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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Hover over here. They don't want to be on camera. They don't want to see anything.

[00:00:03] **Speaker 2** Just close enough to make you feel what's going on. Sorry, I can't help you with the Legos right now.

[00:00:09] **Speaker 1** Yeah, well, my kids always my daughter, especially saying I don't like the way you look.

[00:00:14] **Speaker 2** Oh, geez.

[00:00:15] **Speaker 1** I sound weird because I have to shave. And when you put on that suit and you look different and right.

[00:00:21] **Speaker 2** What is it, Daddy?

[00:00:22] **Speaker 1** Yeah, exactly. I don't look like that. I understand how we don't. We are good to go. All right. Do you need a clapper at the end just because that thing go set up? Right. Okay. Yeah, we'll get at the end. All right. Well, Senator, thank you for joining us today.

[00:00:37] **Speaker 2** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:00:38] **Speaker 1** So tell me about the adjustment you've just been made, minority leader in the Senate. What's that process been like for you to move into a new office in a new position?

[00:00:46] **Speaker 2** It feels a bit like drinking from the fire hose, but also I'm really ready. This last cycle has been challenging, certainly in the Capitol building as well as during the campaign season. And I always feel better when we have purpose and we're moving forward for what it is that the folks have actually elected us to do. Being able to build my team, to support my caucus, to support the people of the state of Wisconsin, and actually being able to work on behalf of the folks of the people I consider my bosses, the people of Wisconsin. It's exciting and it's exciting. But that transition, packing, unpacking, setting up the office, it does take time, but we're hitting our stride and we're ready.

[00:01:32] **Speaker 1** So the Democratic caucus in the Senate has been shrinking over the years. Where are you at as a team? What is the mindset as you are fewer and fewer as the years go on?

[00:01:42] **Speaker 2** So that's an interesting question. I have only been in the Senate for two years. Many of my colleagues have been there longer and there are handful that have been there for less now or the same amount of time as as I have. Certainly, we know that as members of the minority party in Wisconsin, it is our job as a caucus to build forward to become part of the majority. We also know that the people across Wisconsin really value what it is that we're working on, the things that we prioritize. That's clear with the reelection of Governor Evers and the reelection of Josh Kaul. So knowing that we're in touch and in tune with the people of Wisconsin really helps. Bouie The work that we're doing at the same point, I know that in order to get things done right now, it's a balance. In order to get things done right now, we also need to sit down and build collaborative, trusting relationships with our colleagues on the other side of the aisle. And hopefully they've heard the same thing that we have over the last six months or so during the campaign cycle, which is people in Wisconsin want us to work together. They want us to figure out what it is that we can get done and not throw bombs at one another. So that balance of being unapologetic about what we know that the ordinary people of Wisconsin want, regardless of who it is that they vote for at the top of the ticket, along with the fact that we are in the minority in the building, and we do need to figure out how it is that we can work together on behalf of those people who are our bosses, how it is that we thread those those paths through the same needle and figure out how it as we move forward. That's where we're at right now and having the opportunity to sit down and talk with my colleagues who have entrusted me with the position of being their leader in the state Senate, as well as talking with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and folks in the other House and the Assembly. That is important, and it does seem that we are all really earnest about wanting to be able to move forward. There's history. So how it is that we heal from that is, you know, to be seen. It's only been a week or close to two weeks, I guess, now that I've been in this position. But we've been working hard, meeting with people, figuring out what it is that we can work on, where it is that we're going to be willing to have compromise hearing and some conversations just like this from our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, what their vision is and being able to bring that forward.

[00:04:12] **Speaker 1** Traditionally, the role of the minority has been the vocal opposition. When you see the members that are put on Joint Finance, it's to raise objections, to raise points. On the other side are there. But there's a lot of places that we could list that we know that the two sides don't see eye to eye. But what are the areas that you think you do have common ground where you are most likely to find consensus?

