

Rep. Nygren: Gov. Evers administration must end the blame game with UI backlog

Posted on Tuesday, Sep 29, 2020

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Madison—State Representative John Nygren (R-Marinette), Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Finance has learned the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) did not request funding for IT system upgrades in the upcoming budget. This development contradicts the repeated statements from the Evers administration that the antiquated computer system was one of the main reasons for the massive backlog of unemployment insurance claims.

“Since March, hundreds of thousands of workers lost their jobs and were faced with serious financial difficulties,” said Rep. Nygren. “Instead of working to fix the problems at DWD, Gov. Evers has consistently blamed the UI backlog on outdated computer systems. Even last week, after he fired his Secretary for failing to address the backlog, Gov. Evers blamed the computer systems. When DWD submitted its agency budget request, I was surprised to see that the department did not request any funding for IT upgrades.”

In a 177-page budget request, the only mention of IT systems is another attempt to blame Gov. Evers’ mismanagement of the UI backlog on IT systems. Earlier this year, former DWD Secretary Caleb Frostman claimed that DWD had been studying plans to improve IT systems for well over a year and solicited bids for the project in 2019. However, in a cover letter to his former employer, Frostman simply claims DWD is still studying how to develop IT system improvements.

“If DWD were serious about addressing the computer problems, it would have included a request in its agency budget for upgrading IT systems, like other state

agencies did. It seems this failure by Gov. Evers' administration exposes another attempt to lay the blame elsewhere. Enough excuses, the buck stops with Gov. Evers. The blame game must end," added Rep. Nygren.

Since May, the average number of days from application to regular UI payment has increased by 41%. A recent audit found that only 0.5% of 41.1 million telephone calls to the UI call center were answered. The governor and DWD have repeatedly missed their own deadlines to eliminate the backlog and even claimed they were doing a "great job" in a legislative hearing.

"It's well past time for Gov. Evers to address the UI backlog. Wisconsinites continue to struggle due to Gov. Evers' inaction and mismanagement and they desperately need him to step up and fix the mess at DWD."