

## The Mis-education of Wisconsin Republicans

By

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Budgets are blueprints for an organization's priorities. In the state of Wisconsin our budget shows the people of the state what our leaders' value—and with the latest actions by the Republican-led Joint Finance Committee, I'd venture to say they don't value the people of this state very much. Last week, the twelve Republican members of the state's powerful budget-writing committee chose to eliminate nearly four hundred measures proposed by Governor Evers, which translates into more than \$3 billion in revenue sources.

Of the items ditched by Republicans were Medicaid expansion, full funding of four-year old kindergarten, ending the “dark store” loophole, legalization of medical marijuana, and a ban on vaping in schools. This is odd, as some of these ideas were proposed in past sessions by Republican members of the legislature. What remains painfully obvious is the obstinate relationship between Republican leadership and the East Wing; and equally as frustrating, the lack of collaboration between Republican leadership in the Assembly and the Senate. At times it seems as though there are “too many cooks in the kitchen”. This often results in a mess and the hardworking people of the state are left holding the bag, literally and figuratively.

For example, Medicaid expansion should have been a no-brainer for inclusion in the state budget. Expanding Medicaid eligibility would save the state \$1.6 Billion by tapping additional federal funds and cover nearly 91,000 additional people while expanding benefits such as addiction treatment and enabling more payments to providers such as hospitals and nursing homes. This would be a win/win situation for our state, as we struggle to attract and retain obstetricians, other physician specialists, and mental health clinicians, especially in our rural areas. Women's reproductive health has long been a staple of the Republican platform, therefore it would make perfect sense that they would do everything in their power to ensure all Wisconsin women had access to doctors; but I guess not.

The same goes for education. I would think the Republicans would want to honor former Senator Luther Olsen, longtime chair of the Senate Education Committee, by fully funding four-year-old kindergarten. This would relieve districts who offer K4 of making up the 40% deficit attached to the program (K4 is only funded at 60%). With there being so much discussion in the capitol about early education and improving reading scores, this should have been common sense. But, as a friend of mine often says, “common sense isn't so common anymore”.

What I know for sure is that the people of Wisconsin are not fools and they know when they're being hoodwinked. Its time out for lip service, empty rhetoric, and politricks. This biennial budget needs to have substance and actual help for Wisconsin's families. Insurance and healthcare are life or death situations for many people, as are educational resources, and actual tax relief (not frivolous sales tax holidays that end up causing counties billions later).

No more smoke in mirrors. Get it together and deliver what the people want and need.