[00:04:33] **Speaker 2** Well, I think one of the biggest areas that we have seen is during the campaign cycle. Everyone was talking about supporting our local governments. The loving limits that have been put on our local governments for the last decade or so in Wisconsin are not working. We saw unprecedented numbers of communities bringing forward referendums for simply providing public safety. This is above and beyond the referendums that we had seen a handful of years ago starting. To roll on when it comes to supporting our schools. So when we're seeing our municipalities, our local governments struggling like this, and I'm hearing from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that they see this as a problem. I'm hearing from the governor that he sees that a problem. He's already committed to addressing this in his budget. I am hopeful that we can take this $6.6 billion surplus that we have in the state of Wisconsin on top of our standard biennial budget, that we're going to be rolling up our sleeves and mucking through over the next couple of months as well, and really figure out how that we get that back into the communities. So supporting our local governments I think is at the top of the pile of things that we can agree on. It's whether, you know, so we have the end point, how it is that we get there, what are the paths that we use to move forward? To be continued. But I do think that when we can agree that we have an understanding about what that endpoint is, that's exciting. Additionally, in the Senate, we are responsible for confirming appointments to secretarial positions, commissions and and other important roles within our state government. And that has not been happening. The Senate needs to roll up their sleeves and get back to work in that process. We know that that peaceful transition of power not only in Washington, D.C., but even at this level within our state government, is important. And I am hearing from my Republican colleagues that they're ready to get moving on that. So I do think that there are some really big issues, umbrella issues that we do have agreement on. And yes, there are many things that we're not going to agree on. But let's focus on what we can agree on and try to get in particular that money that we have in the surplus and how it is that we work forward with the budget back into our communities and supporting the ordinary people of our state.

[00:06:50] **Speaker 1** The appointment process has been obviously a big item of contention. Now that Governor Evers has been reelected, he's talked about trying to build more communication and trust. What role does the minority have in that process? You don't control any of the committees. You're obviously going to support the governor's appointees, but that's most of them don't even get to the floor to get to that point. So is it more of in the committee process? Is it backchannel in private conversations? What role do you play in that?

[00:07:17] **Speaker 2** Well, we play an awful lot of roles. I have had folks who have been appointed to committees and commissions reach out to me to introduce themselves so that when we do go to the committee process, there's a little bit of familiarity in what it is that, you know, who is sitting across the table. How is it that we interact with each other? I think when they are doing that proactive outreach, it helps to show that they are serious, that they really want to do this. It's not just filling a seat. These appointments to commissions and boards across the state of Wisconsin are vitally important and how it is that our state continues to move forward in making sure that we have the people of the communities with the best knowledge and the best skills in those spots is important. I believe that Governor Evers administration has done their due diligence in making these appointments. And based on what I'm hearing from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, they're ready to start moving forward with them. Let's have the tough conversations at the committee level. Let's bring it to the floor. Let's debate it and let's vote up or down. If the governor needs to go back to work, if the majority party does feel like that person is not the right fit, holding them in this weird limbo isn't going to help the state of Wisconsin. It's not even going to help them in their point that they feel like that person isn't the right fit. So I am looking forward to being able to pull the anchor up from the committee reporting process and get that boat moving across the finish line.

[00:08:40] **Speaker 1** You mentioned the budget and obviously the tax cuts are going to be something that Republicans are prioritizing. Governor Evers has talked about tax cut, but they're coming at it from different perspectives. What role do you think you have to play and what what approach would you like to see when it comes to how taxes are cut?

[00:08:57] **Speaker 2** Yes, absolutely. You know, and again, we have this surplus. And I think that one of the things that we can do with the surplus is get that money back into the hands of the hardworking people of Wisconsin that have earned that money and brought it to the state. The fact that has been sitting in Madison for all of these months and it's just continued to grow and grow well, our communities and our friends and neighbors across Wisconsin struggle because of inflation. It's a global issue. Certainly we have a role to play in getting that back out. And part of that, I think, can include tax cuts for hardworking people in Wisconsin. But it needs to be targeted to the hard working people of Wisconsin, the actual people of our state, not just the top tier, not the well-connected, not the wealthy. But let's figure out how it is that we get back, that back into the hands of families that are struggling to be able to put new shoes on their kids feet and have enough food at the kitchen table to feed their families.

[00:09:54] **Speaker 1** In past budget process is the last two with Governor Evers as governor. But. Watchers have been looking at Democrats and their votes of approving a Republican budget, saying that if Democrats vote with Republicans to find give final approval to a budget, it makes it more difficult or less likely. Governor Evers would veto the entire budget because that would hang some of those Democrats out to dry. Do you look to have unity within your caucus before you come to the floor? Do you want to have Governor Evers know where he stands on a lot of this before you would come to the floor? If the budget is more aligned with Republican principles than it is with what Governor Evers wants.

