

Popular Policies Make for Wise Budgets

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Last week, Governor Evers released his biennial budget proposal, which invests our \$7 billion surplus in local communities and the people. It's vital that we work together as we continue to develop the budget.

MADISON - It's that time when the rubber meets the road. You might even say this is when your state leaders better "put up or shut up."

Every odd year the state of Wisconsin begins another budget biennium. During that two-year period, we measure our state's estimated needs and priorities and balance that with the revenue to be collected during that same two years.

As the biennial budget season kicks off, it's the perfect time to remind your elected officials of what they promised or preached during the campaign the previous year. Did your representative promise to provide more resources for your school? How often did you hear that the state should send more revenue back to cities, villages and towns? Maybe candidates in your area said they were going to fight to bring back more shared revenue to fix roads and provide fire, EMS and law enforcement services.



Whatever you heard or read from your legislators and elected leaders, now is the time to put their feet to the fire. This is an exciting time to think of all the possibilities. A new budget offers a fresh start. It's a chance to prove that we can set political grudges aside and do the people's work. It's a chance for politicians to prove they can behave like adults and work to solve problems.

That may sound optimistic to some who read this. But if we expect a stalemate, that's exactly what we'll get.

At last week's budget address, Governor Evers delivered a budget encompassing all the priorities he touted during his reelection bid last fall. Now the Joint Committee on Finance, made up of legislators from both the Assembly and the Senate, will meet and dive into the policies that make up the state's budget.



The membership of the Finance Committee is determined by the party holding the majority. Thus there are 12 Republican members and 4 Democratic members. Despite overwhelming

support for the Governor, Republicans have already rejected the Governor's budget outright.

We know from experience the budget will likely look quite different after they put it through the grinder. It's like a sausage factory, and it isn't always pretty. But there will be opportunities for public input when the committee holds hearings throughout the state. Hopefully we'll get a chance to have a hearing in western Wisconsin this spring. I would encourage everyone to attend, listen and speak in favor of the Governor's popular budget initiatives.

Every budget cycle brings with it new challenges and opportunities. Oftentimes challenges become opportunities to remedy shortcomings of previous budget choices.



A prime example of this is K-12 education. We've become too reliant on passing property tax referenda because the school funding formula doesn't work for every part of the state. Another place we see this is in shared revenue for local governments, where we've failed to keep pace with inflation. Roads and bridges have long been a point of contention as counties and municipalities have struggled to maintain them.

Turning challenges into opportunities is much easier when we have \$7 billion to use. But we must be wise with our decisions to limit future challenges and invest our resources back to the middle class who deserve tax relief.



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