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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Well, I guess let's start with walk me through what we just what you just went through at the roundtable, kind of the background on that and what you're able to pull away from there.

[00:00:08] **Speaker 2** Yeah, absolutely. So we've been doing roundtables all over the state. I think we've done nearly a dozen of them over the last oh, I think I was appointed secretary last August. So I think we're roughly at about nine month mark here. But the real purpose of them is to is to hear directly from our partners, particularly in the health care industry, about the challenges they face, both both emerging and existing, and how do we work to be the best partner that we can be to address those challenges. We're sort of in, I would think, you know, I, I almost hate to overuse this word, right? I mean, unprecedented is the word that comes to mind. We used that for three years during the pandemic. But but at least in terms of the workforce, we're in sort of unprecedented times. Wisconsin has record low unemployment, record high labor force participation. And the reality is, is that there's still more than two and a half jobs for every every job opening out there. And so how do we work to meet that demand? And and that's some of the conversation that we've been having, having with our health care partners.

[00:01:10] **Speaker 1** So the history of that, is it displaced DSPs? What were you guys using?

[00:01:17] **Speaker 2** DSPs is good.

[00:01:19] **Speaker 1** Okay. I know I've heard both from state lawmakers, but I, I don't always trust their their knowledge of those things. But from the history, from what the public has learned, because for a long time, no one even knew that the agency existed. And that was probably best for everyone if you didn't have a direct relationship with it. It just wasn't on people's minds. The same way that some of the other state agencies are. Like, it wasn't the big bad guy, like the DNR that changed during COVID in in the last couple of years. So what was your background kind of leading into the last couple of years up to becoming secretary? And then what have you seen since then? What was your top of mind? This is what I need to do. Yeah. Oh, I just saw cable. Just before you answer.

[00:02:04] **Speaker 2** You know, I've held a number of positions over the years, primarily most immediately in the past, working for the US House of Representatives, for Congresswoman Gwen Moore and Milwaukee. And one of the things, you know, starting with that position and moving all the way through is how can we be most responsive to the people that we're serving? And and, and at the end of the day, just like our roundtable here today or the steps that we've undertaken with our agency, it's about being responsive to the people that we're serving. And so I think when I think about your statement about, oh, you know, many people didn't if you didn't have to engage with this DSPs, you didn't you didn't know who they were. Well, that's how we like it, right at the end of the day. We want you to walk into a building and understand that I'm safe here in Wisconsin because this building is safe and because Wisconsin has taken the appropriate steps to keep us safe. The same holds true when we're talking about licensing and credentialing, or we're talking about for profit educational institutions or the myriad of other programs that we operate on A day in and day out basis were our goal is to keep the citizens of Wisconsin safe. And the more they don't have to think about it because we are thinking about it, the better I think we are as a state, both to live, work and and as a destination for folks coming from from other places.

[00:03:27] **Speaker 1** So walk me through a little bit of what you knew going into taking the job as as acting secretary. Obviously, we received a lot of negative attention at that point. Were you worried about the outside perception? Were you more worried about the stakeholders? What was your focus? Because there's a lot of different layers to who who's commenting?

[00:03:47] **Speaker 2** Yeah, absolutely. I think first that he's not acting so.

[00:03:50] **Speaker 1** Oh, I'm sorry. So.

[00:03:52] **Speaker 2** And that's something that I just tried to clarify. So he's. Secretary it.

[00:03:58] **Speaker 1** I'm sorry.

[00:03:59] **Speaker 2** Thank you. Our focus has always been been the folks that we serve. Right? Whether it's our our partners in the construction industry, our our license applicants. It's about. It's about meeting them where they're at and understanding both the demand that exists in industry today and trying to project also the demand that will be in the future. You know, one thing that I've often said about about our processes as they exist today is, is that we're issuing more licenses more quickly than at any point in the last seven years of of of our agency and maybe beyond. But that's as far back as my data goes. And and but that's not that's not good enough. That's not how Wisconsin wins the battle for workers throughout the country and, quite frankly, in the global economy. And so we've got to be thinking beyond being the best we've ever been, and we've got to think creatively about how to make Wisconsin the best, not just in the nation, but in the world. And I think it's it's that focus. It's that that taking that that ability to see the opportunity and then apply that to the needs and the demands of citizens. You know, one thing that I think is really important to point out is that seven years ago, the workforce demands the labor shortages that exist didn't exist seven years ago. And so we're in a much different environment. And the demands both on government and on private industry are much different than they were seven years ago. So it's about how do we meet the demands of today?

