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[00:00:20] **Speaker 1** The following program is a PBS Wisconsin original production.

[00:00:35] **Speaker 2** Welcome to Wisconsin Public Media's coverage of Governor Tony Evers, seventh State of the State address. We are bringing you live coverage tonight from the Wisconsin state capitol in Madison. In a few moments, the 46th governor of Wisconsin will make his way into the assembly chambers.

[00:00:53] **Speaker 1** Evers will speak tonight before a joint session of the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate, the state Supreme Court, his cabinet and tribal leaders. Good evening. I'm Shawn Johnson from Wisconsin Public Radio.

[00:01:05] **Speaker 2** And I'm Frederica Freiberg from ABC, Wisconsin. Tonight, Democratic Governor Tony Evers lays out his plans for 2025. He'll be speaking to the 107th session of the Wisconsin legislature.

[00:01:20] **Speaker 1** Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, who represents communities in Racine and Walworth counties, will provide this year's Republican response immediately following the governor's State of the State address.

[00:01:30] **Speaker 2** And the governor is already in the assembly chambers, having left the parlor where we are sitting. And so he is making his way to the podium.

[00:01:39] **Speaker 1** He's getting an early start this year. Sometimes we wait for the governor. This year he's practically waiting on us as he goes between the both sides of the aisle for this speech. It's a different makeup of the legislature than he's had recently. Still, Republican majorities in the state assembly and in the state Senate, but they are smaller under maps that he signed last year that this legislature passed last year under the threat from the state Supreme Court.

[00:02:11] **Speaker 2** So this marks the governor's last State of the state address before he announces whether he will run for a third term in 2026.

[00:02:19] **Speaker 1** And he said that he's likely to make that announcement after the budget is wrapped up. We're going to hear hints about what's going to be in that budget tonight. He's going to deliver his budget address on February 18th, but then the legislature again, controlled by Republicans. If history is any guide, they're going to make a lot of changes to it. And it's all going to be done with that sort of political question hanging over of what will Tony Evers do?

[00:02:46] **Speaker 2** It is my honor to introduce the governor of the great state of Wisconsin, the Honorable Tony Evers.

[00:03:06] **Unidentified** Thank you. Thank you.

[00:03:16] **Speaker 3** Good evening, Wisconsinites. Honorable Supreme Court justices. Tribal nation leaders, Constitutional officers, Adjutant General May, members of the Wisconsin National Guard and active and retired members of our armed forces, Cabinet members, legislators, distinguished guests and Wisconsinites from wherever you are joining us tonight. Thank you for being here with us. I'm Tony Evers and I am so grateful and proud to be the 46th governor of the great state of Wisconsin.

[00:04:08] **Unidentified** Thank you. Thank you.

[00:04:17] **Speaker 3** I see her up there. My former former Forever. Forever Prom date. Cathy is up in the gallery as well. Kathleen Francis. Kathleen Francis. Kathleen Francis. You are the.

[00:04:47] **Speaker 1** Cream.

