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COMMITTEE ON
FINANCIAL SERVICES

CAPITAL MARKETS, INSURANCE, AND GSEs
INTERNATIONAL MONETARY POLICY AND TRADE
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The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

My state of Wisconsin is in turmoil over Governor Scott Walker's changes to collective bargaining rights under the guise of balancing the budget.

He recently presented his full budget for the 2011-2013 biennium. It comes as no surprise that his budget is as divisive as his attempt to end collective bargaining.

His budget is less about numbers and more about ideology. He slashes education funding, eliminates teacher standards and ties the hands of city leaders to make up for the cuts. He could make seniors and the disabled wait in line for health care. He wants to deny health care to some of the most vulnerable Wisconsinites. He may try to completely privatize food assistance programs. He wants to end city recycling programs – and in separate legislation – he wants to stop wind energy. He has also jeopardized Federal transit funding.

Wisconsin and our budget survived this recession much better than many other states. And while I respect the Governor's duty to present a balanced budget, I question his wisdom to do it on the backs of the working class while giving tax cuts to corporations. I am sure you do too.

There is no question about it. Governor Scott Walker's budget will cost Wisconsin jobs.

And when coupled with what Congressional Republicans are trying to do, my district and all of Wisconsin face a dual threat that could severely limit the state's ability to participate in our nation's economic recovery.

We are under siege, and we need your help.

I ask the following:

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Education
Governor Walker's budget expands access to the state's voucher and charter programs. Before Governor Walker took office, the voucher program had minimal requirements. His budget eliminates testing requirements, income limits, and would allow voucher students to go to school anywhere in Milwaukee County. All this will do is take more funding away from Milwaukee Public Schools. Furthermore, he not only expands charter schools, but he also eliminates teacher licensing standards at these schools. Do these expansions put Federal education funding at risk?

He is also cutting elementary and secondary schools statewide by nearly $1 billion, the University of Wisconsin system by $250 million and the state's technical colleges by $76 million. Does this significant cut jeopardize future Federal funding due to insufficient maintenance of effort?

Health
Please stand strong and refuse any requests for Medicaid waivers that would let Governor Walker reduce healthcare for the elderly and poor. I know that HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius has already issued guidance to states outlining ways to reduce costs without drastically curtailing eligibility. I am concerned Governor Walker did not see this guidance as his own health secretary has advocated for states to drop out of Medicaid all together. I – along with many Wisconsinites – believe that Governor Walker can balance the state budget without limiting access to health care.

Beyond eliminating state funds for family planning, Governor Walker has also proposed ending state requirements that health insurance policies covering prescription drugs provide coverage for birth control. This will only compound Congressional Republicans' assault on women's health care. As regulations implementing health insurance reform are written, I ask that contraceptives be appropriately classified under preventive health so that Governor Walker's efforts won't limit Wisconsin women's access to birth control.

Social Services
Federal law requires that public employees determine eligibility for families to receive food stamps. Governor Walker's budget would both transfer administration of the program from our counties where families can easily seek answers and get help to the state. He would also privatize administration of this program that many parents rely on to feed their children. This change may not violate the letter of the law, but it certainly violates the spirit. Can your administration issue an opinion on if the governor's proposal violates Federal law?

Also, could administration rule making authority be used to allow cities and municipalities to apply directly for this funding to counteract the governor's proposal? If not, what legislative changes would you need to do so?

Clean Energy and Environment
For America to compete in the 21st century global economy, we need to lead the world in new, clean-energy technologies. Governor Walker has proposed onerous regulation on wind energy that some have said would effectively end further wind energy development in Wisconsin, which

would cost the state at least $1.8 billion in investment. Can your administration please issue rules on wind farm standards that could allow this industry to thrive in Wisconsin?

His budget eliminates support for city recycling programs. As you know, Wisconsin's economy relies on a healthy and clean Lake Michigan from shipping to tourism. I am concerned this is just the opening act of an effort that could jeopardize our economy and advances we have made in industries such as water technologies.

Transit
As Milwaukee County Executive, Scott Walker was no friend to public transportation. His budget moves transit out of transportation to compete with more priorities for funding, which inevitably will lessen funding.

Also, Federal law prohibits altering collective bargaining rights of workers performing transit work. It appears his effort to break public sector unions jeopardizes nearly $50 million in Federal transit money coming to the state. Can your administration issue guidance to Governor Walker as to whether or not his changes to collective bargaining rights will cost the state these transit funds? If the state has indeed lost these funds, could administration rule making be used to allow cities and municipalities to apply directly for these funds? If not, what legislative changes would you need to do so?

This may seem exhaustive, but it is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. His budget will do real damage to Wisconsin. And every day, I grow increasingly concerned that his ideological stubbornness will cost our state good jobs and lock us into this recession longer than we would have otherwise been.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress