**Evers, GOP remain apart on key policy areas**

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Assembly Republicans two months ago laid out a marker for Gov. Tony Evers on policy areas where compromise could be found.

But a WisPolitics.com review found fundamental differences remain between the two factions on a number of items.

While there seems to be consensus on some issues highlighted in the Jan. 10 letter, including expansion of high-speed internet access and prevention of homelessness, Evers and Assembly Republicans disagree on several major items, based on a comparison of the governor’s executive budget proposal to the GOP letter.

Overall, Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, said he was disappointed by Evers’ budget. While he noted there appeared to be several areas where the two sides could find compromise, he called the document “divisive.”

Meanwhile a spokeswoman for Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, said he would “rather work from a clean slate.” Kit Beyer knocked Evers for proposing a budget with specifics on a number of topics in the letter without feedback from Republicans. She said the goal of the letter was to collaborate with the governor by highlighting broad topics where consensus could be found, but no collaboration occurred.

But an Evers spokeswoman said it’s time to “stop playing politics and get to work on the issues that matter most to Wisconsin families.”

“It’s unfortunate that Republicans are now backpedaling and threatening to craft their own budget instead of working with the governor on these priorities,” said spokeswoman Britt Cudaback.

Here are some of the top areas of difference:

**Income Tax Reductions**

Evers recommends creating a family and individual reinvestment credit, which would cut into the leftover tax balance of single filers making up to $100,000 and married joint filers making up to $150,000 by up to 10 percent.

The budget also calls for paying for the tax break by limiting the manufacturing and agriculture credit to only the first $300,000 of income per tax year for manufacturers. Limiting that tax credit would only cover roughly 60 percent of the estimated cost of the middle-class tax cut over the course of the biennium.

The proposal comes after Evers previously vetoed a GOP-backed measure that would provide a similar tax cut but fund it with the budget surplus.

**Enhancing high-speed internet access**

The budget contains a nearly $75 million boost to the Public Service Commission to expand access to broadband internet.

Evers also recommended that the commission partner with the Department of Administration to provide a report on internet access in the state, complete with recommendations on how to incentivize telecommunications companies to provide access to underserved communities.

Additionally, Evers in his budget targeted reaching 25 megabits per second download and 3 megabit per second upload speeds statewide by 2025.

According to the Legislative Reference Bureau, the Legislature hasn’t addressed broadband access so far this session.

**Pre-existing coverage guarantee**

Evers includes an item in his budget recommending “that the insurance marketplace guarantee health insurance for individuals with preexisting conditions.”

An Evers spokeswoman referred WisPolitics.com to a document highlighting differences between Senate Bill 37 — a pre-existing conditions coverage bill from Sen. Jon Erpenbach, D-Middleton — and Aseembly Bill 1, the effort by the Assembly GOP to cover pre-existing conditions.

According to the document, Erpenbach’s bill encompasses many of the same principles as the GOP plan. But it also requires coverage of preventive services and a number of essential health benefits, sets a floor instead of a cap on the length of the open enrollment period, and applies to short-term plans. SB 37 has not been voted on in the Senate.

AB 1, meanwhile, remains hung up in committee in the Senate. Spokesmen for Fitzgerald and Sen. Patrick Testin, R-Stevens Point — who chairs the Senate Health and Human Service committee — did not provide comment on when the bill will be taken up.

**Support for K-12 education**

Vos and Assembly Republicans called for a return to funding two-thirds of K-12 education in their letter.

Evers’ proposal meets the two-thirds mark in the first year of the biennium and exceeds it in the second year. His budget also includes an item restoring the requirement for the state to provide at least two-thirds of partial school revenues, which was repealed as part of the 2003 state budget.

**Clean water**

Evers includes several proposals to address water quality in his budget, most notably authorizing nearly $70 million in bonding to address water contamination and to replace lead pipes.

But Vos said he doesn’t believe there is a need for $70 million in bonding, because the Legislature created a program last session that allowed municipalities to replace lead pipes by partnering with local governments and property owners.

“I understand why he wants to look like he’s doing something, but the lucky thing is the Republican Legislature already has,” he said in a press conference after the budget address.

**Investments in infrastructure**

Assembly Republicans called for a thorough review of state-owned buildings to examine possible cost-saving measures and ensure proper maintenance and management.

The Department of Administration lists increasing the efficiency of buildings as a goal and targets a vacancy rate of less than 5 percent in department-owned buildings. The governor’s budget also allocates an additional $2.3 million for operating costs and maintenance staffing but does not address a top-to-bottom review.

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