[00:04:48] **Speaker 3** To fill my cream buff. And I love you more every day. Thank you so much. Caffeine. We begin a new year. We begin a new year with a new legislature elected under new fair maps. For the first time in a generation, this legislature was not elected under some of the most gerrymandered maps. And in America, I am hopeful this will mean more collaboration or partnership, a little less rancor, and a renewed commitment to do the right thing for the people of Wisconsin. And that's great news. It means we can work together to make bipartisan progress on critical priorities like reforming our justice system, fixing our roads, funding our public schools, and expanding access to affordable, affordable housing. You know, it's no secret that sometimes people in this building disagree and share some differences. Never with me, of course. But we begin this year with, I believe, an urgent need and a mandate to find common ground. So let's get to work. Wisconsinites. Wisconsinites. I begin tonight with good news. Thanks to our work cutting taxes, Wisconsinites are keeping more of your hard earned income today than any point in the last 50 years. A new Wisconsin. That is a new Wisconsin policy. Farm report says Wisconsin state and local tax burden dropped to a record low in 2024. The state and local taxes Wisconsinites pay as a share of your income is the lowest it's been in over half of a century. Think about that. Just two decades ago, Wisconsin was in the top five states states for our tax burden and the taxes Wisconsinites paid as a share of their income. Today, Wisconsin is at the bottom of 16 states and the country. We have seen the largest drop in our tax burden of any state over the last 20 years. Cutting taxes has been a bipartisan priority for over the last six years. I have proposed the middle class tax cuts and every budget I introduced as governor and the legislature has sent me back some proposals I agreed with, including one of the largest tax cuts in state's history. All told, through the through the income tax cuts I've signed into law that most of Wisconsinites have seen a 15% income tax cut or more. And if folks will see a $1.5 billion in tax relief each year, primarily targeted to the middle class. And we've been able to provide real, responsible relief while still paying down our state's debt. Savings we're saving where we can and working across the aisle to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. After 30 consecutive years of our state's checking account, running a deficit, we have ended all five fiscal years that I've been governor with a positive balance. And Wisconsin. Our workforce has never been stronger. I declared 2024 the year of the worker in Wisconsin because I want we wanted to address the workforce challenges that have plagued our state for generations to make it a top priority. And here are the results so far. In 2024, we reported nine counties with the lowest rates of unemployment on record. We had. We had historically low unemployment and in Wisconsin ended the last year it was seven consecutive months of record high employment. Wisconsinites are hard workers by nature, and more Wisconsinites are working than ever before. And we want Wisconsin workers to be ready for the 21st century. For the second consecutive year, we hit an all time high of nearly 10,000 U.S. apprentices and had record high employer participation. And we had the highest enrollment ever in our registered apprenticeship programs, 100 year history for the third year in a row. We launched the first ever teacher apprenticeship program to retain new teachers and bolster our education workforce. We created new youth apprenticeship pathways from law enforcement and fire prevention to early childhood education. And we're partnering with over 20 bipartisan states through the U.S. Climate Alliance to train 1 million new registered apprentices nationwide with a focus on climate and clean energy fields over the next decade. And we're making sure our economy is built for the 21st century, too. In 2024, we relaunch the largest public private investment in Wisconsin startups and entrepreneurs in the state history. We also welcome billions of dollars in investments from global companies, including Microsoft, Eli Lilly and Company and Kikkoman, among others that will create thousands of jobs here in Wisconsin. Businesses partnering with our administration last year committed to more than $2 billion in capital investments, the highest level ever in the last decade. We're also working to make Wisconsin a global leader in health and medical field. Advances from developing new technologies to discovering cures and strategies to improve treatment outcomes. We worked with Senator Baldwin to secure Wisconsin's designation as a U.S. regional tech hub. Our tech hub is projected to create over 100,000 jobs and $9 billion worth of economic development in Wisconsin over the next decade alone. And Wisconsinites. Thanks to our hard work, state government is working smarter and faster than ever before. We've been able to modernize and improve programs that can help improve your daily lives. It's about making sure our government works and works better for you. We expedited community infrastructure projects for drinking water by cutting the review time for engineering plants in half. We partnered with the technical colleges to streamline licensing for students, helping make sure they could join our strapped health care workforce as soon as possible. We also created the first ever interactive mapping tool for producers to be able to monitor animal diseases outbreaks across Wisconsin. After I directed investments to bring our state's licensing system into the 21st century, folks can now apply for or renew their light professional licenses online. And get this. Wisconsinites no longer will have to use a fax machine to send in some of their materials. For those of you who are wondering what the heck a fax machine is. Folks, that's the point.

[00:15:09] **Unidentified** We created a.

[00:15:09] **Speaker 3** New system to help professionals respond to drug overdoses, identifying dangerous trends in our communities and getting information out quicker to folks that need it. We made it possible to purchase state trail passes online so folks no longer have to carry a paper pass on the trails. And we launched a new app for our state run veterans homes so that loved ones can stay up to speed on their veterans medical care. And Wisconsinites. We're also saving your tax dollars along the way by shrinking our bottom line. We're working to consolidate building space across state government and by downsizing and expanding remote work options. We've made it even easier for the Wisconsin Knights to join our state workforce. Regardless of where you live, our plan is projected to save taxpayers over $7 million every year by delivering another half $1 billion in savings from deferred maintenance costs. Wisconsin. We accomplished a lot this last year. We have shown that we can get a lot of good things done. When politics stay out of our way. There is, as always, more work to do. And our work together continues here tonight. I will soon interject, introduce our next state budget, laying out our state's top policy priorities for the next two years. Every budget I have ever built began first by doing what's best for our kids, and this one will be no different. So I will go. I will again propose historic investments in K through 12 education. And I and I will again ask Republicans and Democrats to join me in doing what's best for our kids by making meaningful investments in public education at every level, from early childhood to our UW system and our technical colleges. The good news is that the legislature need not wait until I introduce my budget to get to work. Republican lawmakers can start today by releasing the $50 million we approved with bipartisan support nearly two years ago. These funds were already approved. They are available now and they should not still be sitting in Madison Hawk's box. Helps our kids and their future. Are too important for politics. Republicans please releases investments of equity, yet their work improving reading outcomes statewide. We have to do more to improve outcomes for our kids. And yes, that means making making meaningful investments in our public schools. But our kids outcomes are as much a reflection of what happens within our schools as they are, importantly, a reflection of what happens beyond them. And that's a simple matter of math. The average Wisconsin elementary student, for example, spends less than 12% of their year receiving direct instruction in the classroom. That means that they probably spend, give or take, about 80% of their time of the year outside of our schools. So we have to recognize that our schools and educators cannot singlehandedly fix our kids circumstances beyond the school doors that nevertheless impact learning, success and success in the classroom every day. Folks, the obligation to help address the challenges our kids are facing in 80% of the time they're not in school falls squarely at the feet of elected officials, including myself, in this building. So tonight, I'm declaring 2025 the year of the kid in Wisconsin because I want everyone here to start talking or taking that important responsibility seriously. I will keep saying this and tell the folks in this building finally hear me. If we want to improve our kids outcomes and we have to shorten the odds. If we want our educators in schools to be able to do their very best work in the hours our kids are with them. We have to set them up for success. And we have to start by making sure our kids can bring their full and best selves to our classrooms. Kids in class should be focused on learning, not wondering when and whether they'll eat next.

