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Remove Barriers and Make Higher Ed More Affordable

By State Representative Dianne Hesselbein

The value of higher education is clear: For our state to prosper and succeed, our next generation must possess the knowledge to imagine, innovate and create. Those seeking higher education should not be locked out due to rising costs. Fortunately, Governor Evers' 2021-23 Biennial Budget Proposal works to remove financial barriers and make higher education more affordable for all Wisconsinites.

Governor Evers' budget proposes the largest investment the UW System has seen in two decades. The proposal will continue and fund the current tuition freeze for Wisconsin residents, help campuses recover from COVID-19, and expand the "Bucky's Tuition Promise" Program for low-income students. Evers' budget will also provide a critical, 17% funding increase for Wisconsin Technical Colleges.

Serving on the Governor's Task Force on Student Debt, it became clear to me both students and families need help dealing with higher education costs and resulting student loan debt. I am pleased our recommendations were fully embraced and incorporated into the Governor's proposal. Notably, borrowers will benefit from the creation of a Student Loan Borrower Bill of Rights, and the Office of Student Loan Ombudsman.

If approved, the budget will address a variety of project requests to repair and update aging educational infrastructure throughout the state. This will help attract incoming freshmen to our campuses across the state and ensure the UW System remains innovative and competitive. Unfortunately, Republicans in the State Building Commission voted down all proposed capital improvements found in the budget, but I hope to see them revived moving forward.

Education must remain available and affordable for all Wisconsinites seeking to improve themselves, and in turn, improve our state. Without needed state funding, however, many will confront financial challenges they cannot meet. We must continue to make higher education affordable.

As President Obama said, "Higher education cannot be a luxury reserved just for a privileged few. It is an economic necessity for every family. And every family should be able to afford it." I believe Governor Evers' budget proposals for the UW-System and Technical Colleges will make higher education affordable for every Wisconsin family.

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