

# Howard Marklein: A responsible stimulus plan to spend federal funds in Wisconsin

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The Wisconsin State Senate and State Assembly have written 11 bills to provide direction for allocating just over \$2 billion of the \$3.2 billion that the Federal government is sending to our state government from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). This massive spending bill is sending a deluge of taxpayer money to our state and we must take it into consideration as we write the next state budget.

The Responsible Stimulus Plan reflects the legislature's priorities to invest in people, improve infrastructure and boost our economy as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a thoughtful, thorough plan to work with the Governor to dedicate massive Federal investments into the things that matter most to the people we serve.

Both houses of the legislature have spent considerable time and effort to develop a real plan after listening and understanding the needs of our people, communities and industries. This plan provides relief and investment to all communities, of all sizes, statewide. Our plan puts money back into the hands of the people.

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As you know, we are on the starting line of the legislature's work on the state budget, but we do not know how - or when - the Governor will allocate the massive amount of Federal funding available to Wisconsin in the most recent stimulus plan.

These bills provide specific plans based on real priorities like local roads, broadband, water infrastructure, emergency response operations, long term care facilities and rural economic development and recovery.

We cannot ask state taxpayers to foot the bill if there is Federal cash available to us that could pay for our priorities. These are all tax dollars, paid for by tax payers. We need to spend them wisely. The Responsible Stimulus Plan does that. It invests in people. It pays for infrastructure. It will boost our economy.

I support all 11 bills of the Responsible Stimulus Plan package, but there are several that are particularly important to me because they answer the call I have heard from many of you, the constituents I serve.

Senate Bill (SB) 274 invests significant funds to fix our local roads. This bill will send \$2 million to every county and \$2,000 per road mile to every town, village and city. I consistently hear from constituents and local government leadership who demand our support to fix their roads. This is the right way to invest these funds.

SB 274 sends funding directly to counties and municipalities. It is not competitive, nor does it require matching funds. It is simply funding to fix and maintain roads. That's it. But that's everything to many of you.

SB 272 directs the Governor to use ARPA funds to keep the Unemployment Trust Fund whole. The Trust Fund has been tapped repeatedly throughout the last year to help those who were unemployed due to COVID-19 while protecting the employers who worked hard to keep their doors open. In the near future, we will need to backfill some of this funding to avoid creating a new tax for employers all around the state. This is exactly what these funds should be used for.

SB 278 invests \$500 million of ARPA funds for broadband expansion through the Rural Broadband Expansion Grant program. This program has successfully expanded broadband into unserved and underserved areas of our state since 2014. It is important that we continue using the grant program, which is working well, to expand. This bill also directs the grant program to spend \$125 million per year from 2021-2024 in order to allow stakeholders time to develop meaningful projects for maximum expansion to unserved communities.

Again, we have a tremendous, unique opportunity to invest Federal funds into Wisconsin's priorities before we ask Wisconsin taxpayers to foot the bill. It will be

nearly impossible to write a state budget without knowing where the deluge of Federal funding is going to be spent in our state.

While the Governor has given us some general, broad categories, he has not provided specifics. The specifics in these bills are partially derived from his budget proposal and we hope he will work with us to lay the groundwork for a productive budget process. We can make transformational investments and we need to do it now.

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