

Collaboration Is Not A Dirty Word

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Senator Smith writes about Governor Evers' latest call for the Legislature to convene in special session to address Wisconsin's childcare crisis and workforce shortage.

MADISON - A call for a special session is a constitutional privilege of the Governor, invoked when the legislature fails to address an urgent priority. Last week, Governor Tony Evers called a special session for September 20th, a response to the gigantic holes Republicans left when they gutted the Governor's budget this summer.

When partisan politics cloud the judgment of the legislature, calling a special session is often the Governor's only available option. This power allows the Governor to do something when the legislature fails to act and give the legislature one more chance to do the right thing.

The current leaders of our legislature have time and again ignored the needs and the will of the people of Wisconsin. Legislative Republicans have pursued an oppositional strategy against the Governor who is from the opposite party, regardless of his decisive statewide win. If an idea comes from a Democrat, no matter the potential it has, Republicans won't consider it. This is what has happened as a result of gerrymandering legislators into safe districts, where

they don't have to worry about significant opposition.



Governor Evers has tried to get Republicans to consider solutions such as farm relief, school aids, gun violence, reproductive rights and direct referenda, in which voters can make their voices heard directly on the issues that matter to them.

While ignoring all of these needs and more, Republicans chose to stay home for 300 days during the height of the pandemic. Meanwhile, the people they supposedly serve were struggling to pay their bills, and the unemployment system could not keep up.

The Governor called a special session to modernize our unemployment system to speed up responses and support the workers who could not safely and responsibly leave their homes for their jobs.

What was the Republican response? Those in charge of our legislature continually chose politics while the public suffers..

This special session is an opportunity to do what we came to Madison for – work for solutions.

When calling this special session, Governor Evers focused on what is probably the most pressing issue of all: workforce development. The pandemic illustrated the need to address a worker shortage that has been looming for years. With baby boomers aging out of the workforce and the impossibility of finding affordable child care, businesses have struggled to

staff up.



Wisconsin's record-low unemployment rate of 2.4% leave businesses struggling to fully staff up. This isn't just a Wisconsin problem – businesses nationally have adjusted their hours and how they operate. Other states are coming up with innovative solutions, and in order to stay competitive, Wisconsin's solutions to this issue must be creative and aggressive.

Using federal funds from the pandemic, Governor Evers has been able to keep childcare centers afloat these past three years through Child Care Counts program. This has helped child care centers keep costs lower and pay their workers a competitive wage. Unfortunately for parents and child care providers, that money is slated to expire in January with no relief in sight. Similarly, paid family and medical leave was included in the Governor's budget proposal, but was slashed by Republicans from the final product of deliberations.



Continuing Child Care Counts and initiating a paid family and medical leave program are just two parts of the workforce development plan called for by the Governor. It also calls for investments in higher education and incentives for workers in teaching and healthcare, measures that will bolster our workforce for years to come and prepare us for a prosperous

future.

We still have a \$4 billion surplus. This proposal calls for a quarter of that surplus to be invested in the growth of Wisconsin's economy. We can afford to do this, and the opportunity is now.

Governor Evers' call for the special session on September 20th gives the legislature one more chance to address the issues neglected due to partisanship.

Legislation introduced on the floor can be amended, and the strength of the legislative body is its collaborative approach to lawmaking.

So the question is: why does debate and compromise scare Republican leadership?

You'll have to ask them.

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.

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