

Unemployment Bill Not Enough, But Step in the Right Direction

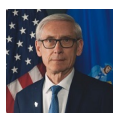
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<http://newprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/unemployment-office-line-s5.png>



After governor's special session call, Senate finally takes up special session legislation on unemployment modernization after years of inaction.

MADISON — Gov. Evers today released a statement following action by the Wisconsin State Senate on the governor's special session legislation to modernize Wisconsin's antiquated unemployment system. Today's action comes after the governor sent a letter to the Wisconsin State Legislature nearly two weeks ago urging immediate, bipartisan action on modernization.



"I believe—and I sure hope you would agree—that this time Wisconsinites deserve better than getting the runaround," Gov. Evers said in his February 4 letter. "This problem and the people we serve cannot and should not have to wait. Again. And here's the bottom line: I don't care who gets the credit, I just want to get it done."

Wisconsin's unemployment insurance system programming was developed in the early 1970s. Previous administrations and more than a decades' worth of state legislators that knew this system was outdated and failed to fix it. While a [PolitiFact inquiry](#) previously found legislative action and approval would be necessary to ensure ongoing funding for the project over multiple state budgets, yesterday, the Joint Finance Committee voted to eliminate the governor's proposed funding to initiate and make the first installment of payments on modernization, choosing instead to require seeking additional legislative approval down the road for funds to

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be released. However, the legislation, which was passed by the Senate today, does include waiving the one-week waiting period among other fixes to the unemployment system—measures the governor has repeatedly called on the Legislature to take up.

“Modernizing our unemployment system should have been done a long time ago—our system isn’t new and these problems aren’t either, and plenty of members of the Legislature have been serving long enough to no longer be able to claim ignorance,” said Gov. Evers.

“Our proposal would have ensured we had a commitment from the Legislature to fund fully modernize our system to completion. While I wish the Legislature would have provided the funding we asked for that we need to fix this system once and for all, I’m glad the Legislature is finally be taking this issue seriously after years of inaction. It’s not enough, but it’s at least a step in the right direction.”

During his State of the State address, Gov. Evers announced he would be calling a special session of the legislature to immediately begin the process toward fixing and upgrading the state’s broken unemployment system. The process proposed under the governor’s special session legislation proposed \$5.3 million to initiate the replacement process and the first installment of payments under the master lease program. The master lease program, which operates functionally similar to a home mortgage, effectively would allow the state to make a down payment on the project while paying it off over a longer, extended period of time.

On Tuesday this week, in addition to his already-proposed special session legislation, the governor also announced his [Badger Bounceback agenda](#), which includes, as promised, proposing funding to completely overhaul the antiquated system. A summary of the governor’s 2021-23 biennial budget is [here](#).