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Sierra Club Denounces Budget Changes

Joint Finance Committee action means Wisconsinites will continue to drink polluted water, pay high energy bills, and lack access to nature, work, and school

MADISON - Wisconsin's Budget Committee, known as the Joint Finance Committee threw out Governor Evers' budget, including climate programs, drinking water programs and much more. Specifically, the Joint Finance Committee removed funding for the PFAS action plan, climate programs, energy efficiency, parks access, and more. Additionally, the committee removed the proposal to allow local governments to raise funding for transit systems.

This action comes after nearly 1,000 Wisconsinites testified at the four Joint Finance Committee hearings, most of which were in support of programs in Governor Evers' executive budget order. Massive omnibus motions were made, removing the ability to engage in a real, detailed debate about these critical programs.

In response, Wisconsin Sierra Club Chapter issued the following statements:

"Governor Evers proposed a budget that demonstrated leadership by taking action on the things Wisconsinites care about: bold climate action, safe drinking water, and access to transit and public lands. At a time of public outcry over the political games and lack of transparency of the Joint Finance Committee, the actions by the committee reinforced how out-of-touch with Wisconsinites they are. These decisions made this week by the Joint Finance Committee locks Wisconsinites into drinking polluted water, paying higher energy bills, and a lack of access to work, school, and public lands." - Elizabeth Ward, Chapter Director

"Communities across Wisconsin have been dealing with unsafe drinking water for years without adequate support from our state government, putting their health and safety at risk. Governor Evers included crucial funding for PFAS testing, prevention, and clean up in his proposed budget, and yesterday the Joint Finance Committee slashed these programs, ignoring calls for action and support. In the recent Wisconsin Conservation Congress spring hearing, 89% of participants across the state voted in favor of stricter testing and standards for PFAS. Wisconsinites need to be listened to and cared for by our state legislators, not ignored and under-resourced." - Jadine Sonoda, Campaign Coordinator

“As Wisconsin’s local roads, bridges and transit systems continue to crumble and as young Wisconsinites continue to call for more transit, walking and biking options, the Joint Finance Committee threw out many key transportation programs that were in the Governor’s executive budget. Not only is multimodal infrastructure good for the climate and public health, it draws and retains young professionals to our state and increases access to opportunities for all people, no matter their race, socio-economic class or disability.” - Cassie Steiner, Senior Campaign Coordinator

“Yesterday the Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation was hosting a hearing about AB11, a bill that would allow for fourth graders and their families to access Wisconsin state parks for free. This bill has bipartisan support and Governor Evers included a funding appropriation for this program in his executive budget. While the hearing on AB11 was happening, the Joint Finance Committee voted to remove the funding for this program from budget considerations. This is just one of many examples of short-sided decisions that the Republican members of the Joint Finance Committee are making. This decision unfairly limits our children from opportunities to access green spaces.” - Maureen McCoy, Lands Team Member

“We are saddened that at a time when many of Wisconsin’s citizens are struggling and climate impacts are harming Wisconsin’s farmers, tourism industry, and communities, the legislature is choosing to forgo clean energy solutions that would help Wisconsinites in need and stimulate Wisconsin’s economy. Wisconsin has no fossil fuels to extract and stands only to gain from advancing clean energy solutions, gaining energy independence, and being at the forefront of the clean energy economy. While our neighboring states are forging ahead, protecting their future, and lowering energy costs and burdens, once again, the Republican legislature’s politics threaten to keep us in the dark ages.” - Don Ferber, Chapter Co-Chair

The proposals that were stripped from the budget include:

- Establishment of the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy and the Office of Environmental Justice
- Increased funding for Focus on Energy
- Changes to the levy limits for local governments
- Repeal of Prohibition of Condemnation Authority for Recreational and Pedestrian Trails
- PFAS action plan and funding
- High capacity well application fees
- Several diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives
- Lead service line replacement funding
- Wild rice protection
- Changes to the Stewardship review process
- Ban on coal tar-based sealants

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest, largest, and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Sierra Club’s mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth. The Sierra Club – Wisconsin is made up of 18,000 members and supporters from throughout Wisconsin working to promote clean energy and protect land and water resources.