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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** I am rolling whenever you're ready. You're ready? I will start our timer as well. And Mr. Speaker, thanks for your time.

[00:00:04] **Speaker 2** Thanks, Zach. Appreciate you having me on.

[00:00:05] **Speaker 1** So it looks like the budget negotiations are very fluid. Bring us up to date on where we stand between the Senate, the Assembly, and the government.

[00:00:12] **Speaker 2** Yep, so weeks ago we began talking with Governor Evers because our goal is to get a budget signed into law that has guaranteed tax relief for Wisconsin citizens. We negotiated in earnest. At some point, it felt like the governor really wasn't being flexible enough for us. So we said, let's just start the finance process and see where it goes. So we began to go through the process like we always do with a goal of being done by July 1st. And then several weeks ago, we also decided, look, if there's a way we can stay engaged with the governor, I'm not opposed to negotiating. I'd like to get something that we can all live with. To begin talking again with the Assembly and the Senate. I feel like we have a very broad, vague general framework of where we could get to. So I'm optimistic that we could actually conclude by the end of July. Now it's just up to all three parts to continue negotiating. And it sounds like as of today, my Senate colleagues don't want to do that, which I think is a real shame because if Governor Evers vetoes the budget, no property tax relief, no funding for schools, and no one wins. That is not our goal. It's to find something that we could all live with. And I guess I'm still an optimist that we can do that, but only time will tell.

[00:01:15] **Speaker 1** Obviously the math in the senate is they can only lose one vote as a republican majority before they need to rely on democrats are is there any point at which you would ask the governor too put pressure on the democrats in the senator trying to include some of those democrats to see if you can secure a vote that way

[00:01:29] **Speaker 2** Well, one of the things I learned a long time ago is I love the assembly, right? That is where I get to work. If I predicted what was gonna happen in the state Senate, I would have even less hair than I do right now, right. So I have no idea what they're gonna do over there. Here, I feel very confident that we have almost all, if not all, assembly Republicans in general agreement with our framework. Again, the budget's gotta work its way through. There are still details left to work out. But the idea that we're gonna make investments in special education, that's something that we support. The idea that were gonna invest in childcare, we agree with that too. That we're going to have significant tax relief, hopefully focusing on retirees and the middle class, that's a winner. So I think you check a lot of boxes that get Republicans to want to be a yes. Now we just have to get a bill to the governor so we can actually be done with our part of the process.

[00:02:13] **Speaker 1** When you've been negotiating do you have to wait for the Senate Majority Leader to go back to his members and involve his caucus? Are you going to your caucus or can you kind of speak for your caucus?

[00:02:22] **Speaker 2** Yeah I mean I can only speak for us. I keep them updated on a very regular basis. We talk about what's in there. I try to get a general parameter where people are comfortable with to say okay can we live with that if we give this. It's actually been pretty productive. Our caucus has really been engaged. They've done a great job. Every single member has things that they know are important for their part of Wisconsin and then we all think there are things that are important for the whole state. So luckily we're in general agreement. We want to make sure we have great roads. We wanna make sure that you know we have that tax relief that will really flow to real people who need it at a time when, look, prices are still high. So I think at the end of the day, we have to focus on our goal, which is to get something done that's better than current law. The thing that makes me most optimistic is look in the last budget, we had historic investments in public schools and healthcare, we tried to do tax relief, that was vetoed by the governor, almost all the tax cuts were vetoed, so that didn't work. But even this time around, even with a historic tax cut that will be in our budget and some investments that are really important, our spending level will still be lower than it was two years ago. So it's not like we're on a spending binge. We're trying to be responsible, but at the same time, get something Governor Evers can hopefully support.

[00:03:26] **Speaker 1** In December, you said that you would have liked to see the tax cuts passed before the budget. You went into negotiations. Are what we're seeing passed out of joint finance similar to what the governor's agreed to? Did you kind of get his answer on where he was willing to go? And that's what's before everything. I mean, I don't want to.

[00:03:39] **Speaker 2** I mean, I don't want to speak for the governor, but I do feel like we're trying not to do things that would draw veto That is not our goal. We want to do that I think he hopefully could sign look there are things that in a compromise I'm gonna not love but the whole is better than the parts that I dislike and I'm sure he would probably say the same Thing there are parts that he wished were different, but I hope in the end he'll be able to look at it and say in total. It's a better deal than doing nothing

[00:04:02] **Speaker 1** When it comes to public education, obviously the governor's veto from the last budget created the parameters where school districts have the ability to raise funds on a per-pupil basis that's not funded into the Republican budget. Is this kind of a standoff of who will take the blame in the public's eyes for rising property taxes if the state doesn't fund it?