[00:10:31] **Speaker 2** Well, I think what we've seen in Wisconsin, you know, you don't have to look too much farther back from looking at the last budget process. There was a budget that was brought together by Republicans and Democrats. Republicans were taking credit for the budget that the governor signed and the governor was taking credit for the budget that the governor signed. That probably means it was a budget that was good for the people of our state. And it's a long process. So it's not like there's just a bill put before us in the legislature and we get to vote up or down. The governor has been working with the agencies across the state of Wisconsin to hear what it is that they need in order to be able to continue to move forward in the best interest of the people of our state. He has then taken that information. He's crafting his budget. He hasn't presented that to us. We're anticipating that to happen in the next handful of months. Then the Joint Finance Committee will have all sorts of public hearings, and we plan as Democrats to have public hearings across the state of Wisconsin to ensure that people everywhere in our communities are able to weigh in on that budget process. What is it that matters most to them? It's vitally important that we realize that the people of the state of Wisconsin are our bosses. As Governor Evers points out, engraved on the ceiling of his conference room are the words The will of the people is the law of the land. So right here, right now, I'm not willing to say I'm going to not support what the Republicans bring forward or I'm going to support 100% what the governor brings forward. We need to be listening to the people of the state of Wisconsin taking that information and making sure that we are crafting the budget in the best interest of everyone.

[00:12:09] **Speaker 1** The last two budget presentations by the governor have included a lot of proposals that everyone knew Republicans would never support. That was part of a mission statement by the governor of what his principles and priorities were. But everyone knew a lot of it was dead on arrival. Do you think the governor should take that same approach this time in laying out his budget as a vision of what his priorities are, or should he attempt to be more realistic as to what may actually get passed?

[00:12:35] **Speaker 2** Yeah, that's a really great question, really great question. And frankly, I think it's a bit tricky because many of the things that the governor will put in his budget that he's already announced that he's putting in his budget, are things that matter to the people of the state of Wisconsin because they are Wisconsinites who care about one another, as opposed to because they are issues that were brought forward by a Democrat or because they were brought forward by a Republican. So my Republican colleagues might say, oh, we're not going to legalize cannabis in Wisconsin. That's dead on arrival. We're not going to expand health care in the state of Wisconsin. That's dead on arrival. We're not going to support our public schools to the full capacity that we should. That's dead on arrival. At the same time, we know that those are issues that the vast majority of the people in Wisconsin, upwards of 70, 80% on some of these issues, support. They are not partizan. So are we going to listen to the fact that there is a handful of Republicans on the Capitol building that have created a narrative that these issues are not important or they're that they're nonstarters? Are we going to listen to the vast majority of the people of the state of Wisconsin who are saying they want these things to happen? They are budgetary and they should be included in that budget. And this is our opportunity to to debate them, because, frankly, when they're introduced as standalone bills in the legislature, the Republicans who have control over that committee process aren't even allowing us to come to the table and have a debate having a committee meeting. So I do hope that the governor takes takes heed from the people of the state of Wisconsin and puts in those issues that he knows that the vast majority of our friends and neighbors care about are included in that budget and that we're allowed to debate it. And I keep hoping that there is a point in time where they actually pass, because that's what Wisconsinites are asking for.

[00:14:18] **Speaker 1** Abortion was a huge topic in the election. It will be a huge topic going forward. It's in the courts. Republicans have talked about passing a bill that would at least change the 1849 law that in theory right now applies as the law of the land. In Wisconsin, Democrats, especially Governor Evers, have said he would veto some of the ideas. What do you think is the most realistic outcome given that Republicans are not going to pass a bill? That brings us back to the ROE standard. What would you actually see as a compromise or is it possible to reach a compromise?

[00:14:52] **Speaker 2** There are some issues where there is no room for compromise. This is a personal health care decision. It is not a place where politicians belong. And some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have suggested that we also include in the doctor's office not just politicians, but police officers. We need to trust that the people of Wisconsin can make the health care decisions that are best for them and their family with the support of their doctors. And gender shouldn't be part of that.

[00:15:17] **Speaker 1** The reality is, though, that the law right now does not even allow exceptions for rape or incest if there is no compromise, that is the law going forward. Would the people of Wisconsin not be better off with some of those exceptions, at least written into law for them rather than to have them? Not at all.

