

First Glance at Governor Evers' Budget

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 06 March 2019 03:04

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Sen. Smith reviews the policies included in Gov. Tony Evers' first budget, presented to the Legislature last Thursday, including broadband expansion, nonpartisan redistricting reform, education and transportation funding, and Medicaid expansion.

MADISON - Governor Tony Evers presented his first budget to the Legislature on Thursday evening last week. It was a uniquely crafted budget. It contained encouraging policy for Wisconsin's future. And many of the Governor's budget provisions were long overdue.

The Governor's comments highlighted his goal to present the people's budget to the Legislature: "It's about creating a Wisconsin that works for everyone — a Wisconsin for us. This isn't the Tony Evers' budget, the Democratic budget, the speaker's budget, or the Republican budget — this is the people's budget. And it's one that we crafted together."

This was a very unique [budget address](#). During the Governor's speech, he presented a video about the process he used for developing the people's budget. The video showed footage of public budget listening sessions throughout December in Green Bay, La Crosse, Wausau and Milwaukee. This was the first time a new Governor hosted listening sessions while crafting his budget for introduction.

Much of the budget was exactly what the Governor laid out in his campaign, but there were many policies he included that were from the feedback he received at the listening sessions. Governor Evers' budget was specially crafted from a uniquely collaborative process.

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Many of the different policies in the budget were encouraging for Wisconsin's future -- for years we've seen devastating cuts to public schools, our universities, unsustainable borrowing and a Wisconsin that has lagged behind while the nation recovered. New ideas are needed if we are going to make Wisconsin a national leader again.

The Governor's plan to add \$78 million for broadband expansion grants is a massive increase from the \$16 million adopted in the previous budget. Broadband expansion is arguably one of the most important budget provisions for our rural communities.

The Governor also defines broadband speed as 25 megabytes while downloading and 3 megabytes while uploading. This change will ensure rural communities truly receive "broadband" internet so we can fully participate in the digital age and not be left behind.

Nonpartisan redistricting reform was also included in the Governor's budget. We need to look toward the future. Voters should choose their elected officials, not the other way around. This proposal is supported by a wide margin of citizens. It was no wonder the Governor included it in the people's budget.

For years, Republicans have stripped away essential voters' rights in Wisconsin. The Governor's inclusion of automatic voter registration is a good first step for reversing the undemocratic policies of the last 8 years and starting a new chapter of voter rights expansion in Wisconsin.

There were additional provisions in the Governor's budget that are long overdue.

When Governor Evers served as the Superintendent of Public Schools, he offered his Fair Funding for Our Future plan time and time again. Each time, Republicans punted on fixing the inequalities in our school funding formula. Republicans put politics first and kids last. Our children have suffered far too long from inaction. Now is the time to finally fulfill our constitutional duty to provide equal public education across Wisconsin by accepting the Governor's plan.

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Four budgets in a row, the Republicans kicked the can down the road by irresponsibly borrowing our way into a transportation crisis. Although I have reservations about some aspects of the Governor's transportation plan, I do give him credit for finally offering ideas to fix the problem.

Since 2014, Republican ideology prevented Wisconsin from joining 37 other states to expand Medicaid, costing Wisconsin \$1.1 billion in additional health care funding. It's a no-brainer to finally accept the Medicaid expansion money for Wisconsin.

This is just the start -- we have a long way to go before the budget bill becomes law. The Governor's unique way of crafting his budget deserves praise. His forward-looking budget is a sight for sore eyes. It's great to finally see a budget include many of the things we've been waiting far too long see.

Republicans plan to dismiss the people's budget outright. As we continue this process, Republicans and Democrats will need to look past old ways of saying "no" to each other and find new ways to say "yes" for Wisconsin.