http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/foxconn-walker-ryan-johnson-s5.jpg



In addition to tax breaks for millionaires, we have FoxConn causing a drain on our state's resources during the pandemic, says Sen. Erpenbach. These past poor choices limit options now.

MADISON - Virtually, in person, or planning and executing hybrid models, students and educators across Wisconsin are showing up and doing the hard work. Families are making sacrifices and hard choices in the face of this pandemic. We should all take a lesson from this dedication and perseverance.

As of this writing, it has now been 190 days of inaction since the current leadership of the Assembly and Senate and their caucuses last answered the calls coming from every corner of the state, 6 ½ months without a single day of action on the most significant crisis we've faced in generations.

During that time away, educators from across the state preparing for the school year have raised the alarm about the lasting impact enrollment changes during a public health crisis might have on schools that are the bedrock of our shared history and future – especially in smaller and rural communities.

Schools, like all of Wisconsin's economy and way of life, would have been better served by a

unified effort in the spring to limit this virus and its impact. I salute the men and women who have dedicated their careers and lives to education and are continuing that work, in person and remotely, to this day. And I stand with the Wisconsin parents who are making sacrifices at home and difficult choices for their children's future.

Last week we saw a snapshot of the impact the ongoing pandemic is having on our schools. In the districts I represent all or of parts of, we saw enrollment drop by over 2600 students, nearly 3%.

Thankfully, Gov. Evers set the bar high for public education in his initial budget and general aid increases will help many of our schools and property taxpayers. Unfortunately, we could and should have done more. GOP budget choices included taking $500 million from the Governor's special education proposal to preserve a tax giveaway targeted primarily at millionaires. Those dollars would certainly help educators and families meet the needs of students often suffering the most curing the COVID crisis.

A pandemic that has seen the wealthy grow wealthier while the challenges for working parents have grown – much – more difficult has made our choices and priorities even more starkly clear.



As parents, students and educators face up to the extraordinary challenges of this pandemic it will be our job to rise to the challenge of continuing to support them. I will continue to support public schools that have been the cornerstones of our communities for generations. The impact of this pandemic on classrooms and homes is tremendous, and it will be our responsibility to protect the future of public education for 800,000+ students and their families in the budgets and legislation ahead.

Because of choices our colleagues in the majority caucuses made, our next budget starts out maintaining that tax giveaway for the millionaires instead of the additional $500 million that could have relieved costs local districts and their taxpayers are already required to pay for special education.

In addition to tax breaks for millionaires, we also have FoxConn causing a drain on our state's resources. Thankfully, in 2020, we find ourselves with responsible leaders at the head of the state holding them to the contract, or FoxConn alone would take over $500 million– that could be coming home to your district to reimburse 60% of special education costs you are bearing – in the next budget alone.

Our Republican colleagues made unfortunate choices when they decided to fall for the FoxConn plan in just over a month in 2017. They made another unfortunate choice when they scurried back to Madison to pass lame duck legislation designed in part to protect the FoxConn handout in just 2 days.

We recently learned how little the people have gotten for the $165 million this has already cost state taxpayers and the billions more the GOP set aside for FoxConn in budgets ahead. Buildings as empty as the promises scrawled on a single sheet of paper three years ago. Homes lost, local debt the state may have to step in for, and fewer jobs than the hundreds and thousands of small businesses across our state have fought to maintain without a fraction of the help FoxConn demanded – and even worse – got.

It is time for responsible decisions and responsible leadership. It is time to come back to Madison to answer the call from educators with an unparalleled dedication to our state instead of back rooms on the other side of the Pacific. The students, families, educators, and the businesses, Wisconsinites facing unemployment through no fault of their own and especially our health care heroes on the front lines deserve our every effort – not zero days of action in six months from legislative leaders who could not leap high or fast enough when FoxConn came calling.