[00:15:33] **Speaker 2** The folks that I have talked to across the state of Wisconsin say don't settle for that. I do very much support the lawsuit that has been brought forward by Attorney General Call. I am looking forward to some clarity provided by by his actions. And I do anticipate that we're going to continue talking about this in Wisconsin for quite some time. It's unfortunate that, again, this is an issue that the majority of the people of the state of Wisconsin believe is a private health care decision. It's a personal freedom. And when my colleagues finally wake up to that, I believe very strongly that we will be moving in the right direction. States across our nation that are more red than Wisconsin have the opportunity to have ballot initiatives that are binding. We do not have that opportunity in Wisconsin. In those states, people turned out and they said reproductive health care freedoms are no place for government involvement. And that message has been heard loud and clear by me and my colleagues.

[00:16:30] **Speaker 1** Given that that lawsuit is out there, is it most likely that any any potential compromise won't take place until after that issue is decided in the courts one way or the other? That that would give people more clarity as to where where it actually stands, as opposed to the upheaval of waiting for a court to decide.

[00:16:50] **Speaker 2** Well, at this point, it is in the courts. And I think one of the things that I have heard from my colleagues, from advocates on the outside, from my friends and neighbors across the state of Wisconsin, is that we do support the lawsuit that has been brought forward by AG Hall, and we're looking forward to having the results of that. We anticipate there will continue to be more litigation, but this isn't an easy conversation. I understand that. However, my caucus and myself very much believe that people will be making their best decisions on their own with their families and their doctors. And we are not to be involved in that process. So we will continue following that, following that path and the work that we're doing.

[00:17:33] **Speaker 1** The courts are obviously very important to Wisconsin. There's a very important Supreme Court election coming up that could rebalance the ideological makeup of the court and that could lead to the path back to the majority in redistricting. How important is the Supreme Court this election that's coming up to all of the Democratic priorities that you've talked about?

[00:17:54] **Speaker 2** Absolutely. The Supreme Court election and I think we've heard time and time again, oh, this is the most important election of our lifetime. And then there's another one. No, wait. This one is more important. This is a very important election for the state of Wisconsin. And historically, our spring elections have a smaller turnout associated with them. We do know that because of the split government that we have in Wisconsin and the history of laws being litigated up to the Supreme Court in Wisconsin over the last decade or more, that the Supreme Court's makeup really does matter and does affect the everyday lives of the people of the state of Wisconsin. I do anticipate that not just folks in Wisconsin, but people all across our nation are going to be paying attention to the Supreme Court election. Not only is it tied to redistricting, abortion rights, union rights, the list goes on and on. And we do know that there is going to be a spotlight shown on the state of Wisconsin through the Supreme Court election. And it will have really big effects. It'll it'll have ripples on the future of our state.

[00:19:05] **Speaker 1** What is the path back to the majority in the Senate for Democrats? Can you win back rural areas or is it the path through the suburbs?

[00:19:15] **Speaker 2** So I would say both. Ultimately, we may hold the minority of seats in the state of Wisconsin, but we know that we hold the majority of the hearts of the people of the state of Wisconsin and the work that we are doing. Again, it's not about whether or not you have an R or a D next to your name. People in Wisconsin do know what it is that they care about. So to me, one of the things that is important that we are doing as a caucus, as Democrats in the state Senate in Wisconsin, is that we are making ourselves available to the people of our state where they are. Yes, we do need to continue to pay attention to the urban areas and to college towns that have tended to trend a little bit more blue than the rest of the state of Wisconsin. But it is vitally important that we're available to people in the suburbs surrounding Milwaukee and up into the Green Bay corridor. It's also equally important that we're spending time in northern Wisconsin and central Wisconsin, because ultimately what we have heard is that people want us to be present. They want to be able to tell us what matters to them. And they want to see us bringing their stories, bringing forward what it is matters to their families, to the Capitol building, and advocating for them and building those connections, being present, not expecting them to come to us, but us going to them, I think, will play a big role in being able to move the ball forward so that the people of the state of Wisconsin have adequate representation in the Capitol building.

[00:20:43] **Speaker 1** Is that more difficult when you don't actually hold seats either in the Assembly or the Senate in a large percentage of the rural parts of the state?

[00:20:51] **Speaker 2** Well, just because I don't represent a portion of the state of Wisconsin, it doesn't mean that I'm not allowed to go there and set up shop and hear from the people that do live there. And I imagine you're going to be seeing more of us as the Democrats in the Senate traveling the state of Wisconsin and reaching out to people, asking them to come and share with us what it is that is working and not working for them.

