

## What the Budget Says About Us

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***Sen. Smith writes about the budget investments announced by Governor Evers to support communities all across Wisconsin.***

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MADISON - Budgets are necessary to keep us on track, lay out our priorities and work toward what we want to accomplish. Every two years, the Governor introduces a budget that reflects the values of our state. The state budget is a moral document just as much as it's a financial map for the years ahead. When state leaders approve the budget, we're showing the world who we are and what we stand for.

At a time when America was building back after the social and economic crisis of the Great Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt famously said, "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." I consider these words as the golden rule for our state's budgeting responsibility.

Governor Evers appears to already be following the golden rule set by President Roosevelt. Governor Evers introduced his 2021-23 budget this week, but he set some impressive goals in

previous weeks that should make Wisconsinites proud. The Governor's budget will go a long way toward supporting our small businesses and critical industries, making healthcare more affordable and helping communities across our state recover from the pandemic.

The budget aims to address many of the issues that were apparent long before the pandemic but were made even more visible in the past year, including Wisconsin's agricultural crisis. The Governor prioritized rural prosperity efforts last year and is, once again, committed to strengthening Wisconsin's essential industry. His budget proposal invests \$43 million to support our farmers, provide additional mental health resources and create partnerships throughout the food supply industry. More than \$28 million of this investment will go toward expanding agricultural market opportunities, supporting new and innovating farming practices and strengthening our agricultural workforce.



Governor Evers' budget supports our rural communities in many other ways. He proposed legalizing medical and recreational marijuana, which would generate an estimated \$165 million in revenue for our state. This would go a long way to boost our economy and even help our rural schools with additional sparsity aid. Marijuana legalization would provide greater oversight over producers, processors and distributors. The evidence available also shows states that already legalized marijuana experienced a reduction in opioid-related deaths.

Governor Evers' budget focuses on making health care more affordable for Wisconsinites across the state. He adopted policies in his budget to lower prescription drug costs and provide greater access to mental health resources. Specifically, the Governor proposed capping insulin co-pays at \$50 and providing more oversight over the pharmaceutical supply chain. In addition, Governor Evers directed more than \$150 million in the budget to improve Wisconsinites' access to quality mental and behavioral health services and treatment.

The Governor understands the importance of investing in the industries and workforce that care for Wisconsinites from an early to old age. In the 2021-23 budget, Governor Evers directed \$140 million in his budget toward a new initiative to address quality, affordability, access, and equity for childcare in the state. Additionally, Governor Evers targeted more than \$600 million to strengthen Wisconsin's long-term care infrastructure and support the direct care workforce and family caregivers.



Before Governor Evers introduced the budget, he declared 2021 the Year of Broadband Access and announced \$200 million toward rural broadband expansion investments. This last year really showed us how every household relies on being connected to their workplace, school and healthcare provider. I hope we really can make this the year of broadband access.

Governor Evers' budget reflects the priorities of the People. These priorities must echo our state's motto, "Forward." They must uphold the ideals our country was founded on, asserting we're all equal under the law and that we have the same access to opportunity. The budget must help us create a more equitable state by removing racial and socioeconomic barriers and systems that deny success.

The budget will represent who we are as a state, whether we're a state looking out for one another or whether we're a state leaving too many behind. I choose the former and I hope you do too.

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