[00:21:20] **Unidentified** Our kids. Our kids.

[00:21:22] **Speaker 3** Our kids should never go hungry, period. But especially not at school in the year The kid. The budget I want to introduce next month will again include my Healthy Meals Healthy Kids initiative. Let's end school meal debt and make sure every kid has a healthy breakfast and lunch at school with no stigma at no cost. And let's start treating our state's mental health crisis with the urgency it requires. Yes, for everyone of every age, but especially for our kids. The state of our kids mental health continues to be a concerning for me as governor and also as a grandfather. A kid in crisis may be distracted or disengaged, may not be able to focus on their studies if they are able to get to school at all. I fought hard to secure students to secure $30 million in our last state budget to support school based mental health services in schools across Wisconsin. That was just a fraction of what I asked the legislature to approve. Tonight, I'm announcing my budget proposal will invest nearly $300 million to provide comprehensive mental mental health services and schools statewide, including support for peer to peer suicide prevention programs and expanded mental health training. Making sure our kids are healthy physically and mentally is a crucial part of improving outcomes in our classrooms. But we have to connect the dots between school achievement and the challenges our kids are facing at home and in our communities. Take lack of access to clean and safe drinking water as an example. There is no safe level of lead exposure for kids. None, according to the CDC. Even the smallest exposure can lead to it, can have serious long term consequences and can even, quote, reduce a child's learning capacity, ability to pay attention and academic achievement. End quote. A 2019 study of kids over several early grade levels found that even low level exposure during early childhood can affect kids achievement, including reading and math scores. It also showed that even additional schooling and physically maturing, quote, are not sufficient to offset the damage caused by early childhood exposure. End quote. My Healthy Meals Healthy Kids plan will also help moderate modernized bubblers recom bubblers in Wisconsin at schools across Wisconsin to remove harmful contaminants. And as we kick off the Year of the Kid, I'm also announcing we're going to invest over $6 million in our bi annual budget to support lead poisoning, intervention and response. And I'm announcing this week that I'll approve a Department of Health Services emergency rule strengthening Wisconsin's lead standards. So more kids and more families will be eligible for these critical resources. RAF each day of inaction, addressing harmful contaminants in our water grows more and even more expensive. So I announcing tonight that I've directed an additional $5 million to continue our work getting harmful contaminants out of water wells in 2025, The Year of the Kid. It's about doing what's best for kids and families. Simple as that. If we want our kids to bring their best and full selves to our classrooms, elected officials have to start acknowledging how policy decisions and often investments or lack thereof here in this building affect kids, families, schools and communities across Wisconsin every day. Whether or not kids and families have access to safe, reliable housing affects kids at school, whether or not kids and families have a way to safely and efficiently travel to and from home and work affects kids at school. Living in a traumatic or unsafe home environment affects kids at school, lack of access to preventive health care and dental care and eye care. Affects kids in school. The state cannot continue to shirk responsibility for the 80% of time. Our kids are not in our classrooms. That 80% falls on us. So folks, that means we have work to do. We can start with the basics, making sure our kids are safe at home, at school. In our communities is an area where we have much room for improvement. Last week I created our new Wisconsin Office for Violence Prevention. We're going to work across law enforcement agencies and local governments with school districts, nonprofits and firearm dealers to help keep our kids, families and communities safe. I also announce my budget will include sustainable, ongoing funding to make the Wisconsin Office for Violence Prevention permanent so that we can take a statewide approach to preventing crime and violence across our state. I will again be proposing significant investments in our next state budget to expand access to mental and behavioral health services across our state. Those investments should receive bipartisan support. We also have to make sure crime victims, survivors and their families have the support they need to recover. I directed millions of dollars to keep the Victims of Crime Act providers afloat when the federal funds were cut. Tonight, I'm announcing I'm investing $66 million to support services for crime victims. In our next state budget. But these actions alone cannot be our only effort to reduce crime and violence and keep our kids, families and communities safe. Addressing gun violence must be part of our work, folks. In recent years, Wisconsin has seen about a 21% decrease in homicide and nearly 30% decrease in burglary and almost a 50% decrease in motor vehicle theft. Major categories of violent crime are going down statewide, and yet the rate of gun deaths in Wisconsin is trending in the opposite direction, according to Everytown for Gun Safety. The rate of gun violence increased in Wisconsin by 54% between 2014 and 2023, compared to a 3,434% increase nationwide over that same time period. 37 days ago, a shot a shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison took the lives of Erin and Ruby. A student and an educator who woke up and went to school that morning. Well, never return home. Six others are injured and countless lives will never be the same. Folks, Wisconsinites, Wisconsinites sent us here to see big problems and fix them. We cannot let common sense get lost in debates over whether basic policies could have prevented the most recent shooting or the one before that or the one before that. We aren't here in Madison to quibble about the semantics of the last shooting. We are here to do everything we can to prevent the next one. So we can do better than doing nothing. This legislature must do better. And doing nothing. So, folks, this is what this is Wisconsin. I get behind, we fish, we trap. And generations of growing up learning to appreciate our traditions. No one wants to change this proud part of our heritage. And we won't. But we do not have to choose between respecting the Second Coming and Second