

JFC Democrats: A budget Wisconsinites want

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After a year of uncertainty and hardship, our state needs bold policies to help families, communities and small businesses bounce back better than before the COVID-19 pandemic

Over the last month, we have listened to people from all across Wisconsin on Governor Tony Evers' Bounceback Budget. After four hearings and thousands of emails, one thing is abundantly clear – Wisconsinites want and deserve the investments this budget makes in our economy, public schools, health care, environment and communities.

When asked, a majority of Wisconsinites say they support increased funding for K-12 public schools, fairly funding special education services, accepting federal funds to expand BadgerCare, and modernizing our outdated laws on marijuana.

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Further, on the top of the minds of families, small business owners, and farmers, is the damage the pandemic wrought on Wisconsin's economy and their ability to be financially secure. In addition to tax relief for working families, we know Wisconsinites support Governor Evers' proposed investments supporting local businesses, kick starting startups, and strengthening our agricultural economy and rural communities.

For years, we've heard story after story from parents and students about the devastating impact inadequate funding has on our 860,000 public school children – with a special emphasis on the need to increase special education funding, which

has not kept pace with the rising costs. Throughout the four Joint Finance Committee public hearings, Wisconsinites once again showed their support for increased public education funding. The investment we make in students today creates a path to success and results in better economic opportunities for future generations, and Governor Evers budget 'connects the dots' by ensuring all of our children, regardless of their zip code, have the opportunity to thrive.

Another issue that can make or break a family's finances is health care. We heard from many individuals about the importance of investing in caregivers, local health clinics, and access to affordable health care. That's exactly what the Governor's budget proposal aims to do by expanding BadgerCare and ensuring greater access to affordable, quality coverage, lowering premiums and prescription drug costs, and generating millions to be re-invested in the health and wellbeing all Wisconsinites.

Expanding BadgerCare is the best fiscal decision for our state, and would allow an estimated 90,000 hardworking people to access affordable healthcare across Wisconsin. Moreover, under the federal American Rescue Plan Act, if we expand BadgerCare, our state could receive an additional one billion dollar incentive payment. That's right, one billion dollars on top of the millions of dollars Wisconsin would already save. Rejecting this deal would be fiscally and socially irresponsible when we stand to help so many and save so much for the entire state.

The Badger Bounceback Budget is chock-full of provisions that the people of Wisconsin voted for and expect lawmakers to deliver on. Unfortunately, Republicans are once again planning to ignore your voices. Instead of focusing on ways to help our communities bounce back, they would rather play politics and scrap the governor's budget completely, even if that means ignoring the needs of Wisconsinites.

By rejecting this budget, Republicans will jeopardize necessary investments in health care, schools, and communities, even as Wisconsinites struggle to recover from this past year. Their opposition is remarkable and disproportionate after hearing from hundreds of Wisconsinites - a huge majority - who testified in support of the Badger Bounceback Budget to the Joint Finance. To make this budget real, we need people in every corner of our state to continue to mobilize, contact members of the state Legislature, and voice your support for this budget and the investments it makes for all Wisconsinites.

Wisconsin workers and families have had to endure a lot this past year. The last

thing we need is politicians jeopardizing a prosperous economic bounce back for our state and everyone living here. Republicans have an opportunity to come to the table, work with legislative Democrats and the governor, and deliver comprehensive solutions that are supported by a majority of Wisconsinites.

It would be disappointing if history repeated itself and Republicans chose political retribution over listening to the priorities and wishes of the people of our state.

— *By Sens. Jon Erpenbach and LaTonya Johnson, and Reps. Evan Goyke and Greta Neubauer.*