

## People Speak Out About Consequences of Budget Decisions

Written by Kathleen Vinehout, State Senator 31st District

Monday, 13 April 2015 10:14 - Last Updated Tuesday, 14 April 2015 18:55

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<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/elderly-crowd-s5.jpg>



***This week, Senator Kathleen Vinehout writes about a recent Eau Claire listening session held regarding the State Budget proposal.***

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EAU CLAIRE, WI - "This is not my cup of tea," the farmer said quietly as he moved up to the microphone at the Eau Claire budget hearing.

"I'm a UW grad. I'm a farmer. I'm a tech college grad. My kids went to public school. There's a lot I could talk about today. But I'm here today for Craig, my son. He loves where he lives."

"I don't want to lose that," said Craig sitting between his parents. Craig had surgery to remove brain tumors at 3 years old. His mind is quick and his words are heartfelt.

"IRIS gives Craig the opportunity to be as independent as he can be, to do the things he enjoys" said his dad. "It helps allow my wife and me to work and be taxpayers." IRIS is a self-directed option under Medicaid.

Many others spoke about the long-term consequences of changing the health programs for the elderly and disabled.

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“People like Judy cannot support themselves,” said Mort, of his disabled 41-year-old daughter, “cannot lobby and cannot speak for themselves...they certainly do not need their programs to be seriously damaged.”

“We take care of others. We take care of people less fortunate,” Glory told listening legislators. “That’s who we are.”

A Menomonie School Board member shared his concerns about cuts to local schools.

“I wasn’t going to speak... But I can’t stand by with what I see happening. Our teachers pay a lot for their health insurance. We’ve been using our ‘budget tools’ all along. The current proposal will cost the Menomonie School District \$1 million. Can’t the governor figure out schools’ costs go up but we don’t get any additional money? No increase in the first year? Some back in the second year but it doesn’t make any sense to put it all in school levy credit. That doesn’t go to schools. How do we keep young people in Wisconsin if we keep cutting?”

He continued, “We need good news sources. WPR (Wisconsin Public Radio) offers people a choice they can’t get anywhere else. News is less balanced these days. We need a balanced source of news. And efficiencies? I’m all for that. But to put banking and credit unions into an agency that regulates tattoo parlors? I have nothing against tattoo parlors. It just doesn’t make sense. There’s a reason why we have careful regulations over banks and credit unions.”

During the presentation before the public testimony, I talked about refundable tax credits - state checks given to large businesses that owed nothing in taxes. “It’s like no state taxes taken out of your paycheck, but when you file taxes you get a check in the mail,” I told the group.

Chris, of the Eau Claire school board, did some quick math before she came forward. “You know those refundable tax credits you talked about?” she asked me. “They are the same dollar amount as the cuts to the Eau Claire School District over the last 16 years.” She handed me a three-page, double-sided list of 210 separate items reflecting the cuts made by the district.

“Even if the revenue limit is increased to \$150 per student,” she continued. “We will still have a

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\$3 million hole. Now it's about \$5 million."

Many people spoke about the long-term consequences of cuts to the UW. One Eau Claire City Councilman said the city calculated the cuts would take \$7.6 million out of Eau Claire's economy. He talked about the budget process in Eau Claire and encouraged legislators to look at a more open, deliberative process at the state level to reflect the views of all the people.

"One of our goals on the City Council is to create a community that is enticing for people to come to Eau Claire."

"Take the policy out of the budget. There is no way these things could ever be done on their own. No legislator would put their name on these proposals.... This is an entire state's budget. It affects all the people... people need to have a bigger say."

Thanks to all who came and shared concerns. Your advocacy is making a real difference.