

Holding on to Local Control

Since the Governor announced his budget in February, the capitol has been buzzing with activity. For many of us, that activity has been pointed toward making sure our rural areas are treated fairly, and that Madison's grip doesn't stifle our goals. Having served as mayor of Rice Lake, I know that some in the state government think they have all the answers – but I also know that our communities have different needs and priorities that aren't always the same as in Madison and Milwaukee.

To me, the biggest of those priorities is education. One proposal in the budget particularly concerns me in that regard: funding for the two-year and extension colleges in the UW system. Both of these valuable assets to our community are under threat in the budget. These are the schools that focus on rural and farm programs, doing great things to educate the next generation of farmers. They are also among our most responsible schools, providing an excellent education at affordable prices and ensuring that they are run as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. I am doing everything I can to make sure that they remain strong and durable.

That is why I have submitted a budget motion to preserve funding for the two-year colleges at the same level as in the previous budget, and am working with Rep. Ed Brooks to ensure the same funding for the extension schools. These schools have already found the efficiencies they need to be as effective as they can be. Throughout the last month, I have had productive meetings with Dr Yohnk, Dean of UW-Barron County, and with Chancellor Sandeen, the head of the two-year and extension programs. They have both brought home to me just how badly any further cuts would affect their schools. These vital programs must be preserved, and so I am working to build a coalition of legislators to support my budget motion and fight to do the right thing for education in our state.

Another crucial issue in Madison has been making sure that our local communities remain independent and able to govern themselves as they best see fit. I have fought for a few pieces of legislation that help to preserve local autonomy. One of those is the proposed change to the system of property tax assessment. Currently, every community controls its own assessments, ensuring that they remain accessible responsible to their respective communities. The budget proposed to remove that local control, putting assessment responsibilities in the hands of county government. I heard from many of my constituents about how problematic this change would be, and pushed for this change to be removed from the budget. I am proud to say that the leadership in the Joint Finance Committee (JFC), which controls the final budget, listened – and removed this proposal completely.

I also fought for SeniorCare, another program that is crucial to supporting many rural citizens who have spent their lives working hard to earn an honest living. This was another program that was on the chopping block in the budget. I knew just how important this program was to seniors in my district and across the state, and wrote a letter to the head of the JFC, Rep. John Nygren, explaining it. So I was very glad to see the JFC commit to fully supporting SeniorCare in the final budget.

We have had some real victories in the budget process so far, but we can't rest yet. Please continue to contact your representatives to let them know what your priorities are, and what programs you want to see supported. We as Representatives want to make sure we are crafting a budget that responds to the needs of all of the people of Wisconsin, not just the southeastern corner of the state. Your support means a great deal as we do that!