

Broad backing for broadband

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GOP and Dem Joint Finance Committee members agree that a big investment in broadband is needed in rural areas.

But that was the extent of agreement.

During a Milwaukee business panel, Joint Committee on Finance members Evan Goyke, D-Milwaukee, and Jessie Rodriguez, R-Oak Creek, debated which provisions in the Gov. Tony Evers' biennial budget would have the most impact on the state. These provisions range from health care to infrastructure to education.

"[Broadband] is an area that we've heard many stakeholders, whether it be the schools, the public libraries, economic development organizations around the state, ask for us to look at," Rodriguez told the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce briefing. "It is an area that we're certainly going to look at."

While both representatives agreed on the importance of broadband for rural communities and businesses, Goyke and Rodriguez drew lines on funding for schools and school choice, marijuana legalization and Medicaid.

"The most important single item in the governor's proposal is the expansion of eligibility of the BadgerCare system," Goyke said. "The state would receive savings of about \$1.6 billion dollars over the course of the next two years, and obviously, I have plans for that \$1.6 billion dollars as well!"

Rodriguez raised concerns regarding where the money for the budget would come from. She also flagged items that would only receive a one-time incentive from the federal government — including Medicaid expansion.

“As we hear from constituents that are asking us to expand the program, they say ‘Let’s put it into mental health, let’s put it into senior care,’ let’s put it into all these things they would like to prioritize. But unfortunately, it’s never going to be enough,” Rodriguez pointed out. “People are expecting us to fund that down the road.”

-By Addison Lathers

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