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President's Column: State Budget Will Have Lasting Impact on Access to Health Care

At the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA), we often say that good health care policy makes good politics. Never has that been more evident than last week, when state lawmakers raced against a loudly ticking Congressional clock to ensure Wisconsin could provide \$740 million in increased Medicaid payments to hospitals.

If the governor and the Legislature had acted a day late, Wisconsin would have been far more than a dollar short. Hospitals would have lost out on the \$740 million in increased Medicaid payments that will be used to improve access to care, invest in providers and enhance critical health care infrastructure. And the state would have lost out on another \$300 million to fund the Medicaid program.

But they didn't. Lawmakers in Madison came together, Republicans and Democrats, to pass a state budget that allowed Wisconsin to maximize its state-directed payment program (i.e. hospital assessment), like most other states in the country.

This outcome was anything but certain. To be honest, it felt doomed in early June when budget negotiations broke down between Governor Tony Evers and Republican leaders.



Kyle O'Brien

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When the news broke that negotiations fell apart, WHA immediately called on lawmakers to come back to the negotiating table. To their credit, they did.

For some, it may have been politically easier to sit back and blame the other side of the aisle for inaction. But that's not what happened.

What you saw in Madison last week is a government that worked.

According to WHA's most recent financial data, one-third of hospitals have negative operating margins as government payer-mixes creep up with an aging population and commercial reimbursement rates fall short of the ever-increasing cost to deliver care. While two hospital closures in the Chippewa Valley grabbed headlines, there were concerning trends across the industry that necessitated decisive action by lawmakers.

Last week's budget vote may go down as one of the most important actions the state has ever taken to provide necessary resources to hospitals across Wisconsin. And they did it, against many odds.

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WHA was honored to work alongside the governor, legislative leaders and lawmakers from both parties who made this possible, including their staff and non-partisan legislative service agencies that were drafting last-minute amendments to the budget bill through the night.

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For the first time in modern history, a state budget was passed by both houses of the Legislature and signed by the governor in less than 24 hours. Their responsiveness to our call will undoubtedly help stabilize and improve health care in rural and urban communities across Wisconsin. They deserve credit for their action.

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EDUCATION EVENTS

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