

IN MY OPINION

Reducing services to state's babies a shameful act

Lawmakers favor bank bailout over highly touted WIC program

By JOHN J. BARTKOWSKI

I have followed with interest the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's coverage of the Wisconsin Legislature's debate over the new budget bill.

There are two particular items in the budget that have me wondering whether legislators have our priorities a little mixed up. From what I've read in the media and seen in the budget bill, state legislators have taken more than \$1 million away from the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, which has proven results in ensuring a positive quality of life for women and children. At the same time, the budget bill gives \$1.75 million to a large bank in the Fox Valley to cover some bad loans, which resulted from poor judgment.

While I appreciate Wisconsin's support of the business community, I also wonder what happened to the free-market concept of private-sector business making it on its own. This appears to be a case of a company making a bad loan and turning to Wisconsin's taxpayers to help bail it out of a bad business decision.

Each month, the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center's WIC program provides for the

health and nutritional needs of more than 5,000 women, infants and children. Statewide, more than 109,000 moms and children are better off because of WIC.

Sadly, we know there are others in our community who can benefit from WIC, but may not have the opportunity because of the pending state budget cuts.

Under this budget, community-based clinics like Sixteenth Street will not have the resources to serve additional numbers of woman and children who can benefit from WIC's food, nutrition and health counseling services.

State and federal studies of WIC show that it improves the health of participants and reduces overall health care costs. Here is what we know about WIC:

- Women who participate in WIC have longer pregnancies, leading to fewer premature births. Premature births are one of the leading causes of death among infants.

- WIC participation results in a significant increase in the number of women who seek prenatal care early in pregnancy. Early and adequate prenatal care is one of the major factors affecting the health of newborn infants.

- WIC contributes to a reduction in the number of miscarriages.



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- Four- and 5-year-old children whose mothers are served by WIC during their pregnancies have better vocabulary test scores than children whose mothers did not receive WIC benefits.

- WIC improves the diets of mothers and infants.

- Children participating in the program have a higher rate of immunizations and are more likely to have a regular source of medical care.

- Additionally, the taxpayers benefit from WIC. A cost analysis by Mathematica Policy Research Inc. concludes that every dollar invested in WIC yields up to \$4.00 in Medicaid savings and that prenatal WIC participation reduces Medicaid costs an average of \$753 a person.

Why take food from the mouths of children to benefit the stockholders of a bank? There are currently other safeguards to help ensure the safety and stability of a bank. The Legislature should not take food, nutrition and health services from women and children for the benefit of a single financial institution.

Let's maintain WIC funding to give more pregnant women throughout the state a better chance to receive critical health and nutrition services so essential to the birth of happy and healthy babies.

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