

Making the Best of a Bad Hand

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 12 July 2023 09:26 -

<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/assembly-wi-robin-vos-s450.jpg>



Gov. Evers signed the budget last week, exercising his partial veto to modify the most harmful provisions added by Republican legislators. Our lack of political compromise is driven by gerrymandering and the resulting lack of electoral accountability.

MADISON - The big news in Madison last week was the Governor signing the budget. The even bigger news was how he did it. The Governor put his veto pen to work on 51 areas of the budget. Most notable was his veto of the tax cuts for the wealthy that Republicans crammed in at the very end of the process. Governor Evers' veto prevents Wisconsin from wasting a surplus, but many opportunities remain unaddressed and crises continue to loom.



The Governor plays two roles in the budget process; 1) he introduces a budget to the Legislature, 2) he signs the budget into law, vetoes it completely or tries to improve it through line-item vetoes. The line-item veto can't fix something as fundamentally flawed as this budget, but it can remove terrible policies and add more funding if done creatively.

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Governor Evers (D-Wisconsin) has introduced three budgets to the Republican-controlled Legislature. All three times, Republicans unilaterally rejected his budget, deciding to do it on their own. It's not the smartest or most collaborative way to start a process in which the Governor gets the final say.



If Republicans invested half the effort into working with the Governor as they do working around him, they'd save themselves a lot of work, the taxpayers a lot of money and newspapers a lot of ink. It's common practice now for Republicans to pass bills that split funding from policies for big-ticket items (as we saw in the shared revenue bill.) Republicans have also incorporated a process to retain funding through supplemental appropriations (a fancy way of saying hold back funding) so they can dole the money out as they choose. Through the last 4 ½ years, Republicans have consistently done everything possible to forego bipartisanship.

This year, Republicans plowed ahead once again and dropped a pile of garbage on the Governor's desk. It was so bad even Republicans voted against it. I, like many others, hoped the Governor would veto the entire budget to impel Republicans to govern like adults instead of grudgingly undermining the Governor like children.

Politics can be petty, ugly and downright bizarre at times. But the opportunity to stand face to face with a person who is worlds apart from you philosophically and find solutions to a problem can spark something great. Our nation and state have accomplished great things when we've worked together.

Intense political pressure is usually the catalyst for legislators across the political spectrum to

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work together. It doesn't happen often, but it can have a beautiful effect.

We've seen overwhelming public pressure for over a decade now, but nothing changes. What gives? Republicans took a year-long vacation during the pandemic. Meanwhile, worker shortages were and continue to be exacerbated by lack of child care options, and schools have been starved for funding so badly that their fates hinge on voters' willingness to raise their own property taxes.

The core issue in our lack of political compromise is electoral accountability. I've no doubt Republicans safe in 70% and 80% Republican districts have no desire to work with a Democratic Governor. In last fall's election, though, the majority of Wisconsinites overwhelmingly supported the Governor as well.

Republicans control 2/3 of the Senate districts and nearly 2/3 of the Assembly districts, mostly through a process we call "gerrymandering." When district lines are changed to make very Democratic or very Republican districts, we all lose.



In this political tug-of-war between Legislative Republicans and our Democratic Governor, remember who cowers behind gerrymandered maps and who represents the will of the voters across the state. The truth about this budget is that Republicans made their bed. Governor Evers merely tucked them in.

There's good news on the horizon. Starting this August, Republicans won't have a majority of conservative Supreme Court Justices to serve as a backstop for their gerrymandered majorities in the Senate and Assembly. We should be encouraged that fair maps for our state could be one of the first things the new court takes up this fall.

New fair district maps would bring accountability back to government and help people sleep at night knowing compromise can happen no matter what political party controls the levers of power in Wisconsin.

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Senator Smith represents District 31 in the Wisconsin State Senate. The 31st Senate District includes all of Buffalo, Pepin and Trempealeau counties and portions of Pierce, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson and St. Croix counties.