

Common Ground: We Are Your Neighbors

Our community is in the midst of a real crisis. Members of **Common Ground** seek a safe, peaceful, and prosperous Chippewa Valley. We seek a place where all of us — rich and poor, right and left, union and non-union — can find a common ground, a place to talk with one another, a place where we can work to move Wisconsin forward *together*. Common Ground asked local workers: Why did you choose to work in a service profession? How will the proposed budget bill impact you and people you serve?

Why did you choose to work in a service profession?

9-1-1 Dispatcher: I take pride in my job and strive to do the best job I can. After almost 32 years, I'm still here. I still work nights, holidays and weekends and I still enjoy my job! I've taken the call from the hysterical mother whose child is not breathing or has been horribly injured. I've heard the words of an officer radioing in, "shots fired, we need assistance." I've attempted to soothe the elderly husband or wife who has just lost their life partner. My voice is my instrument. I can take control, give direction or I can calm and soothe. It is my job to provide the link between the person in need and the police officers, firefighters and paramedics who respond to render aid. You will never see me, you will only hear my voice — a vital link in the chain of public safety.

City Firefighter: I wanted the occupation of firefighter because I could serve the public in a direct and hands-on manner. I believe I have the skills and mentality to serve people when they are having the worst day of their lives. I feel honored and privileged that the city of Eau Claire trusts me to serve and protect its citizens.

Middle School Secretary: I didn't necessarily "choose" to work in the public sector — I chose to work with students.

High School Teacher: I knew that teaching teenagers would let me share glorious moments here and there when they would understand a concept, when they would express themselves eloquently, when they would break through a personal tragedy with grace and with a greater understanding of themselves and of the world. As a teacher, I knew I would have a tiny part in helping those amazing human beings grow up.

CVTC Librarian: Because I find joy in helping people learn and find answers.

City Police Officer: Helping the public be safe from burglars, sexual predators, rapists, etc. The elderly and the young who cannot protect themselves from the bad members of society! Feeling of satisfaction for a good job helping the public.

CVTC Curriculum Assistant: I have always wanted to work in education. My background was in the private sector, working in the capacity of office support. When I had an opportunity to work in career and technical education, I jumped at it! It has become my career to help others prepare themselves for their occupation/profession of choice.

City Bus Driver: I actually started working in the public sector by chance. Little did I know that public transportation would become my career, a career that I would become very passionate about. Before I started driving bus, I had no idea how many people were dependent on this service. After a year I became full-time. By this time I loved my job, my co-workers, passengers, and what public transportation provided for the people who truly need this service.

Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: I became a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing with the vision of carrying on my dad's legacy of making our community a better place for handicapped people. When I was 12 years old, my dad had to start using a wheelchair. I recall overhearing my dad tell my mom how discouraging it was to see job vacancies in the paper and know he couldn't even make it to an interview because of the steps in front of the building. He worked closely with city, county and state officials, along with architects and engineers, to advocate for accessible buildings and facilities.

How will the proposed budget bill impact you and the people you serve?

Homemaker: My husband and I moved back to Eau Claire when we decided to start a family because we were looking for a community that offered safety, arts, access to the outdoors, and strong schools. Several of Eau Claire's greatest features are at risk with this bill, but as a mother I am most concerned about my son's education. He is starting kindergarten in the fall and I am deeply worried that during this pivotal year he will enter a system crippled by the budget bill and cuts to education.

Home Health Care Nurse: As a nurse I see vulnerable people every day. If the proposed Medicaid changes happen, fewer people will qualify for services. There will be no oversight or legislative input about what changes can be made. Pushing people off Badger Care will reduce access to preventative medicine and health education for those who need it most.

Financial Advisor: As a private sector business owner I worry that people directly affected by this bill will not be able to invest in their futures like they may have been able to. This obviously affects my business directly.

