



An initiative of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

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## Breaking with Tradition

### How Wisconsin Lawmakers Have Shortchanged a Legacy of Investment in the State's Future

Decisions made by state lawmakers since 2011 have undermined a history of investment in education, health care and other assets that contribute to strong communities and economic progress, according to a [new comprehensive review from the Wisconsin Budget Project](#).

The new publication, “[Breaking with Tradition: How Wisconsin Lawmakers have Shortchanged a Legacy of Investment in the State's Future](#)” outlines the numerous changes policymakers have made over the last three and a half years in how Wisconsin supports its schools, communities and workforce, including:

- Reduced investments in public schools and higher education, despite the role education plays in individual financial success and building a strong economy;
- Tax cuts for Wisconsin taxpayers with the highest incomes, but higher taxes for some seniors with low incomes and some working families;
- Health insurance for fewer parents at higher cost; and
- New obstacles to obtaining important safety-net benefits like unemployment benefits and food assistance.

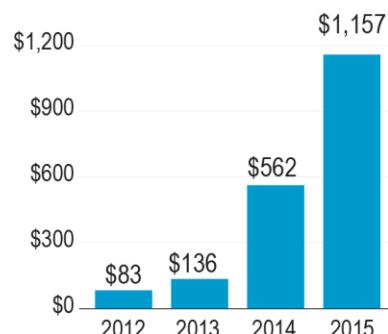
“Some lawmakers have said that these changes are necessary to help Wisconsin grow economically, despite the steep cost to our schools and communities,” said Jon Peacock, Director of the Wisconsin Budget Project. “But the promised job growth hasn’t materialized. And if making these changes hasn’t boosted job creation, then it’s time to take a step back and ask whether Wisconsin should continue on this unproductive path.”

Among the information noted in the new publication:

- Wisconsin lawmakers have cut taxes 43 times since 2011, draining \$1.9 billion for education and other priorities over that period;
- Half of the value of the major tax cut packages from 2013 and 2014 went to the top 20% of taxpayers by income, and the remaining 80% of taxpayers shared the other half;
- The state has traditionally tried to keep debt repayment costs under 4.0% of tax revenues, but in 2014 they consumed 5.26% of general fund tax revenues.

### Cost of Tax Cuts in Wisconsin Rises

State revenue lost due to tax changes, in millions. Over four years, revenue losses total \$1.9 billion.



Source: Legislative Fiscal Bureau  
WISCONSIN BUDGET PROJECT

- Only six states made bigger cuts in state support for education in recent years; and
- All the states that border Wisconsin have had faster private sector job growth since 2010.

“Our review does point out a few bright points over the last several years,” said Peacock. “For example, lawmakers have made important progress towards establishing a more meaningful level of money in the state’s rainy day fund, and have improved mental health services for children. But by and large, we believe that the changes made over the last three and a half years will have long-term negative effects for Wisconsin’s children, families, and communities.”

Read the full publication, “[Breaking with Tradition: How Wisconsin Lawmakers Have Shortchanged a Legacy of Investment in the State’s Future.](#)”

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