



Written by [Billy J. Stephen](#) on July 8, 2025

Wisconsin Budget Grows More Than 68 Percent in 14 Years

In 2010, Scott Walker's election as Wisconsin's first Republican governor since 2002 ushered in a period of GOP legislative dominance, shaping a state budget that has grown from \$66 billion in 2011-2013 to \$114.2 billion in 2025-2027. That increase was heavily influenced by federal funding fluctuations and rising expenditures on Medicaid and infrastructure. The recently passed 2025-2027 budget, signed into law by Governor Tony Evers on July 3, 2025, reflects a 15-percent increase over the previous biennium. It features a \$1.3 billion tax cut and increased funding for education and child care, but faces criticism from both parties for its reliance on federal funds and perceived fiscal shortcomings.



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Republican Budgets

Following the Tea Party movement's "red wave" in 2010, Scott Walker became Wisconsin's first Republican governor since Scott McCallum, who lost to Democrat Jim Doyle in 2002. Walker's first [biennial budget](#), covering 2011-2013, totaled \$66 billion. It relied heavily on federal funding — [from 30 percent to 35 percent](#) — largely due to [Recovery Act](#) allocations following the 2007-2009 recession.

Since then, the federal share of Wisconsin's state budget has fluctuated between 28 percent and 40 percent. That share peaked during the 2021-2023 biennium as Covid-19 relief efforts — including the [CARES Act](#), the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#), and later the [American Rescue Plan Act](#) — pumped federal dollars into state budgets nationwide. Wisconsin's budget has grown steadily over the past decade, largely driven by rising expenditures on Medicaid, infrastructure, and other programs. Total [biennial spending](#) increased as follows:

- \$68.2 billion ([2013-2015](#))
- \$72.7 billion ([2015-2017](#))
- \$76 billion ([2017-2019](#))
- \$81 billion ([2019-2021](#))
- \$87.5 billion ([2021-2023](#))
- \$99 billion ([2023-2025](#))
- \$114.2 billion ([2025-2027](#))

The 2025-2027 Budget

On [February 18, 2025](#), Governor Tony Evers introduced a [\\$119 billion budget proposal](#). The Republican-led Joint Finance Committee trimmed that figure by roughly \$8 billion and eliminated over [600](#) of the governor's proposals. The Wisconsin State Senate passed [Senate Bill 45](#), the final version of



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the state budget, on Wednesday, July 2. The Assembly followed suit in the early morning hours of Thursday, July 3.

The budget passed both chambers with bipartisan support, with most Democrats and a few Republicans voting against it. The final budget reflects a [15-percent increase](#) over the previous biennium, and a total increase of more than 68 percent since 2011. The Senate approved the measure with a [19-14](#) vote, with four Republicans voting no and five Democrats voting yes. In the Assembly, the budget passed [59-39](#), with one Republican opposing and seven Democrats in support.

Representative Scott Allen (R-Waukesha), the lone GOP Assembly member to oppose the bill, stated in a [press release](#):

As a legislator committed to fiscal responsibility and the well-being of Wisconsinites, I could not support this state budget. It fails to uphold our principles of limited government, prudent spending, and prioritizing core government functions.

Wisconsin Senate President Mary Felzkowski (R-Tomahawk) also voted against the budget. In her [press release](#), she explained:

This budget is balanced on the back of the federal government, which is \$36 trillion in debt, using a little-known gimmick: the Hospital Assessment and Access Payments provision. Governor Doyle was the first to use this provision in Wisconsin during the financial strain of the Great Recession. Now, the federal government is cracking down on states abusing this unsustainable program. This is why Governor Evers and Republican legislative leaders are rushing to complete the state budget before the president signs his “One Big Beautiful Bill” into law.

[Governor Evers signed](#) Senate Bill 45 into law at approximately 1:32 a.m., shortly after the Assembly passed it. Democrats who opposed the bill believed the budget did not spend enough on education and childcare.

Legislative Debate

During Senate debate, Democrats introduced [25 substitute amendments](#) to increase spending in areas such as child care, local government aid, and Medicaid expansion (Wisconsin is one of the [last](#) states to rightly refuse to expand Medicaid). All of the proposed amendments were rejected by the majority.

In the days leading up to the budget vote, Republican legislative leaders and Governor Evers [negotiated a deal](#) that included a \$1.3 billion income tax cut for middle-class families, averaging about \$180 annually per household. While Republicans had pushed for a larger cut, the compromise also included making the first \$24,000 of income for residents over age 67 tax-free — a move aimed at discouraging retirees from relocating to states with more favorable tax policies. Additionally, the budget eliminates the state sales tax on electricity, saving taxpayers an estimated \$178 million over the next two years. In 2023, Wisconsin Republicans proposed a [\\$3.5 billion](#) income tax cut.

Governor Evers secured key funding increases for education, infrastructure, and [child care](#) — the latter being an area where Republicans had previously refused to compromise. The University of Wisconsin System will receive a \$240 million increase, including \$94 million allocated for employee pay raises. Republicans had initially threatened funding cuts to the system over concerns about progressive



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policies on campus. The final budget also includes an additional \$200 million for roads and \$330 million for child care initiatives to replace the expiring federal Child Care Counts program enacted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Wisconsin's budget uses a maneuver to get extra federal money for hospitals, but it adds to the country's debt and still leaves a [\\$1.2 billion](#) gap where the state plans to spend more than it earns.

Will the Latest Budget Resonate With Voters?

With the passage of the latest state budget, both Republicans and Democrats will return to their districts for the summer, preparing to explain to constituents why they voted for or against the plan. The budget is expected to be a key topic on the campaign trail, particularly in competitive districts.

Republicans have held majorities in both chambers of the Wisconsin Legislature since [2011](#). However, [newly drawn legislative maps](#), enacted during the 2023-2025 session following a [ruling](#) by the state's left-leaning Supreme Court, significantly [reduced those majorities](#). Historically, the party opposite the sitting president tends to gain ground in midterm elections. With a Republican now in the White House, the Wisconsin GOP faces its greatest challenge since 2008 in retaining legislative control, potentially reshaping the state's fiscal and political trajectory.

Republicans are hoping the latest budget will benefit their more vulnerable seats. Only time will tell how it will resonate with voters — especially in an era when rooting out government waste, fraud, and abuse remains [popular](#) among conservatives. The [state government](#) should adhere to our nation's founding principles of limited government and fiscal responsibility, prioritizing the efficient use of taxpayer dollars and avoiding reliance on [unsustainable federal funds](#) to ensure long-term economic stability for Wisconsinites.



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