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Governor Celebrates Earth Day by Vetoing Clean Water Initiatives

MADISON— Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after Governor Tony Evers vetoed [2021 Assembly Bill 243](#) which was authored by Senator Cowles, Representative Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) and others:

“What better way to celebrate Earth Day than with a veto of a bill to target \$61 million towards water quality and infrastructure initiatives that have long had bipartisan support. The Governor showed me today that his “efforts” to provide cleaner water aren’t about principles, they’re about politics. If that means rural low income residents continuing to drink contaminated water because we weren’t able to assist in replacing their well or homeowners in cities continuing to get their water through a lead service lateral because their community isn’t working proactively to address the problem, so be it, the Governor says. I was hoping to discuss this effort with the Governor all week following a request Monday to express that I hoped to see a unified approach towards the goals that Congress laid out like water infrastructure, but it appears his veto pen works quicker than his schedulers.”

Water infrastructure improvements were a [designated purpose](#) for federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act. Assembly Bill 243 required the Governor to designate \$61 million received from the latest federal COVID relief bill – the American Rescue Plan Act – for the following water quality and infrastructure related purposes which largely align with initiatives in the Governor’s proposed budget:

1. \$40 million to provide principal forgiveness loans to municipalities to cover up to 50% of the cost of the replacement of private-side lead water service lines, which will be run through the existing Safe Drinking Water Loan Program at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
2. \$12 million to the existing Urban Nonpoint Source Water Pollution Abatement and Storm Water Management Program at the DNR to continue funding municipal projects and planning that reduces urban runoff through stormwater retention, proper drainage systems, and more.
3. \$6.5 million to the existing Rural Nonpoint Source Program which is intended to pick up where the Soil and Water Management Program leaves off by funding the implementation of agricultural best management practices needed to achieve water quality goals.
4. \$2 million to the existing Well Compensation Grant Program at the DNR which provides 75% of the project cost, up to \$12,000, for rural low-income residents to replace contaminated drinking water wells with water testing above standards for certain contaminants.
5. \$500,000 to a new well testing program, run through the DNR with a new statutory structure established by the bill, to provide up to \$10,000 to counties for new well testing efforts or \$2,500 to counties to improve existing well testing efforts, with results provided to UW-Stevens Point.

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