe that this simple approach is the right way to go as we near the end of the calendar year. The Governor must make a request immediately and the JFC must meet to allocate funding. We need to act. This is a way to do what needs to be done quickly, efficiently and effectively for everyone in Wisconsin.

As always, please do not hesitate to connect with me to provide input, ideas or to seek assistance. Send an email to sen.marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov or call 608-266-0703.

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