

# **WisDems: ICYMI: Racine Journal Times: Mason says Biden saved Racine: Federal spending bills prevented massive cuts in 2022 budget, mayor says**

Posted on Thursday, Oct 21, 2021

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Madison, Wis. — Today, the Racine Journal Times reported on Mayor Cory Mason's 2022 budget address, in which Mayor Mason credited President Joe Biden for saving Racine.

Due to long-lasting economic strife — caused by former Republican Gov. Scott Walker's total mismanagement of Wisconsin — Racine has seen a string of tough budgets that burdened city employees and residents. But this year, Mayor Mason stood triumphantly in City Hall and proclaimed that Racine was building back better than ever. He credited President Joe Biden and Democrats in Congress delivering for Wisconsin.

This latest praise is echoed by the Racine state Representative, Rep. Greta Neubauer, who recently lauded the Biden agenda in an opinion column titled, "[We Must Build Back Better.](#)"

Read the full coverage of Mayor Mason's address below:

Racine Journal Times: [Mason says Biden saved Racine: Federal spending bills prevented massive cuts in 2022 budget, mayor says](#)

Previous budgets under Mayor Cory Mason have been marked by massive cuts,

leading to protests from city employees and lawsuits after their health benefits were cut.

The 2022 budget Mason presented Tuesday evening isn't nearly as dire or, in his words, as "draconian" as previous proposals have been. He said there's one reason for that: The city's portion of the nearly \$2 trillion federal American Rescue Plan Act.

That [spending bill](#) gave the [City of Racine \\$46.98 million](#) — \$36.16 million more than Racine County's remaining 16 municipalities combined.

The proposed 2022 budget, Mason said, includes no cuts to services, gives 1% "cost of living" pay raises to city staff and an increase in the city's contributions to employees' health savings accounts.

"I know the changes we made in health insurance a few years ago were necessary for the fiscal health of our city. But they also had a real fiscal impact on some of our employees' budgets at home," Mason said. "It is my hope that the city contribution helps reduce that impact and makes health care more affordable."

In 2019, Mason and other city leaders saw city workers — firefighters, cops, public works employees, parks and recreation workers, office staff and others — protesting inside and outside City Hall when budget cuts led to drastic cuts to health insurance for current and retired employees. When Mason's office proposed the cuts, he wrote in a commentary published in The Journal Times that ["other options are worse."](#) Those cuts narrowly made it through the City Council by a [vote of 8-7](#).

Hundreds of city retirees [filed a lawsuit](#) in September 2020 against the city regarding the cuts. That lawsuit is ongoing.

In a lengthy opening statement to Mason's 23-minute budget address Tuesday night — he delivered it virtually and took no questions from the media — the mayor profusely and repeatedly thanked the Biden administration. Mason said the ARPA funding lifted a load off the city's shoulders, enabling it to balance the 2022 budget without making further significant cuts.

Mason, like Joe Biden, is a Democrat.

The [ARPA passed Congress and the Senate in March](#) with no Republicans voting for it, two Republicans not voting, two independents voting in favor of it, one Democrat voting against, and all other Democrats in favor.

Mason further railed against state rules passed under former Gov. Scott Walker that limited municipalities abilities to raise taxes so as to avoid cuts. Due to [levy limits](#) passed about 10 years ago, cities have very few ways to raise property taxes unless there is new construction in the city. Racine, like most old and landlocked cities, has had very little new construction in recent years.

“This administration,” Mason said, referring to his own mayoralty, which began after he [won an October 2017 special election](#), “inherited structural deficits, spending limits imposed by the Legislature, a once-in-a-century storm that ravaged our lakefront, and of course COVID. The structural deficits and spending limits have made the three previous budgets difficult for all of us.

“We have had to wrestle with the fact that our expenses are going up faster than the money we are collecting. Because of state spending restrictions, no increased value to our property tax base can be added to our operational budget unless the value comes from new construction.”

To get around those hurdles, Mason said that his office has “struggled to make hard choices: reducing benefits to employees, eliminating positions through attrition, and in some cases raising fees ... None of those choices were pleasant. Those hard choices put us in a position where our structural deficit is now smaller than it was before.

“Then COVID hit: devastating the economy, locally here as well. City finances were not immune to the impact of the coronavirus. This year was shaping up to be every bit as difficult as previous years’ budgets.

“I stand here today, however, not to deliver a budget address based on austerity, or reductions in services or positions. I stand before you now to post a budget that is balanced, cuts no services, eliminates no staff positions, and reduces the property tax rate.

“None of this would be possible were it not for President Joe Biden and the American Recovery Plan Act. The president was sent millions in federal dollars to stabilize our budget and reinvest in our community. I want to thank the president of the United States for saving our city, and countless cities just like ours all over the country.”

As for ARPA funds, the City Council has so far allocated less than \$9 million of the city’s \$46.98 million, which needs to be [fully allocated by the end of 2024](#). Racine

so far has approved ARPA funding for COVID-19 [vaccine incentives](#), establishing a [\\$1.5 million “land bank” to help rehabilitate Racine’s aging housing stock](#), \$1 million for forgivable loans to encourage city employees to buy houses in Racine, and to purchase to new medical first responder pumpers for the Racine Fire Department.

“Rescue plan funds give us a once in a generation opportunity to scale up programs, to measure our success, focus on equity, and make real impacts on the disparities and deficits that we know exist in this community,” Mason said. “Racine will build back better.”

Mason delivered the speech virtually from his office in City Hall. He did not take questions from the press.