Governor Walker Unveils 2017-2019 Biennial Budget
by Nathan Houdek

On Wednesday, February 8, 2017, Governor Scott Walker delivered his fourth budget address and unveiled his proposed state spending plan for the 2017-2019 biennium. Governor Walker’s proposed budget spends $76 billion over the next two years – a 4.2% increase from the previous biennium. Some of the highlights of the governor’s budget include a $650 million increase for K-12 schools, numerous changes to state welfare programs, a 5% tuition cut for in-state students at UW campuses, a move to self-insurance for state employees, elimination of prevailing wage on state-funded projects, a tax cut for the two lowest income brackets, and $500 million in bonding for transportation projects.

Legislative reaction was mixed. Democrats support the increased funding for schools, but they criticize the governor for not doing enough to make up for past cuts.

Senate Democratic Leader Jennifer Shilling also criticized the governor for failing to address the $1 billion transportation deficit. According to Shilling, “a budget that fails to address the $1 billion transportation funding deficit is not a balanced budget.”

Meanwhile, Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald struck a cautionary tone about the level of spending in the governor’s budget saying, "We have to be sure that we’re not doing something we’re going to have to revisit two years from now, or god forbid, sooner than that."

In a written statement, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos said, “this is a good budget proposal but a work in progress. It’s disappointing Governor Walker has forgotten that a long-term solution for transportation is a priority, too.”

The budget bills (Senate Bill 30/Assembly Bill 64) will now go to the Joint Finance Committee for review over the next few months before being sent to the State Senate and State Assembly for approval. A complete overview of the state budget process can be found [here](michaelbeststrategies.com).