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School aid payments delayed amid GOP budget fiasco

Worse yet, Legislative Republicans budget actions cut rural school funding

MADISON, WI – Noting that the latest budget deadline to come and go has a damaging impact on school district budgets, Democratic Senate Leaders Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse) and Janet Bewley (D-Delta) criticized Republican budget delays and cuts that will hit rural school districts especially hard. The state's Department of Public Instruction had been set to certify sparsity aid payments to school districts as of today, August 31st. Rather than heed the call to action on behalf of rural districts, GOP leaders delayed a committee vote on education funding and ultimately settled on a plan that cut Gov. Walker's proposed increase.

“Democrats were ready to go with an education plan in June that would have built on the Governor's sparsity aid plan, restored the low spending revenue cap to where it should have been in 2011 and cut property taxes compared to the Governor,” said Senate Democratic Leader Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse). **“Unfortunately Republican delays and back room dealings resulted in a plan that's way too late and at least \$18 million short in sparsity aid alone.”**

A provision in Gov. Walker's budget proposal that united people in northern and western Wisconsin would have increased sparsity aid for districts with low populations. These schools are especially vulnerable to state funding cuts and the property taxpayers who support them have been especially hard hit. Republicans on the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee scrapped the Governor's plan on Monday and instead voted to increase revenue caps for low-spending districts. Absent additional state aid, this new funding burden will fall almost entirely on local property taxpayers.

“Schools and property taxpayers would have done much better under the Democratic motion,” Assistant Democratic Leader Janet Bewley (D-Delta). **“Instead, the Republicans came back with a plan to make property taxpayers pay more for voucher schools, make property taxpayers pay more for low spending districts and cut \$18 million in sparsity aid – including \$3 million from Northwest Wisconsin schools alone.”**

The Democratic budget motion would have brought the cap for low spending districts to the level GOP budgeters scrapped in 2011 and paid for the increase. And the Democratic motion would have increased sparsity aid to largely rural districts by:

- Accepting the Governor's proposed \$100 per student increase for districts with less than 746 students & less than 10 students per square mile
- Increasing eligibility to districts with less than 1,000 students
- Expand program eligibility to districts up to 2,700 students at a tiered funding rate
- And making the program sum sufficient so districts receive the full amount they qualify for

The Senators expressed hope that rank and file Republicans in the Assembly and Senate will reject the special interest handouts, property tax hikes and sparsity aid cuts in the Joint Finance package and instead work with Democrats to return taxpayers dollars back to the rural communities who pay them.

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