

A Budget Full of Deficits

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There are at least four different deficits in the state budget that is working its way through Wisconsin's legislature. Wisconsin is lagging the nation in so many respects. All these deficits certainly aren't going to help matters any.

MADISON - Wisconsin lawmakers started the process of building a new state budget in a [substantial hole](#)

. They insisted their predecessors dug it, but in truth the hole was [of their own making](#)

. When they are done, the books will be made to appear balanced on the surface *for the time being*

, even though a sizeable underlying “[structural deficit](#)

” will remain.

The ongoing inability or unwillingness of budget writers to truly put our state government in the position of taking in as much as it spends is a significant problem, but it represents only one of the budget deficits we will have in Wisconsin.

In addition to leaving a financial deficit, the proposed budget as it stands now suffers from a **common sense deficit**

as well. It not only continues to fund state programs that are not working, it throws good money after bad by expanding those failing programs. The private school voucher program has been around for a quarter-century now, and has never delivered on its promises. After more than two decades the program has not boosted student achievement as its supporters said it would. Voucher students do no better than public school students, and by some measures they do worse. Yet this budget takes more money away from public schools to fund further expansion of the voucher program.

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation established back in 2011 has been a train wreck since its inception. But despite [fresh evidence](#) that WEDC is playing fast and loose with taxpayer money but is unable to document that its actions produce much of any actual economic development, the budget includes a \$55 million *increase* in state funding for the agency.

There also is a pronounced **common good deficit** in this budget. It seeks to privatize pretty much everything, from human services and state parks to local schools and the state university system. It does this despite the fact that human services experts in other states and local communities across the country “are finding that turning over these programs to private contractors not only fails to achieve projected cost savings but also decreases access to these important services,” according to the watchdog group

[In the Public Interest](#)

- . If approved as written, the budget will make parks [more expensive to the public and will likely discourage tourism](#)
- . Top business leaders warn the planned cuts to the university system [will hurt](#) Wisconsin’s economy.

Among the many deficits in this budget is a distinct **vision deficit**. Instead of working to make higher education as [affordable](#) for future generations as past generations made it for us, lawmakers have confined themselves to debating only whether college spending should be cut by a little or a lot and whether student tuition should be kept at its stratospherically high current levels or allowed to go up even more. No thought is being given to [closing the digital divide](#), which is critical especially to rural development and a key to dealing with growing inequality. Lawmakers aren’t even showing any interest in [thinking creatively about how to avoid deep cuts without raising taxes](#).

Wisconsin is lagging the nation in so many respects, as our neighbors to the west [never](#) [hesitate](#) to remind us. All these deficits certainly aren’t going to help matters any.

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