Amendment or keeping kids, schools and state streets and community safe. We can do both. And the truth is this The vast majority of Wisconsinites, including gun owners, agree. So let's start with two basic policies. We already know Wisconsinites support We can take easy, simple steps to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people. Let's ask everyone to play by the same set of rules. Let's close the loophole loophole so that everyone goes through a background check no matter what kind of firearm they are buying or where they are buying it. And the second thing we can do is pass a red flag law to give law enforcement and loved ones the tools they need to get guns out of the home. When someone is a dangerous risk for themselves or others. Just last month, we saw how crucial red flag laws can be to prevent tragedy. Shortly after the shooting at Abundant Life, law enforcement discovered the shooter had potentially plotted with a man in another state who was allegedly planning his own mass shooting. Because he lives in a state with a red flag law. Law enforcement was able to get an emergency protective order requiring him to surrender his firearms before he could move forward with his plan. Their quick work almost certainly saved lives without red flag laws. Law enforcement in Wisconsin are often unable to intervene unless a crime has already been committed. At that time, at that point, sometimes it's too late. We have to change that. So that's still what an overwhelmingly majority of Wisconsinites, including our gun owners, believe we should. Let's give law enforcement and loved ones the tools they need by passing a red flag law here in Wisconsin. And there are other easy steps we can take to keep our kids and our communities safe and keep guns off the streets. We can keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers. We can help make sure that guns in homes where there are kids or someone prohibited from possessing a firearm are locked away or have a trigger lock engaged. We can help make sure that firearms at retailers are secured when their businesses unattended. We can help make sure that if a firearm is lost or stolen, law enforcement is immediately notified. We should be able to get this common sell stuff done with bipartisan support. That's. A lot of our work is not just to prevent people from hurting others, but to make sure people are safe from hurting themselves. These next two policies are personal for me, as I know they are for folks who are here and tuning in at home. Please know that if you or that you or someone you know is struggling, help is always available. You can call or text nine, eight, eight or visit nine eight lifeline.org to get free confidential help any time. 24 seven. Just three years ago, as I deliver in my State of the State address, state Representative Jonathan Ross staff sat right there in one of these seats. Jonathan had a heart of service. He was always working to make someone else's life just a little bit better. As a fierce advocate as Jonathan was. He was still always eager to learn about and understand others in order to bridge divides. At the end of last year, Jonathan died by suicide. We are so deeply sad, saddened that he is no longer with us. Jonathan's wife, Diana, and his parents, Phyllis and Alan, are here with us in the gallery tonight. Please stand and join me in recognizing that. Or to many Wisconsinites, even if they did not know, Jonathan, the story of losing him as their story to Kathy and I share that story. The families, friends and coworkers of veterans, farmers, construction workers and law enforcement officers and so many others share that story. Kids, classmates, parents, grandparents. Loved ones and friends in every corner of our state. They share that story. This heart has become far too often. Wisconsin in 2022, reported 932 deaths by suicide, according to Department of Health Services report, nearly 60% of which involved a firearm. These are statistics we cannot change because there are those those are souls we cannot bring back. But there is more we can do today to save lives tomorrow. If you talked to someone who loved whose loved one died by suicide, many will tell you that their loss was not a foregone conclusion. That maybe, just maybe, if the person they loved had just made it through one more dark night to see with certainty that the sun would rise again, things could have ended up differently tonight. I am asking this legislature to give the family in the end the next one and the family after that, hope for that same opportunity. Studies show studies show that the time between when someone decides to take their life and attempts to do so is often left less than 24 hours and for about half less than ten minutes. The window for intervention is really short. Being able to purchase and possess a gun in minutes significantly significantly increases the risk of firearm suicide and firearm homicide as well. A decade old decade. Decade ago today, Wisconsin had a had a waiting period law requiring time between when a person purchased a firearm and took possession of it. That policy was repealed. It's time for Wisconsin to return that common sense to that common sense policy. Tonight, I'm announcing I will be asking the legislature to restore the 48 hour waiting period in Wisconsin in our next state budget. I am also announcing tonight a new self assigned firearm exclusion program or safe to help reduce suicide by firearm. We can help make sure folks have a plan to keep themselves safe when they are in a crisis. Our safe program will allow Wisconsinites to temporarily and voluntarily register to prevent themselves from purchasing a firearm. Registering safe could make a real difference and even save someone's life. Let's get this done. Folks in the legislature must start doing its part to take gun violence seriously in the state. People don't expect us to be perfect in this building, but they do expect us to be pragmatic. People don't expect us to acquiesce, acquiesce to each concept, every policy put before us. But they do expect us to at least have the courage to engage in a conversation. People don't expect us to agree with each other 100% of the time, but they do expect us to have the guts to give reasonable policies a vote that's still better for Wisconsin than doing nothing. Kathy and I raised three kids into it and including twins. We know that for parents, nothing is more important than our kids safety no matter where they are. So keeping our kids, families, schools and communities safe by reducing crime and gun violence should be a top priority for us in this year of a kid. Kathy and I also remember working to make ends meet so that our kids are not just safe, but have food on the table, a warm bed to sleep