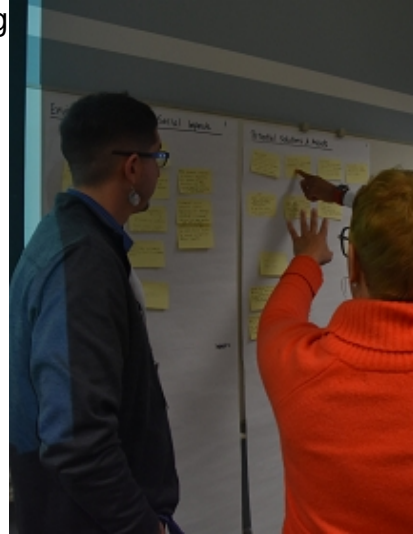


Jeff Smith: The Importance of Being Prepared

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 13 May 2020 09:26

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Elected leaders have a responsibility to invest in safety nets to protect citizens when disaster strikes. Being prepared by properly investing in our future will ensure we're successful for years to come.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - As we become responsible adults we are faced with many decisions that can affect our future and the future of our families. We choose a career, decide where we work and how to prepare for retirement. We may choose a life partner, start a family, move and continue to make important decisions because, after all, we're responsible to prepare our children to be independent.

We buy insurance policies to be prepared for the worst-case scenarios for just about every circumstance: a house fire, car accident, health crisis and even death.

Almost all of the choices we make are with our future in mind, whether it's next week, next year or 20 years from now. We do this because we know from experience that anything can happen and though we can't predict the future, we can be prepared for it.

However, during this highly unusual and frightening time, the lack of foresight and planning by Republican leaders is on display. From the White House to Wisconsin, there have been years of tearing down the very safety nets that we, as tax-paying citizens, expected would be there when

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we needed them.

The safety nets we had in place were intended to support people when disaster struck. But over the last decade, the Majority Party latched onto a buzzword that became their rallying cry against the government: “austerity.” They bolstered the notion that we’d all be better off if we cut government funding.

Now, while facing a public health crisis, we see the visible ramifications of austerity policies. The reluctance to strategize on ways to make healthcare more affordable and accessible, on the part of Republicans, by expanding Medicaid or embracing a universal healthcare system is a significant reason why a pandemic is scary for so many. For almost a decade, Republicans in Wisconsin have rejected Medicaid expansion, even though the expansion would save our state \$324.5 million and provide coverage for 82,000 low-income individuals. Looking ahead, Wisconsin would also bring in an additional \$1.6 billion in federal healthcare funding if we expanded Medicaid now.

Without adequate health insurance, some may even be putting themselves at risk because they can’t afford a doctor’s visit, thus putting others at risk during this crisis. Republicans still aren’t making public health investments even in the middle of a pandemic; they cut a key provision from Governor Evers’ COVID-19 relief proposal that would have allocated \$200 million for costs related to the current or a future public health emergency.

We’re fortunate to have dedicated public servants in local public health departments who grabbed the reins and are making the most of what they have to protect us. But still, Republican legislators choose to ignore the professionals and even look for more ways to limit their resources.

While all of this is happening, there is also the terrifying reality of not collecting a paycheck. That is why we have agencies at both the federal and state levels that work to provide support for those struggling to make ends meet. The Department of Workforce Development is currently left scrambling to help thousands affected by this crisis; the workload is further exacerbated by outdated phone systems.

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