



May 14, 2015

For Immediate Release

Contact Person: Billy Feitlinger, 608-239-5384 (bfeitlinger@hotmail.com)

Broad Coalition Endorses Plan for Better Budget Choices Legislators Can Avoid Devastating Cuts without Raising Taxes

Eau Claire - Today, at a press conference at the L.E. Phillips Senior Center at 3:00 pm, Better Choices Coalition and other organizations called on the Wisconsin Legislature to make better choices in 2015-2017 state budget to avoid deep cuts in vital programs and services. The coalition proposes a Better Choices Budget that meets these goals without raising state taxes.

The Better Choices Coalition believes Wisconsin needs a budget that invests in the building blocks of a strong economy. Healthy families, safe and stable communities, and a well-educated workforce are assets critical to helping Wisconsin remain a great place to live, raise families and do business. By strengthening these resources, the state budget can lay the groundwork for broad-based prosperity and an economy that works for everyone.

Richard Spindler, member of the Eau Claire School Board, said, "In March, the Eau Claire Area School District Board of Education passed a resolution urging the Governor and State Legislature to revise the Governor's budget to restore school funding to educationally adequate levels. This means the Board is asking for not only no decrease in state aid, but also providing for an increase for inflation. We thank the legislators who are committed to restoring K-12 funding for their commitment to the children in our communities."

The deep cuts in critical areas of the budget can be avoided without any new tax revenue by simply freezing two tax breaks at their current level and capturing Wisconsin's share of the funding for Medicaid expansions. More specifically, three changes to the budget would generate about \$782 million:

- Saving \$345 million by expanding BadgerCare and bringing back to Wisconsin the funding state taxpayers have been sending to Washington for Medicaid expansions;
- Halting the continued phase-in of an ineffective corporate tax break that has mushroomed in cost; and
- Reallocating \$211 million that the Governor's budget uses for poorly targeted property tax cuts that ultimately provide little benefit to most homeowners.

"I am excited to stand with Better Choices as we advocate for ways to continue Wisconsin's strong history of caring for the vulnerable, offering excellent education for our young and supporting a higher education system second to none. We can and must make choices that reverse the trends of the past four years of continuously advocating primarily for the strong and the affluent," remarked Bishop Richard Hoyme of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Members of Better Choices are talking with legislators and citizens around the state about ways to fix the budget to support programs that reflect Wisconsin values. The coalition's specific recommendations include:

- Restoring the \$300 million cut from the University of Wisconsin – one of our state's main economic engines;
- Providing \$200 million more for public schools – ensuring a quality education for our children;
- Restoring the \$33 million cut from health care services for seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income adults; and
- Providing \$11 million to adjust the Homestead Tax Credit for inflation and restoring \$26 million for the state Earned Income Tax Credit – two of the most effective supports for fixed-income homeowners and working families.

Dr. James Boulter, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, concluded by saying, "Wisconsin has a rich history in environmental policies and actions, from Rails-to-Trails to Earth Day, including visionary historical figures such as John Muir and Aldo Leopold. But the Walker budget proposal turns its back this vital history, seeking short-term, negligible cost savings at the expense of meaningful, well-established, and popular programs that enhance the quality of life for current and future generations of Wisconsinites. It proposed cuts in recycling grants that may lead to increased user fees, limits on the authority of citizen voices in managing natural resources, and reduced opportunities for investments in green jobs and clean energy innovations. It would cause harm to the people of Wisconsin and the natural environment they love so much."

###