

# Melissa Agard: Wisconsin deserves a budget that works for everyone

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Entering the budget season in early 2023, Wisconsin stood in a strong financial position with a historic nearly \$7 billion dollar surplus.

With this in mind, Governor Evers put forward a budget focused on the people of our state. Not only did his proposal make needed investments, it reflected what the majority of Wisconsinites want and support. And let me be clear, these are not divisive partisan issues – they’re consensus building policies that simply aim to help people and respond to their will.

Health care access, child care affordability, family leave to take care of a child or a sick loved one, and cannabis legalization are just a few of the items that have broad support across the state – everyone except the Republicans in the State Capitol.

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So what did Republicans do with that historic \$7 billion surplus and these wildly popular items? They fell short of what Wisconsinites want, what Governor Evers proposed, and what Democrats in the legislature championed. And missed the mark with a tax cut aimed at millionaires and billionaires instead of the working families and main street businesses who are the backbone of our economy.

As we enter the final stages of the budget process, I am frustrated that we are not able to help make Wisconsin be a place where people want to live, work and play because of Republican action.

We could have funded the Child Care Counts program, which was vital in supporting

our kids and keeping our economy strong. Instead, Republicans gutted the program leaving the future of too many working families uncertain. A recent report estimates that if the looming child care cliff is not addressed, Wisconsin risks closing 2,110 child care programs, impacting 87,425 of our kids.

We could have finally expanded Medicaid in Wisconsin which would save the state money while covering more individuals. It is a shameful reality that Wisconsin is one of only 10 states that have failed to take the Medicaid expansion. Remember, this is not a partisan issue as red and blue states have all made this decision to accept federal dollars which should be a policy no-brainer.

We could have aimed tax relief at the middle class like Governor Evers proposed. Instead, Republicans chose to double down on tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires.

We could have legalized cannabis in Wisconsin – increasing safety, prosperity, and honoring personal liberties, instead Republicans chose to continue down the path of prohibition.

Over and over, throughout 13 years of holding a gerrymandered majority, Republicans have proven beyond a reasonable doubt that they are not looking out for hardworking, ordinary Wisconsinites. Democrats stand ready to get our state back to a place of opportunity – a place where our state government is of, by, and for the people. Here's the bottom line: Democrats are working for Wisconsin, and Republicans are working for special interests and partisan advantage.

*-Agard, D-Madison, is Senate minority leader. She represents the 16th Senate District.*