City Bus Driver: I now have four children to support. I got divorced six years ago and my job allowed me to support my family without utilizing public assistance. I have taken on part-time jobs, worked overtime, and donated plasma to help make ends meet. I live in an old house, don't drive a brand-new vehicle so by no means are we living a luxurious lifestyle. I work hard to support my family. People are riding the buses and the majority of them are people who don't ride by choice but ride because they have to — students, the physically and mentally disabled, those who can't afford a car. They are dependent on this service and it would be a great disservice to take this away from them!

CVTC Curriculum Assistant: I know that the institution I work for will have to cut programs, services, faculty and staff. I know that tuition will have to increase, and what was once an affordable education could be out of reach for many students in our district. Lack of funding for career and technical education will impact business and industry as well. If we aren't able to provide a highly trained workforce to the businesses that rely on us, they may struggle to find quality employees.

Naturalist: The bill includes a "poison pill" for land stewardship and protection of our lakes and streams. We'd use Illinois and Iowa standards for water quality. We'd all but lose our ability to set aside farm lands and woodlots for ag and timber production, for protection of Wisconsin's rural character, and for future generations of hikers and hunters.

Farm Family: We are worried about health care and getting our kids through school with the same quality of education that we've enjoyed over the past 10 years.

Local Restaurant Owner: Eventually we are going to be impacted by this bill. If you extract X amount of money out of people's budgets, something's got to go, and it's going to be their fun money. This means lesser diner dollars. It's not going to be insurance or the mortgage that gets cut. It's going to be shopping, dining out, and other things that people don't have to do.

University Instructor: Our students will definitely be hurt. Fewer dollars means larger classes, less individualized care and substantially higher tuition costs. It is frustrating because your daughters and sons, your granddaughters and grandsons, and your neighbors' kids deserve better.

Firefighter: Lower shared revenue [means a] reduction in the monies available to protective services . . . [this] will result in longer response times in these essential services. Increasing the response time by two minutes on a medical emergency could mean the difference between life and death. A fire doubles in size every 60 seconds. Increasing the response time to a fire could make the difference in our ability to save life and property.

Food Service Worker: We are facing a nine percent increase in insurance premiums. If this passes and we don't have a contract, our food service workers will be paying 30 to 40 percent more out of pocket for their insurance.

School Custodian: Already in the last three years we have given up raises. In the last two years we paid 29 percent of our insurance. May lose \$500 more per month. Won't be able to buy anything. Driving beater S-10 pickup just to save money to avoid a car payment. Classrooms larger — more furniture, more time to clean it. Air quality will cost more as class sizes increase. No money for repairs and upgrades. Already understaffed — no time to thoroughly clean and disinfect. Work seasonal summer job already.

Wisconsin Fisherman: The loss of money to prevent phosphates from being released into lakes and streams proposed in the budget will greatly impact the quality of fishing in Wisconsin. Phosphates are the same fertilizers that are put on lawns to enhance growth of grass; in waterways they will cause massive algae growth, which will foul the water so it has a pea soup appearance. For example, the major water quality issue in the Red Cedar River and Lake Menominee is excess phosphates.

High School Student: My school has given me an opportunity to pursue [my] love of the arts while being actively engaged in pursuing an education. Outstanding concert and jazz bands, state-tournament-worthy sports teams, and national festival, invite-warranting drama teams are the product of our district's focus and respect on the arts and extracurriculars. The bill would cut funding and kill teaching jobs which would raise class size and result in the cutting of these programs.

Thank you for reading these stories from a few members of our community — stories intended to put human faces to some of the hardships and concerns facing Wisconsin. Now, more than ever, we need to stand side by side as citizens and neighbors. No matter what our stage of life, work, religion or politics, we all serve a common purpose. We can find common ground in this crisis and work together to make a healthier and stronger Chippewa Valley.

Take Action: Talk to and listen to your neighbors. Educate yourself on issues. Vote. Seek common ground with those with whom you might disagree. Together we can begin meaningful conversations about the economy, the mortgage crisis, and the budget controversy — all issues vital to our community. Let's commit to staying engaged, peaceful and united. Our community depends on it.

This ad was paid for by \$5.00 donations from friends and neighbors throughout the Eau Claire community. Contact information: 715-491-4722.