

Rep. Madison: Republicans demonize hardworking Wisconsinites while refusing to address barriers to workforce participation

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MADISON – Today, Assembly Republicans passed a package of bills (AB 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152) that attack Wisconsin workers while failing to invest in living wage jobs, healthcare benefits, and other barriers to workforce participation such as child care, transportation, and housing.

In voting down Assembly Substitute Amendment 1 to AB 148, Republicans once again refused to expand Medicaid coverage for low-income individuals and accept federal funds guaranteed by the Affordable Care Act. Wisconsin remains one of only ten states that have refused to accept Medicaid expansion, which would allow the state to provide affordable health insurance coverage to nearly 90,000 Wisconsinites. Gov. Evers' 2023-2025 budget proposal includes expanding Medicaid under the ACA, which would draw down an additional \$2.2 billion in federal funds and save Wisconsin more than \$1.6 billion over the biennium.

Representative Madison (D-10) issued the following statement:

“Today, Republicans continued to characterize working-class Wisconsinites as lazy and unmotivated. This flies in the face of everyday Wisconsin workers who power our economy and the essential workers who sacrificed their lives to keep our state functioning at the height of the Covid-19 lockdowns. Instead of rewarding these hard-working Wisconsinites with increased wages, benefits, and protections, Republicans are prioritizing cuts to healthcare and unemployment insurance to further demonize and punish those who access state programs.

As a son of an underemployed hard-working Wisconsinite, I watched my mother work 40+ hours a week to provide for me and my siblings while making approximately \$25,000 annually. Oftentimes I spent time after school sitting in her place of work due to a lack of childcare access. Now in my adulthood, my mother is still underemployed and navigating a work-related injury while fighting her employer to gain necessary supportive services. Today's legislation favors employers over workers and does nothing to address these and other worker challenges in our economy.

Wisconsin is facing a worker shortage because of the significant structural barriers in our economy that prohibit working-class individuals from accessing dignified jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage and provide quality healthcare. In accepting the Medicaid expansion, Wisconsin has a golden opportunity to expand worker benefits, enable more workforce participation, and realize savings of more than \$1.6 billion over the biennium. Republicans in control of the Wisconsin Legislature have had this opportunity for over a decade, but they would rather play politics than help hard-working low-income individuals."

Representative Clancy (D-19) issued the following statement:

"As it turns out, it's not that people don't want to work, but that people don't want to be exploited. My wife, a business owner, used to experience 'ghosting' or people not showing up to a scheduled interview. People stopped ghosting her business when we started paying more, offered more paid time off, and because we proudly became an employer with a union. Our communities are asking to work jobs that pay a living wage, provide health insurance, retirement, paid time off, and a union. These are all things that the authors of this legislation oppose providing local requirements and incentives for. This body continues to deny municipalities local control and, in doing so, contributes to our workforce shortage.

None of the legislation passed today will do anything but make this crisis worse and punish folks when they are most in need of assistance and support. If we really want to fix this, we must raise the conditions of employment and provide real policy support for working-class folks by investing in housing, childcare, and transit."