in and clothes on their back. So a critical part of our work, doing what's best for our kids and the Year of the Kid must be supporting the parents and families who raise them. There are a lot of ways we can lower every day out of out of pocket costs to make sure Wisconsinites and working families can afford basic needs. So I have good news. The plan I am announcing tonight will support our economy and our workforce, lower out-of-pocket costs for working families and Wisconsinites, and help give folks a little breathing room in their household budgets. No surprise. Childcare is too darn expensive. We have to make child care more affordable and accessible. This is as much about doing what's best for our kids as it's doing what's best for parents in our work, in force, in our workforce, and in our economy, too. After years of proposing similar efforts, I was proud last year to sign a bipartisan bill to expand our Child and Dependent Care credit. That bill goes into effect this year so parents and families be sure to look out for that when you file your taxes. Over 110,000 Wisconsin Tech taxpayers will see an average benefit of over $650 per filer, totaling never nearly $73 million this year alone. That's great news for Wisconsin's working families. But we have to do more to lower the order out of out of pocket costs. Working families are paying for childcare every day. 2023 Report. The report showed childcare costs in Wisconsin can consume 18 to 36% of a family's household income. Those parents are under 25 and have two kids in childcare. It's closer to 70%. The cost of putting two young kids in childcare costs more than the average rent mortgage in Wisconsin and exceeds the annual cost of tuition to send two students to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. And even if folks can find and afford care, families may be waitlisted. For months, child care providers across Wisconsin surveyed last fall had 48,000 kids on a wait list, with nearly 60% of providers having unutilized capacity, often because they needed more workers. Child care providers are stuck, increasing costs while keeping classrooms closed and serving fewer kids as waitlist grow. Getting private providers up to full capacity would mean serving another 33,000 kids. Wisconsin's child care crisis affects not only our kids, families and childcare providers, but our state employers, workforce and economy too. I've repeatedly proposed plans to lower the cost of childcare, which Republican lawmakers rejected. So I directed $170 million in emergency funding to keep our childcare industry afloat. But folks, that was 15 months ago. We must do better than nothing when it comes to making child care more affordable. Our state budget will once again include sustainable, ongoing funding to make sure our child care accounts program permanent, including investing over $500 million aimed at lowering child care costs, supporting this critical industry, investing in employer sponsored child care. And when we're looking at every day out of pocket costs, child care is not the only thing folks are struggling to afford. The cost of prescriptions and lifesaving medication like insulin are also too darn high. According to a 2023 national survey. More than a quarter of adults in America are having a hard time affording prescription drugs. I found 30% or it also found 30% of adults aren't taking the medications prescribed due to cost. No Wisconsinite should have to choose between paying bills and putting food on the table and getting their life saving medication, Accessing health care and picking up basic prescriptions or insulin should not break the bank, folks. So let's work to lower the costs of prescriptions and protect consumers from price gouging and life saving medication through my less for our tax plan. I will again ask Republicans and Democrats to work together to approve new state programs aimed at setting price ceilings for prescriptions and improving oversight of drug companies to make sure Wisconsinites are getting a fair shake. That's remove the sales tax on over-the-counter medications and capped the co-pay on insulin at $35 lower. And. You're learning every day. Out of pocket costs for Wisconsinites and working families must be a priority for this session. Making child care And every day prescriptions more affordable are two easy ways we can help Wisconsinites afford basic needs. Help paychecks go a little further and give parents, families and seniors some breathing room in their household budgets. Am I plan allows us to lower costs by supporting our workforce and our economy too. The coming weeks, I'll announce my comprehensive plan to lower costs for Wisconsinites and working families. And this work is especially timely. We've already seen steps taken in Washington in recent days that could significantly increase costs, hurt Wisconsinites and working families and leave a lot of uncertainty for our economy here in Wisconsin. A lot has happened in Washington in the last 72 hours, and I know there's a lot angst, a lot of angst about what may happen in these days, months and years ahead. I want to talk about what it means for Wisconsin and how we move forward together. So let's talk about immigration. These lands were inhabited by indigenous peoples for millennia before people from France, Great Britain, Norway, Holland. In. They were never here before. People from France, Great Britain, Norway, Holland, like my my wife's father. Sweden, Germany and regions the world over. It came and settled here in a state as we now know and love it. Wisconsin began as the land of many people, of many origins, each important and none any better than any other. And that is still who we are. 177 years later, the state of Wisconsin was born of immigrants. But today, there are those who would have us forget that fact. There are those who would have us rewrite the story of ourselves, and they would ask us to believe in a distorted and dishonest history. They would have us abandon the values, the values, the values that made us who we are as the people. It was blood, love and labor make our state great. We cannot. And we. We cannot. And we will not. Wisconsinites are honest people. We tell the truth. So in this building, let's do the same and let's move past partizan rhetoric. Let's agree to be honest about the fact that in this state, some of our state's largest and most important industries have companies have always welcomed the hard work of immigrants. Let's agree to be on. Let's agree to be honest about the fact that the story of our state's success today is told in the labor of over 3 million Wisconsinites, including tens of thousands of workers whose only transgression to date was not having the good fortune of being born in this country.

