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# HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

## Capitol Update

By Senator Howard Marklein

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## Funding Our Priorities While Respecting Taxpayers

Governor Tony Evers presented his budget message on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 via a video recording.

The Governor's budget message, once again, is a wish list of things for Madison and includes several divisive policy items that should be discussed in the regular legislative process. Despite the fact that Wisconsinites have weathered an unprecedented pandemic, economic impacts and ongoing uncertainty, the Governor's budget does not focus on our most important priorities, nor does it respect taxpayers.

The Governor's budget spends \$91 billion, which is nearly \$7.9 billion more than our last budget! This new spending is equal to \$1,350 for every resident of the state of Wisconsin. The net tax increase for his budget proposal is more than \$1 billion.

The Governor's budget would un-do all of the hard work and responsible budgeting that have put us in a terrific fiscal position. He is selling his budget as a "change" budget. But I don't know why we would want to change the responsible budgeting that has produced a massive budget surplus despite a pandemic. I don't know why we would want to change the reforms that have given us the largest rainy day fund in state history. And I definitely don't want to change our focus on respecting taxpayers while funding our priorities. The Governor's change budget is a bad budget for Wisconsin.

Along with huge spending and tax increases, the Governor's budget includes divisive policy like legalization of recreational and medicinal marijuana, repeals of Republican reforms that have put us into positive fiscal position despite the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, sales tax increase options and other non-fiscal items. I firmly believe that these types of topics should be discussed in the course of the regular legislative process so that all Wisconsinites have a chance to debate, provide input and contribute to the discussion. These ideas are a big deal and should not be buried in a massive document like the state budget.

There are some items in the Governor's budget that I agree with. I want to increase funding for broadband expansion. I want to fully fund the Funding Assistance Program (FAP) offered to our community first responders. Transportation, education and healthcare remain top priorities for me. However, I believe we need to craft a budget that considers every individual element as part of the whole. We cannot focus on pieces without comprehending the entire package.

As the Co-Chair of the legislature's budget-writing Joint Committee on Finance (JFC), I have been waiting anxiously for the budget process to begin. This is arguably the most important piece of legislation we craft every session. The Governor's budget address is the first step in a long, meticulous process of analysis, research, discussions and negotiations. It all starts now.

The Governor's budget is now being deeply analyzed by the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB) before their analysis is shared with the JFC. The JFC will be meeting with each of the state agencies to discuss their portion of the state budget beginning in April. We will hold a number of public hearings around the state for citizens to share their thoughts, ideas and concerns before we deliberate as a committee. We are also discussing ways for citizens to communicate with us virtually.

I am also personally planning to hold budget listening sessions for residents of the 17<sup>th</sup> Senate District in the coming weeks. I am working out logistics and will provide more information as soon as I am able. Please visit my website for more information.

Our goal is to draft a legislative version of the state budget and move it through the legislative process before the fiscal year ends on June 30, 2021. I am optimistic that the legislature will be able to achieve this goal. I am also certain that we will craft a budget that funds our state's priorities while respecting taxpayers. I will continue to protect Wisconsin's checkbook.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to [Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov). Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have any questions or need assistance with any state-related matters.