[00:04:21] **Speaker 2** Well, it's really, there's no argument. Governor Evers issued a veto for a 400-year property tax increase. He did it, he has to own it. I mean, literally it was his own decision. Of course, it was ratified by his liberal allies in the state Supreme Court. Of course they're gonna rubber stamp whatever he does. So, I mean that's not a surprise what actually occurred. But where we're focused is to say, okay, that's decided. We're not gonna change Governor Ever's mind. He's not gonna all of a sudden say, we shouldn't raise property taxes. He already accepted that we will forever. So, we're focus on where we can actually find that agreement. I don't want property taxes to go up. If it were up to me, it would have been a different result. But I didn't vote for the liberal majority and I didn't vote for Governor Eber. So I kind of have to accept the reality of where we are.

[00:04:57] **Speaker 1** In negotiations as Governor Evers asked you to fund that per people increase or is he rather see some of the whatever money is available to go into other pots?

[00:05:06] **Speaker 2** Again, I don't want to speak for Governor Ebers, but our negotiations have been mostly focused around the cost of special education. One of the things that Assembly Republicans brought to the table is a proposal which would say for kids who cost over $30,000 for high cost special ed kids, state's going to pay 90% of that. That's what really is bankrupting or hurting an awful lot of school districts. You get one or two kids in a small district that have intense special needs and they don't have the ability to fund it, so they have to cut other programs to put a package together that satisfy that child. So we wanna, we think that's a great way to do it. Governor Evers wanted more money in special ed. We always agreed with that. It's just discussing how much we're able to afford as a state. We need to have, we have a lot of priorities. Schools are an important one, but look, I care about how much we spend on healthcare. I care how much spend on raises for public employees. I care on how much we're gonna spend on childcare. There's a lot things that we have to balance out all while keeping in mind that we're overtaxing the citizens of Wisconsin. We gotta give some of that back.

[00:06:01] **Speaker 1** When it comes to child care funding, is there an agreement between the Democrats and Republicans that there's something needs to be done from the state's point of view, and it's just what is the best vehicle to get money into the system?

[00:06:13] **Speaker 2** Perhaps, I mean, I guess my thought is, look, we need more childcare providers. We need more access for parents to be able to find someone to take care of their kids if they choose to work. That's where our focus is. For the last couple of years, Governor Evers has literally just sent a check to every childcare provider in the state, hoping that that would drop the prices for childcare. That's like sending a check to the owner of the grocery store, hoping he drops the prices of eggs. That doesn't usually happen. So we didn't want to do it that way anymore, but we're open to other ideas, because certainly, look, I want more childcare slots. We look at states around us. Minnesota has a different ratio for how many kids can be watched by every single person who works in a childcare center. I don't think Minnesota is some kind of a right-wing bastion, so we could copy what they do and say that works. So we're trying to find some areas where we can find consensus. Again, not just dumping more money into the system, but hopefully creating more slots, making it more acceptable, and at the same time, doing it within a method that we can afford long-term.

[00:07:07] **Speaker 1** The most recent news on the UW System funding is an $87 million cut potentially. If that stands, would you expect to see tuition to increase? Would that lead to closures at some of the two-year schools?

[00:07:19] **Speaker 2** Well, first of all, our goal is not just to slash the university, just to slash the university that doesn't know when any good. We have tried to say for a long time that there have to be reforms into how they operate. I mean, here's one statistic that I hope everybody thinks about that I just read a study this week that shows from the year 2025 today through 2029, just four years from now, we're gonna have 15% fewer Wisconsin graduates going to college. Now that's not because the university is not accessible, it's because people are having fewer kids and there are lower numbers of high school graduates. So if you had one out of seven fewer customers, the store couldn't operate the same way. It would go bankrupt. Well, it's the same for the university system. If we don't figure a different way to operate, it's not just dumping more money in there. It's saying, wow, we have a lot less kids going to college. How are we gonna make sure that the system is nimble, that we do it in a way that actually makes people wanna go there, and it's not this woke mumbo jumbo that people hate. So we've asked for some simple reforms. We need faculty members to teach more. We need to make sure that if you take a class at Whitewater, it transfers to Superior without a lot of bureaucracy in the middle. You know, we're not trying to do things that are radical, but we're trying to things that will make it easier for families to get out of school quicker and hopefully do it in a way that's more meaningful to them and their family.