[00:05:28] **Speaker 1** Are you doing that through technology primarily? Is that the number one driver and how things are changing?

[00:05:34] **Speaker 2** You know, we're doing it in a variety of means. Obviously, technology has been a big part of our story and a big part of our success, and it's going to continue to offer us opportunities to to pivot and to be responsive to our partners. You know, I think that's that's one of the things I'm most excited about with with our new platform is it's incredibly flexible. So it allows us to go to sessions like we had just had today with the folks at Marshfield and say, Oh, here are three or four items that they've talked to us as about, about as stress points or things that that we could partner more closely on. And so then how do I take that back and build something, build a tool or create a relationship inside of our system or with their systems to to more effectively execute our mission in terms of keeping the folks in the state of Wisconsin safe? You know, there is there's always more to that story. I think for us, it's I always say process people and and communication. And so so obviously we've we've got communication technology. Obviously we've talked about technology. Process is another thing that we've undertaken. My first week on the job, I actually met with our partners on the State Nursing Board and we've made adjustments in the rules and in the processes to allow us to to better align with the technology and the opportunities that presents to to create the most automated nurse licensing process that it's possible to create. But but the other side of that coin is, is we've always got to remember safety is in our name, right? Or the Department of Safety and Professional Services. And and you may be well aware there's a national FBI investigation into nursing transcript fraud. And we've got to be diligent in in automating what we can automate, but then making sure that where people need to have a hand in the process to keep the citizens of Wisconsin safe, we continue to execute that mission.

[00:07:38] **Speaker 1** When you realize that politics comes into every level of criticism that's being applied, including the budget requests, including elections, everything else, do you try and separate those out into different layers or do you just kind of have to look at the whole picture to understand that politics is intermingled no matter whether you're working, trying to do one, help one person get a license, or look at the entirety of how state government works.

[00:08:04] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I mean, at the end of the day, we're we're involved in the business of trying to deliver outcomes for the people that we work with. Certainly politics are a component of that and folks are going to have their different opinions about priorities and about approaches. But but what I'm worried about is results. And with the new system, with the process changes we've made, that's what we're doing. We're delivering results. And and quite frankly, I think as I expressed sort of near the beginning, we can not just deliver results, but I think we can be the best in the country. And I'm the the sort of the third rail of this is the people we need the resources to do the work, to do the important tasks to make sure we're keeping the citizens of Wisconsin safe. We put forth a budget we believe execute on that mission. You know, we're excited about. The prospects of the budget. We've had really good conversations with with our partners in the legislature and and I think their constituents see the need. We see the need. I look forward to to seeing the outcome of that process. But but but again, that process is just one component of the work that we're doing. We've got to look at processes, We've got to look at technology and we've got to look at better communicating it, because it's all of those things together that are going to make not just our organization successful, but make the state of Wisconsin successful.

[00:09:27] **Speaker 1** Over the last couple of years, there have been a lot of negative stories in the media, cherry picking individual circumstances or reflecting a partizan talking point. Do you think that you've been portrayed fairly?

[00:09:39] **Speaker 2** You know, I think what people sensed is that the the there's a higher level of demand for for workers in the state of Wisconsin. And and that creates an imperative that creates an imperative for government to work with its partners in in in private industry, in health care and other industries to meet that demand. And and so that's really what we've been focused on doing. You know, certainly we're not immune to the criticism. We've certainly heard it. But but we've we've got to continue to push through that and we've got to continue to to work to meet the demand, because at the end of the day, that that's the important thing is serving the the folks that we're tasked with serving.

[00:10:23] **Speaker 1** When these topics come up with someone like Governor Evers, he's very forceful in defending the agency and the job they've done and going deep into the politics of who's to blame or what's to blame or why things occurred the way they are. You're taking a very neutral stance, is it? Do you view it as someone else's role to play the political game and point the fingers and your job is different in this area? Or would you appreciate it if you had the opportunity to speak more frankly on some of this?

[00:10:49] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think, you know, we could certainly engage in that discussion, but I'm not sure what what what value that that necessarily brings. I think I think a frank exchange of ideas is always a good thing. And often times, just like our roundtable here today, it leads to, you know, solutions and it leads to creative thinking. And that's really what we're focused on, is making sure that that we're thinking creatively and proactively about problems and bringing those solutions to bear for for the benefits of the citizens of Wisconsin. You know, I especially in this day and age, right, politics are always going to be a part of the story. But but I think it's incumbent on all of us to make it not the main part of the story, because at the end of the day, we need to be focused on on serving the folks of the state of Wisconsin.

