

Federal Bill Gives WI Another Chance to Capitalize

Written by Jon Erpenbach. State Senator 27th District
Tuesday, 03 May 2016 11:35



Wisconsin taxpayers have missed out on hundreds of millions of dollars from the Federal government as a part of the Affordable Care Act implementation, but now there's a chance to push the “reset” button.

MADISON - That fact that Wisconsin taxpayers have missed out on hundreds of millions of dollars from the Federal government as a part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA-ObamaCare) implementation is not new news. One of the few states that to say “no thanks we don't want our own tax dollars back, please send it to Illinois or Texas” has been a painful decision to watch as students cannot graduate because classes are cut, potholes get bigger and another school referendum hits property taxpayer's pocketbook. Well the good news is that this bad decision by Governor Walker and the Republican majority in the Legislature can be reversed at any time. We could come in session tomorrow and get this done.

Now that no one from Wisconsin is running for President and we have seen the unnecessary struggle that the choice to refuse \$320 million just this biennium has had on our state economy, we can come back to the table and accept Federal dollars and give access to affordable health care. Not taking Federal funds does not mean that our tax dollars are squirreled away and saved for a rainy day by Congress. It just means they send our money to another state, to help them balance their budgets and help their citizens with health insurance.

Excellent new news from the Federal government is the introduction of the SAME Act by Senator Tammy Baldwin and others. This bill would push the “reset” button for Wisconsin. We could choose to accept our tax dollars back as a part of ACA and start at the same full reimbursement rate that we could have had in the first place; 100% reimbursement from the Federal government for expansion of our current BadgerCare Plus program. Under SAME, for four years we would be at 100% reimbursement, phasing down to 90% reimbursement after another three years. Still a lot better than where we are now, which is zero. This could be a huge windfall for our state budget.

What people don't understand is general purpose revenue (GPR) was used to backfill Medicaid expenses for Wisconsin this budget. That means dollars that should have gone to our schools,

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roads and UW schools were diverted because of the political decisions of the Legislature. Republicans can even accept the Federal funds for a year and then change their mind the next year. The flexibility and sheer amount of tax dollars makes this decision a no brainer.

It is time for the Legislature to put politics aside and accept Federal BadgerCare expansion funds so our financial house can improve. The SAME Act from US Senator Baldwin will provide Wisconsin a unique opportunity to hit the “reset” button for our taxpayers and citizens. It simply is time to put more than \$320 million in our coffers without raising taxes and without cuts.

For more information on the BadgerCare Plus expansion dollars or the Federal SAME Act please contact my office at sen.erpenbach@legis.wi.us or call 888-549-0027 or 608-266-6670