[00:08:28] **Speaker 1** Those sound like a lot of policy issues. Do those belong in the budget, or is that the only place you can actually negotiate this with the UW and with Governor

[00:08:35] **Speaker 2** Unfortunately, we've tried to work outside the budget, it's super hard. They are not real responsive, they're not real nimble. So if we're going to not reduce funding for the university or perhaps even give a small increase, they have to be willing to change. Doing everything like they did 20 or 30 years ago as enrollment declines means they're going to have serious budgetary problems going forward and that's not because of the legislature, that's just the reality of demographics. So they have be ready for that. That might mean that some of the two-year campuses have to close. It might mean they have to operate differently. It might means that there isn't every major at every campus anywhere in Wisconsin because we can't afford it. We are nowhere near as nimble as people are in other states and dealing with the same kind of demographic. So we have to figure a way to do it better and hopefully this could be a step toward that.

[00:09:20] **Speaker 1** Another big ticket item from the governor's budget that Republicans seem interested in its corrections. What needs to happen and will that be the capital budget? Is there going to be policy in the regular budget?

[00:09:30] **Speaker 2** We probably won't do a lot of corrections reform inside the budget. It's just a basic philosophical difference. Look, if somebody commits a serious crime and they are scheduled to be paroled, I want them to have some kind of worker training. I want him to have every opportunity to never return back to prison and turn their life around. That should be bipartisan. But I feel like under Governor Eber's plan, it's simply dumping a bunch of people outside the system and closing prisons to say that we just have too many people who are behind bars. I don't believe that. You go through a court process, you are heard by a jury. You're sentenced to 20 years in prison, you serve 20 years, right? That's the way it should be. His plan just takes a bunch of people and pushes them out of the system because we're overcrowded. Well, I don't want to just push them out because we are overcrowding. We should build a new prison. We should find a way to reform what we do. So that might take longer than this budget process to find a consensus, but now we're not going to adapt to these policies.

[00:10:19] **Speaker 1** There's quite a few high-profile issues we've discussed. Give me one thing that Republicans have put in the budget that's under the radar that you think deserves more attention.

[00:10:27] **Speaker 2** Boy, I feel like we're focusing on so many areas that people care about. I mean, one thing that I want to focus on is this retiree tax cut. Look, we all have moms and dads. We all have people who we love that made a decision once they retired to go somewhere warmer, right? I can't fault people for the weather. I mean even though I like the winter here, but a lot of people don't, but they choose to live six months in a day somewhere else so they pay their taxes there. When Florida, Tennessee, Texas, a lot times you can live cheaper and have no taxes so they choose domicile somewhere else. Well, that means. They're charitable donations, they're volunteer hours. Seeing their grandkids all goes away. So we have a proposal that would say that the first $35,000 of retirement income tax exempt, that means for the average couple, two teachers, two firefighters, a teacher and a firefighter, they'd save about 1,500 bucks a year. I think that's something that would seriously make a dent in family budgets to be able to help them, as opposed to doing something that only saves them a couple bucks, which probably doesn't do very much. So I think it's not gotten anywhere near as much coverage as I hope it would, and hopefully that'll be something that could be signed into law.

[00:11:25] **Speaker 1** Fifteen hundred is enough to balance someone's decision on whether they go south or move to Missouri or Arkansas or somewhere else.

[00:11:31] **Speaker 2** I mean, I guess for us, we're trying to do it. We prefer to make all retirement tax exempt. Our Senate colleagues wanted an income tax cut instead. All tax cuts are good, so not bad. Governor Evers didn't really offer either one of those. So yes, we'd prefer all retirement income, but in the spirit of compromise, we're getting as much done as we can.

[00:11:48] **Speaker 1** Speaker Boss, thanks for your time.

[00:11:48] **Speaker 2** Thanks, Zach, appreciate your time. All right. Good to see you, as always. Good luck tonight. Yeah, thank you. Hopefully, we'll read my speech one last time. Yeah.

[00:11:56] **Speaker 1** Are there any cameras there? No, I don't have that. You can check it out. All right, thank you, appreciate it. Thanks for everything. You too, sir. Everything recorded, it sounds good.