

The Opportunity to Do What's Right

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 23 February 2022 10:47

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Sen. Smith recaps Governor Evers' 2022 State of the State Address highlighting the accomplishments from the last year and the governor's plan to keep our state moving forward.

MADISON - When the opportunity to do what's right is in front of us, we must grab it because it may not be there for long. This is something we all learn, even if it's the hard way. It's painful when we don't recognize opportunity, we hesitate and it's gone. That's when opportunity becomes regret.

Last week, Governor Evers delivered his 2022 State of the State Address, highlighting successes of the last year and future opportunities. If history is any indicator, then the opportunity before the legislature right now is unprecedented.

Here we are today with a record-high surplus and an all-time low 2.8% unemployment rate. With the 2021-23 budget, middle-class families received a 15% tax cut, totaling \$480 million in tax relief for Wisconsin. What Governor Evers has done to get us through a global pandemic and get our economy back on track is nothing short of a miracle. He's done the right thing when faced with adversity.

How we even have these historic records after the last two years is a feat in itself. Quite

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honestly, it isn't because the legislature has done anything to make that happen. On the contrary, the Republican majority has been on a mission to impede the governor at every turn.

While the legislature sat idle for over 300 days during the pandemic, Governor Evers got to work—and delivered.

Wisconsin has a projected surplus like we've never seen. I've been paying attention long enough to be able to say the \$3.8 billion dollar surplus is unheard of. Any state surplus projection can be rare, but when we have this extraordinary opportunity, it'd be foolhardy to ignore the urgent needs in our state.

On top of this surplus, Governor Evers smartly distributed over \$4.5 billion in federal funds to support our local communities. With economic recovery in mind, the governor invested in more than 1,900 non-profits and over 2,300 local governments, college campuses and school districts. Additionally, he targeted more than \$1 billion to bolster small businesses, farmers, tourism, lodging and entertainment industries in our state.

During the 2020 construction season, Governor Evers' Administration kept up with all 375 transportation projects to stay on track to help Wisconsin secure another \$105 million from other states. This happened all while the legislature chose to sit on the sideline.

In 2021, after the pandemic exacerbated the need for broadband access, the governor proposed \$200 million to close the digital divide in our rural communities in his 2021-23 budget. Despite the Republican-led Joint Finance Committee removing that amount, we still invested \$129 million into broadband expansion efforts. Governor Evers also directed another \$100 million in federal funds toward broadband expansion.

The question now is whether the legislature will choose opportunity or political gamesmanship. Maybe I should mention that we also have a record \$1.7 billion in the 'rainy day' fund.

Governor Evers has a plan to reinvest in Wisconsin and it's the right thing to do. During his State of the State Address he outlined this plan, which starts with putting \$150 back into the

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pockets of each Wisconsinite. A family of four would receive \$600 to help address rising costs and gas prices.



Under the governor's plan, barriers to childcare are reduced by expanding the Child and Dependent Care Credit and creating a new Caregiver Tax Credit. When someone is needed to care for a loved one they're less likely to be able to participate in the workforce.

Governor Evers' plan invests \$750 million in our schools while holding the line on property taxes. There's no question that providing opportunity to all kids no matter their zip code is the right thing to do.

While corporate America has been taking advantage of the growing economy by raising prices, we're sitting on your money that could help right now. The governor's plan, importantly, still leaves \$2 billion untouched.

During his Address to the legislature, Governor Evers added, "indifference in this building is getting expensive." It's time to act. The governor called for a special session for the legislature to pass this plan. Will Republican legislators help Governor Evers continue to do the right thing?