

How the Budget Connects Our Community

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Sen. Smith reflects on the budget listening session he hosted last week. The conversation was a reminder of how the budget connects us to one another and will help us build stronger communities.

MADISON - I had an amazing conversation with a number of constituents who attended my budget listening session last week. The attendees, who were strangers to each other, shared personal and heartfelt stories. They made it clear that the decisions made by their legislators truly do affect them and their communities.

We discussed the importance of mental health treatment and appropriate intervention for those experiencing a mental health crisis. Community members shared their support for investing in our public schools and our rural roads. We also hit on ways to strengthen our economy, create jobs and expand broadband access. When community members come together, we open up about our shared values and the ways public policies impact our everyday life.

Governor Tony Evers encourages us to think of the budget as connecting the dots – how one investment can connect and address more than one issue. The budget also shows how we're

all connected and rely on one another. If you succeed, the community succeeds. When the community succeeds, everyone is better off. When the tide rises, all ships are raised. We all do better when we all do better.

It starts with our children and investing in opportunities for them to succeed. Even before the pandemic struck, Wisconsin faced a childcare crisis. Parents need affordable, reliable and convenient childcare. Children need a safe environment that provides developmental support. Most business leaders agree and support initiatives to keep local childcare centers open and staffed by professional providers. Employees are more likely to be productive and stay in their roles knowing their children are in good hands and close by.

When children have early support and a healthy start, they're better prepared for the educational experience in front of them. But we must invest in our public schools so every student has the same opportunities to succeed.

Governor Evers often says that every dollar invested in our kids is an investment in our state's future. The Governor backs this up by restoring the state's two-thirds funding commitment for public schools and proposing significant investments in mental health support, special education funding and sparsity aid for our rural schools. Education prepares the next generation of innovators and workers.

Education investments today prepare children for life's future challenges and saves our state from an overly expensive correctional system down the road. When we invest in education, we're investing in safer communities and a reduced incarceration rate. That's why I'm glad to see the Governor's budget invest more dollars in the UW System than the Department of Corrections. We need less prisons when we provide more educational opportunities for all Wisconsinites.

The opportunity to learn is easier in today's world when every household has access to fast, reliable broadband. We must make bold investments in broadband infrastructure now, just like our leaders did with electricity generations before us. The Governor's broadband plan would invest up to \$200 million from the American Rescue Plan Act in addition to the \$200 million he proposed in his budget.

