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Legislative Democrats Roll Out Their Priorities: *Forward Together*

By: Senator Jon Erpenbach

WEST POINT - Recently, Legislative Democrats unveiled a list of priorities that are reflective of the voices and priorities of Wisconsinites – “Forward Together.” Thanks to Governor Evers’ leadership, we made great strides in delivering on historic investments in our communities. However, there is still a lot of work to be done to deliver on the promises that were made to the people of Wisconsin. As the legislature returns for floor session this fall, Democrats will continue to work towards bold solutions to fix our schools, increase access to affordable health care, ensure clean drinking water, and reform our justice system. Additionally, Democrats will continue to be champions for workers, students, families, and seniors across Wisconsin.

The people of Wisconsin have made their priorities clear. As legislators, it is our job to listen and to work to meet the priorities of the people who make Wisconsin a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Governor Evers put forth a budget that had bold proposals to improve Wisconsin, but many of his initiatives were blocked by Republicans. Legislative Democrats are sending a message that we are ready to get things done for the people of Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Democrats are focusing on values that put families, workers, and communities first. Listed here are the priorities laid out in “Forward Together:”

- Affordable Health Care
- Quality Schools
- Clean Water
- Financial Security
- Hometown Success
- Justice Reform
- Safe Communities
- Democracy for All

Our focus on improving the lives of Wisconsinites has already started. In August, I introduced legislation to increase the eligibility limit of the Medicaid program to 133% of the federal poverty level. According to the most recent Marquette Law Poll, 70% of Wisconsinites support expanding Medicaid. By doing so, Wisconsin would be able to expand coverage to an additional 40,000 uninsured Wisconsinites, reduce the costs of premiums on the individual market, save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, and keep \$2 billion of our federal taxes in Wisconsin.

Recently, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) wrote a letter to the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) stating that the Department is on track to exceed its Medicaid budget by \$21.4 million in the new biennium. This means that without expanding Medicaid, Wisconsinites would not only lose out on savings and \$2 billion staying in

Wisconsin, but costs to state taxpayers will increase. Medicaid is an investment in Wisconsin, and as we head into the new session, the legislature has the opportunity to do what is right.

Additionally, I have introduced bipartisan legislation to legalize medical cannabis in Wisconsin. Last fall, close to one million Wisconsin voters, in both red and blue parts of the state, sent a message that they were in support of medical cannabis. This bill aims to recognize that people should not have to engage in a criminal act to access medicine for debilitating conditions. Medical cannabis is a tool to alleviate conditions such as glaucoma, cancer, ALS, chronic pain, PTSD, and Ehlers-Danlos. More and more people around Wisconsin know someone who has turned to cannabis as a medical treatment. It is time to listen to Wisconsinites and legalize medical cannabis.

These are just some examples of what I and my Democratic colleagues are working on to improve the lives of Wisconsinites. Our priorities range from increasing special education funding, replacing lead pipes, to non-partisan redistricting, cutting taxes for working families, and other priorities of Wisconsin's working families. There is still a lot of work to be done to deliver on the promises made to the people of Wisconsin. Democrats are listening to the will of the people, and basing our plans on priorities that will improve lives. We cannot ask the people of Wisconsin to settle for anything less than what they deserve. The time is now for everyone to come to the table and work to deliver on these important priorities- Forward Together.

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