[00:52:22] **Unidentified** Let's agree. Let's agree that we can continue. Let's agree that we can.

[00:52:27] **Speaker 3** Continue to be a state that enforces our laws when and if they're broken, but still embraces our shared history. And all those who have helped write our Wisconsin story from our native native nations to the generations of immigrants who came after.

[00:52:47] **Unidentified** And let's agree.

[00:52:49] **Speaker 3** Let's agree that if you work, obey the law, pay taxes, and contribute to our communities and play by the rules just like everyone else, you should have a fair shot at coming and continuing to pursue the American dream.

[00:53:15] **Unidentified** Our current system, our current.

[00:53:18] **Speaker 3** System is unworkable and unsustainable. There must be bipartisan work towards a solution that builds upon the strength of our country without threatening our economic economy's success. Wisconsin We cannot allow reckless decisions in Washington to stymie our Wisconsin economic momentum. We cannot stall. We cannot stall our progress towards fixing the problems that we have that have plagued our station as stake for generations. We cannot afford to lose the prosperity for posterity that we've worked hard to build together. I have always been willing to work with anyone who is willing to do the right thing for the people of Wisconsin. And that has not changed. But I will not compromise on our Wisconsin values. Treating people with kindness, dignity, empathy and respect. And I will continue to deliver on my promise to fight for the values and priorities that I have every day as their governor. But. Protecting protecting access to affordable health care is one of them. The Affordable Care Act insurance coverage for millions of Wisconsinites, including for folks who have preexisting conditions. Women are no longer charged more than men. We no longer have annual or lifetime limits on the care patients receive. So I promise you this I'll fight every effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act, just as I have done since day one as governor. I fight like hell to make sure Wisconsin women have the freedom to make their own reproductive health care decisions without interference from politics.

[00:55:36] **Unidentified** Without, without, without and without interference.