[00:11:37] **Speaker 1** So after a roundtable like today, how quickly can you take some of those ideas and turn them into reality with the system you have?

[00:11:45] **Speaker 2** Yeah, You know, there are a lot of, you know, considerations that come into play. Obviously, you've got to do your cost benefit analysis on on all of the opportunities in front of you. There have been really interesting instances where within a matter of weeks we've been able to to take ideas and either augment existing solutions or create new solutions. And, you know, I think that that not it doesn't just speak to the flexibility of the platform, but it speaks to our willingness to to really understand our partners and where they're at and meet them, where they're at. You know, the primary example I give on this and maybe I'm dating myself a little bit is is we call it the kind of the Apple ification, right. Of of the world is this idea that you shouldn't need an instruction manual because something should be so self-explanatory that that you can you can just move through the process seamlessly. Well, to some of us, that seems a little bit odd, right? The fact that that that people should have this expectation that they shouldn't need to read through things to understand things. But but at the end of the day, it's incumbent upon us as an organization and and to meet people where they're at. And so that means investing in tools that are more streamlined, that are more self-explanatory. It means investing in systems that prompt the people we work with to take the steps necessary to move through the process. And those are all the types of things that we've invested in and we are looking at investing in to help not just help us be successful, but help the people we work with be successful.

[00:13:22] **Speaker 1** One of the things that I think a lot of people look at this as talking about licensing, they're not thinking of the opposite end of that, which you mentioned is in your title is Safety. How do those two go hand in hand?

[00:13:33] **Speaker 2** Yeah, absolutely. The the legislature and our boards have over many decades identified the standards that that they view to be sort of minimally acceptable in terms of of somebodies ability to perform tasks and given license profession. And so it starts with that, right? It starts by making. Sure that the folks that say they are a nurse, they went to nursing school and that they passed the relevant exams and and that they don't have concerns in their potentially in a criminal background check that that may lead us to believe that they aren't a good candidate for that profession. But then it extends beyond that. We also have legal processes whereby if if an incident happens, a member of the public or an employer can submit a complaint about a license holder and we can evaluate that. Did this person act appropriately as required by law for their profession? And so really, it's it's it's kind of on two ends of the spectrum, right? It's making sure they're qualified on the front end. And then on the back end, it's it's holding people accountable not just to to the existing standards, but then also to staying up to date on standards. So things like continuing education.

[00:14:48] **Speaker 1** I mean, that's the the flip side of the people complaining about bureaucracy is like if it wasn't doing what it's supposed to do, then anyone could pretend to be anything. I mean, then there goes your safety, there goes your, your guarantee that things are done correctly.

[00:15:03] **Speaker 2** Like we talked about a little earlier, It's really about making sure that at the end of the day, if if I'm on vacation in Managua and my son gets sick, I can take him to that clinic and I can be reasonably assured that we have appropriate, competent professionals doing doing the work that they need to do to help my son feel better, or for that matter, walking into a building and and and not having to worry about, oh, is the structural integrity of the building looks sound. I wouldn't have that knowledge to judge that anyways, but I know other people are doing that work so that we can feel safe and confident in our daily lives in the work we do here.

[00:15:44] **Speaker 1** Do you enjoy roundtables like this more than working with the legislature when it comes to that end, or do they each have their separate benefit for you?

[00:15:53] **Speaker 2** I think they all have their separate benefits. I really enjoy conversations generally with with a wide variety of people, I think. I think certainly roundtables like this provide me a window into the the day to day struggles or day to day challenges that health care organizations face. Then in talking to the legislature, it allows me to understand the challenges that maybe their constituents face or the things that they're hearing on the ground. I worked in a legislative office for a number of years, and I know that in many ways the legislative offices are sort of that canary in the coal mine. They kind of hear things from their constituents early in the process, and that that kind of gives you that window to identify things a little bit more proactively. And so I value partnership in any form. And and and in fact, I'm looking forward to continued conversations with our legislative partners in the next few weeks, both over the budget and other other legislative ideas.

[00:16:57] **Speaker 1** All right. Anything else that we should know?

[00:16:59] **Speaker 2** No. Just really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me today. I think our our agency is going to remain committed to to doing everything necessary to meet the demand that exists in our workforce today and to continue to keep the citizens of Wisconsin safe.

[00:17:19] **Speaker 1** All right. Thank you very much for your time. Perhaps they shared it. You're still tethered, so don't run off too far.