



Roll Up Your Sleeves and Pass a Budget

By Rep. Katrina Shankland

It's Groundhog Day in the Capitol. With the state's biennial budget weeks past due, Wisconsin is one of just a handful of states that has not enacted a budget – all thanks to Republicans bickering behind closed doors. Even Illinois has passed a budget. Despite Republicans having total control of Wisconsin state government, this is the second budget in a row that they've failed to pass by the statutory deadline.

This unnecessary budget delay is forcing our local governments, school districts, and construction workers to wait even longer to develop their own budgets and find out if their projects are on track. A budget is about priorities, and these problems could have been avoided if the state legislature had voted on the most important funding issues first – like our public schools and transportation infrastructure. But every day that passes by is another day that Republican lawmakers withhold needed investments in our Wisconsin communities.

Most people would be fired from their job if they had missed a critical deadline by weeks and couldn't explain why. Yet Governor Walker and Republican legislators continue to enjoy government paychecks and healthcare while they argue behind closed doors over whether to delay construction projects or cut the proposed public school budget. And the cost of inaction is great – the budget delay is creating uncertainty for our schools and could actually shut down progress on critical highway and building projects, putting people's jobs at risk.

Wisconsin's public schools have lost over a billion dollars in state aid since Governor Walker and Republican legislators took the reins of state government. To give our school children the best opportunities to succeed, Democrats have introduced a plan to lower property taxes, fully restore funding to our public schools, and make new investments in special education programs and sparsity aid to rural districts. But Republican lawmakers haven't even called a budget committee meeting for a month, leaving our kids shortchanged once again.

Republican leaders have also failed to identify a funding solution for our state's crumbling roads and bridges. Even worse, they haven't even tried. Wisconsin's roads are among the worst in the nation and we are facing a large transportation deficit. But what is Governor Walker's "solution"? He is asking for a federal bailout of \$341 million – ten times the federal highway redistribution funding that Wisconsin has typically received.

This is the same governor who flatly rejected federal money to expand BadgerCare, rural broadband, high-speed rail, and early childhood development, which would have helped working people in Wisconsin. The irony is rich and hypocritical. Real leadership is rolling up your sleeves and working with both parties to find a solution, not punting the problem to someone else.

The chaos in Madison sure looks a lot like the chaos in Washington, D.C., and the people of Wisconsin are the ones paying the price. Democrats have presented proposals to fund our state's priorities and are ready to work across the aisle to develop solutions. We invite our Republican colleagues to come out of their closed door sessions and join us at the table. Instead of backroom deals, we can end Groundhog Day in the Capitol and pass a budget that actually works for Wisconsin.

Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) represents the 71st Assembly District in Portage County and serves on the legislature's Joint Committee on Finance.