[00:55:42] **Speaker 3** Without interfering interference from politicians in this building who know nothing about their life, their faith or their circumstances. And I fought like hell to restore access to safe legal abortion in Wisconsin and on the 50s anniversary of Roe v Wade. I'll tell you tonight that I will fight like hell against every effort and veto any bill that makes access to abortion, birth control and infertility treatments and any other part of reproductive health care any less accessible than it is today. And that's a promise. And. Wisconsin will continue to be bold on clean energy, fight the climate crisis and create good paying jobs and innovative industries of the future. Because in Wisconsin, we know we can't afford to choose between mitigating climate change and protecting our environment or creating jobs and economic development. We must do both. So we will continue our work to do right by our kids while leaving a world, a better place and a world than the one we inherited. And to our LGBTQ kids and Wisconsinites. You know the promise I made to you. I promise I have always been proud to keep. I will veto any bill that makes Wisconsin a less safe, less inclusive and less welcoming place. And I'll never stop delivering on my promise to use every power available to me to defend you, protect your rights, and keep you safe. My. My promise to the people of Wisconsin has always been to be a governor who works for all Wisconsinites but does the right thing when it matters most. That is a promise I will continue to keep. If everyone here is more intent on doing more for others than themselves, more focused on what we can accomplish together than what they can gain on their own. And committed to doing what's right rather than what's best for their personal politics. We will get a lot done for the people we are here to serve. We must continue to make smart, strategic investments while staying within our means. We must continue to invest in needs long ago, long neglected while still finding ways to save where we can. And we must continue to grow as ever. Forward together. So let's get good things done for the people of Wisconsin this year and let's get back to work. Thank you. And on Wisconsin, UW marching band.

[00:59:13] **Unidentified** Take it Away.

[01:00:10] **Speaker 2** And so the University of Wisconsin marching band concludes. Governor Tony Evers, seven State of the State address before a joint session of the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate.

[01:00:21] **Speaker 1** Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, who represents the parts of Racine and Walworth counties, is making his way back to our location as we speak. He'll provide this year's Republican response in just a few minutes.

[01:00:34] **Speaker 2** So Governor Evers address was labeled the Year of the Kid. It was an emotional speech. He was talking about mental health, gun violence and suicide prevention to help children and other people in the state of Wisconsin.

[01:00:51] **Speaker 1** Yeah, there were definitely some parts of the speech where he let that emotion draw out. It was not just a throwaway line where he talked about suicide prevention. Told the story of scare part of Jonathan Bronson with his family in the gallery. He connected it to policy. He called for a 48 hour waiting period for handgun purchases. He also talked about the shooting at a Madison school in December and calling for universal background checks and red flag laws. So it felt like a different speech from some that he's given where he just really let those kind of emotional human angles carry out.

[01:01:34] **Speaker 2** Yeah, it definitely did. Did you get the impression that this was a speech that sets him up to run for a third term? I mean, it was really expansive. It had to. It had to do with children. It had to do with guns. It had to do with federal policies happening right now.

[01:01:54] **Speaker 1** And not a budget address, but a lot of budget material that was in there. He talked about a $300 million mental health program for schools, talked about a $5,000,500 million in investment in child care accounts. As we hear the band, very loud background here. And so we're talking real money there At that point. We're up to nearly $1 billion in a speech. Is this just a hint at what the governor will be talking about in its budget address in February?

[01:02:29] **Speaker 2** I thought it was interesting to the number of elements that he had around gun safety. As you said, the red flag laws, the background checks, but also a safe program allowing people to register to prevent themselves from buying a gun in the event of suicidal ideation.

[01:02:52] **Speaker 1** And sort of an underlying message that we have to do something. People expect us to do something. But I mean, as you could see in kind of the reaction in the room. Easier said than done when it comes to issues like these and so many others. We did hear some references kind of broadly to costs. It's not very specific. He did get into specifics on prescription drug costs, that it would be rolling out more as he prepared to deliver his budget. But costs in this inflationary period, that's something you heard lawmakers who were on the campaign trail talk about last year. It sounds like something the governor is going to use his budget to talk about to a large degree.

[01:03:34] **Speaker 2** And we will be looking ahead to that budget address, as you've said, next month. Assembly Speaker Robin Vos leads the Republican controlled state Assembly. He is the 75th speaker of the Assembly and the longest serving person ever to hold that position. Here is Assembly Speaker Robin for us with tonight's Republican response.

