

# Bill Kaplan: Boss Vos dictates rejecting critical federal funding

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The Wisconsin State Journal editorialized: “Wisconsin ranks near the bottom of states – 45th out of 50 – in harnessing money from Uncle Sam, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts. So why is the Republican-run legislature – again – risking if not snubbing federal dollars from Washington that taxpayers here deserve, given all the money Wisconsin citizens pay the IRS? It doesn’t make fiscal or common sense.” Nor is it conservative. It’s simply idiotic and imprudent.

However, Wisconsin GOP leaders have a long history of rejecting federal funding. Former Governor Scott Walker blew off \$810 million to upgrade a passenger rail line from Chicago through Milwaukee to Madison. Moreover, Wisconsin paid a hefty settlement (\$millions) for abrogating a contract with Talgo, a Spanish train manufacturer. GOP Assembly Speaker Robin Vos clamored for rejecting the trains built for Wisconsin. Finally, state funding instead of federal funding was used to upgrade the Milwaukee train station.

It was the same with Walker’s rejecting \$37 million in federal funding for an Affordable Care Act (ACA) state exchange to sell private insurance. “State (healthcare) policymakers say they can run their own exchanges more cheaply and efficiently, and can better respond to residents’ and insurers’ needs” (than the federal exchange) according to Kaiser Health News. Worse was Walker’s rejection of 100 percent federal funding for three years, declining to a permanent 90 percent, for ACA Medicaid expansion.

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However, Walker and Vos were happy to throw away state taxpayers' money - more than \$4 billion - on the ever shrinking Foxconn deal. Former Indiana GOP Governor Mitch Daniels said: "Nothing in public life is more dangerous ... than politicians chasing 'jobs' with the people's checkbook. They can buy their way into the ribbon-cutting photos knowing that if they grossly overbid, they won't be around when the bills come due." Thankfully, Democratic Governor Tony Evers renegotiated the Foxconn deal, "saving taxpayers \$2.77 billion". But Vos keeps blaming others for the end of his mirage.

However, a remarkable press release from Democratic legislators on the Joint Finance Committee makes clear that Vos and other GOP legislators are repeating history - "In the past year, Republicans have 'missed opportunities' for Wisconsin working families in the following ways:

- May 2020, Republicans lost out on \$25 million in federal funding (for) unemployment benefits because they were too slow to act ... .
- Wisconsin almost lost \$70 million per month in federal FoodShare money because of a Republican lawsuit to strike down (Governor Evers') health emergency order, only saved by quick action and negotiations by Governor Evers (with the Biden administration).
- Republicans have rejected \$1.6 billion in additional federal funding by refusing to expand BadgerCare (ACA Medicaid) 2021-2023 (by comparison GOP-led Wyoming, the most Republican state in 2020 elections, is still considering expanding Medicaid).
- Wisconsin has lost a separate \$1.6 billion since 2013 by not expanding BadgerCare.
- Last week, Republicans underfunded the education budget so severely, Wisconsin may lose out on \$1.5 billion in federal aid for schools."

This is sheer GOP incompetence and mendacity. Boss Vos must go.

*-Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.*