

Sen. Larson: Trickling toward decline - Republicans ignore critical needs, swing and miss with workforce package

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Madison, WI – Like the worst summer blockbusters, today’s Senate calendar was substantial in length, but severely lacking in anything that resembles substance. With a record \$7 billion surplus at the state level, a workforce shortage in multiple sectors, local governments near the breaking point for lack of shared revenue, and the future of our public schools very much in doubt, there is much work to be done.

Unfortunately, the bills we voted on today only attempted to address one of these issues (the workforce shortage), and – like a bar league softball player trying to hit major league pitching – it was a giant swing and a miss.

Behind every one of the five bills related to unemployment insurance and workforce metrics we voted on today is a devious assumption steeped in racism – that people would rather collect unemployment checks or tap into the safety net than stand on their own two feet. This reasoning is a sad relic of the Reagan ‘80s that has somehow trickled down to the present GOP caucus despite all evidence from reality to the contrary.

There are three primary reasons that some employers can’t fill open positions: First, our population is aging and slowly shrinking. There are simply too few workers to meet the demand for them. Second, our economy is strong. This should be welcome news to all of us. Finally, many people would like to work, or work more hours than they currently do, but because of the outrageous cost of child care and lack of paid family leave, they simply aren’t able to do so.

Today's Senate action did nothing to address any of these very real drivers of our workforce shortage. However, taken in the context of states like Minnesota moving in the opposite direction by passing legislation that supports its workers, it does risk driving more people out of Wisconsin - something we simply cannot allow to happen.

We need to make Wisconsin a more attractive state to move to and live in. We do this by fully funding public schools, improving our transit infrastructure, ensuring we have enough affordable housing, and passing policies that support families and workers. Governor Evers' budget proposal did all of those things. While legislative Republicans dither on the critical issues facing our state, the rest of us are left wondering if their culture war crusades and corporate interest pandering will buy our state a one-way ticket to long-term economic decline.