[01:03:58] **Speaker 1** Hello, I'm Assembly Speaker Robin Vos. On behalf of the legislature, it's my honor to give the Republican response to tonight's State of the State address. This week has been exciting as we watch the peaceful transfer of power in our nation's capital. However, far too many Americans believe the only place that policies are made is in Washington, DC. While I'm excited for the changes, President Trump as an administration will make too many federal policies inflation, rising rents and increasing food prices have hurt our families for the last four years. And elected officials in Madison must also address the state policies that have created the same challenges. The speech tonight was Governor Evers seventh State of the State address, where he largely delivered the same tired rhetoric he's presented the other six times. He's given the same speech. Year after year, we hear the same lip service about wanting to work together, and then, unfortunately, he rarely follows through. My hope tonight is that unlike the past seven times, Governor Evers is actually serious about finding common ground with legislative Republicans. First, let's talk about taxes. Cutting them remains the primary objective for legislative Republicans. We have the largest one time surplus in state history. And instead of talking about how to return that money to working families tonight, Governor Evers prioritized, adding more spending and growing the size of government. The fact is, a surplus of this size only exists because over a year ago, Governor Evers vetoed a tax cut that would have returned around $1,000 to every family in Wisconsin. That tax cut would have helped those families as they struggle to keep up with rising costs. Instead, he alone decided it was better for government to keep your money. Tonight, Republicans stand united in returning that money to you, the taxpayers. And we will give Governor Evers another chance to do the same. We propose to return it to those who are hardworking retirees and in need of a much needed income tax exemption. And we will also look for ways to hold down your property taxes and help struggling young families. Next, while we heard tonight about another education plan to write a blank check to our schools. Republicans will focus on increasing standards and demanding accountability. Right now, only 48% of students in Wisconsin are even reading at grade level. This is absolutely unacceptable and it has to change. Our reading crisis is not just limited to our biggest school districts, however. It exists in districts all across the state, both large and small. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction own data. Only 37% of students were proficient in English. In 2022, there was little progress in the next year, with only 39% of students testing proficient says that we're doing better now, but it's only because they significantly lowered the standards to inflate the results. Make no mistake our education system is doing an enormous disservice to our students. We will not allow the Department of Public Instruction to shortchange our students by lowering our standards. Republicans will enact legislation to require the forward exam to be aligned with the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This will bring our standards back to the baseline before I artificially inflated them. It will also allow parents to compare the past with the present. Recently, Governor Evers even said in a statement, quote, We need to have as high a standards as possible, unquote. He's right. Hopefully this will be a place where the legislature and Governor Evers can actually find common ground to come together with a solution to this growing failure in K-12 education. Finally, we will focus on helping President Trump fix the broken immigration system. Every state is a border state. When we deal with the challenges presented by illegal immigration, disappointingly, even tonight, Governor Evers has already said that he will not allow our National Guard troops to help at the border. And his administration has said they will not assist with the deportation of violent criminals. There are too many lawless bureaucrats and politicians pushing dangerous sanctuary policies that jeopardizes our public safety here in Wisconsin. This has to stop. Our criminal justice systems and our government programs are already stretched too thin and the need to focus resources on those who are here legally. Surprisingly, there is no current statutory requirement for law enforcement to inquire with Ice when an individual's legal status cannot be verified. In fact, some law enforcement agencies, including Dane County, the city of Beloit and Milwaukee County, have already announced they will not comply with Ice in limited circumstances. Republicans will pass legislation requiring all law enforcement in Wisconsin to cooperate with the immigration service to deport those who commit a serious crime and are being held in our jails or our prisons. The ideas I've just discussed in this brief response are common sense and have broad public support. Everyone, whether you're a Republican, a Democrat or an independent, should be able to rally around the idea of fighting inflation. Better educational outcomes for our kids and. Punishing violent criminals. We heard from tonight, Governor Evers, a long list of things. Partizan demands in a way that doesn't bring Wisconsin together. We all know Wisconsin is such a great place to live, work, raise a family and retire. Our commitment and our promise to you is to keep working to make it even better. Thank you for joining me tonight. God bless you and your family. And God bless the state of Wisconsin. That was Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos with the Republican response.

[01:09:27] **Speaker 2** If you would like to watch tonight's speech from Governor Tony Evers or Assembly Speaker and Speaker Robin Vos, again, we will have it posted later tonight on our website at PBS's wisconsin.org. We will have continuing coverage and reaction to the State of the State address this Friday evening at 730 on here. And now.

[01:09:46] **Speaker 1** Wisconsin Public Radio will also continue to follow developments from the state capital, both on the air and online at npr.org. We want to thank you for joining us this evening live from the state capitol in Madison. I'm Shawn Johnson with Wisconsin Public Radio.

[01:10:03] **Speaker 2** And I'm Frederica Freiberg with PBS, Wisconsin. This concludes our coverage of Wisconsin's 2025 State of the State address. Thanks for watching.