[00:21:14] **Speaker 1** There's a very important special election coming up in the Senate as well. What are your outlooks for the possibility of taking that seat?

[00:21:20] **Speaker 2** Well, as we crunched the data, Governor Evers did not win that Senate district, but he came very close. We do anticipate that it will be a again, a spotlight race. It's going to be the only state legislative race that's on the ballot at this point in time. That's what it appears. And with the suburbs around Milwaukee and the trends that we have seen, we believe that we have a good shot at being able to win that seat and come back with 12.

[00:21:51] **Speaker 1** Are you disappointed that Representative Andronico decided not to run?

[00:21:55] **Speaker 2** Certainly have an awful lot of respect for Representative Deb and I share cell phone numbers with one another and we'll text with each other. I know it's a hard decision to make whether or not you're going to run for a different seat than the one that you hold. Again, it's a personal decision. It's one that she sat down with her family and it's the right decision for her. I support her and continuing the work she's doing on behalf of the people of Wisconsin in the assembly. I would have welcomed her into the Senate, and I know that she's a hard worker. However, the outcome of this is that I continue to be able to work with her and have her be a partner and a friend.

[00:22:32] **Speaker 1** Are you personally involved in the recruitment of any candidates for that race?

[00:22:36] **Speaker 2** So I've spent quite a bit of time this week on the phone calling potential candidates, talking to folks within communities about who they might know, who could use a call and answering questions for folks who might be considering to be continued. But I am involved in that. It's important that we as elected officials, especially those of us that have gone through the path of making those decisions and running campaigns, that we're available to people as they are considering whether or not they're going to take this take the opportunity to run.

[00:23:07] **Speaker 1** In back to the Supreme Court race for just a moment. There are two liberals, more liberal persuasion judges running in that race. Do you expect Democrats to get involved in endorsing or is that a personal decision for each one?

[00:23:21] **Speaker 2** So that's very much a personal decision for each each per each. It's a sorry it's a highly personal decision for each member of my caucus on what it is that they're going to be doing. I think we've already seen folks picking picking their horses in that race. There was a recent announcement. Now there is four people in the race. So two more conservative leaning folks, two more liberal leaning folks. And it's going to be a spirited discussion. And I look forward to being able to support who it is that comes out of that primary so that we do pick up the seat.

[00:23:54] **Speaker 1** This is one of the first times that we've actually seen a four way primary for an open seat where there are two from each ideological camp. And there is the statistical possibility that if either Republicans or Democrats dominate turnout in that primary, they could advance both of their preferred candidates. Is that a fear among Democrats that if they don't have the turnout for February, that they could see the two more conservative candidates advance to the general?

[00:24:20] **Speaker 2** Certainly that's something that we need to keep our eyes on. But we do know that in Wisconsin, you don't need to look farther than in November's election. People are passionate. They are paying attention to these races. And the fact that we do have four candidates means, you know, that this is a spotlight for people on both sides of the political aisle, so to speak, in our state. But I very much believe that we're going to have the best candidate come forward out of the primary, and we're not going to have a problem having two conservatives. I would love to have two more progressive candidates come through, but that's typically not the Wisconsin way. Wisconsin. Tends to act like there's a knife's edge going through our our political our political threads. And we're going to we're going to be able to see what happens as we continue to build forward. It's clear that all four of these candidates are building strong teams to support the work that they're doing. Judicial races tend to be a little bit different than legislative races, certainly. But I also know that there are people not only in my caucus, not only in the legislature, but folks all across the state of Wisconsin that are getting ready to find their walking shoes and their mittens so they can be out knocking on doors and talking to the people about what matters most to them.

[00:25:35] **Speaker 1** All right. Is there anything else that you'd like to touch on?

[00:25:38] **Speaker 2** I don't think so.

[00:25:39] **Speaker 1** All right, Senator Erica, thanks for your time today.

[00:25:41] **Speaker 2** Thank you very much.

[00:25:43] **Speaker 1** All right. Survived.

[00:25:44] **Speaker 2** I did. Yeah.

[00:25:46] **Speaker 1** All right. Don't move. Do you want to get room tone? I want to get room. Okay, so need a clap. All right, so we're gonna do a couple of things. One, just record silence. So we hear the sound of the fan. So if there's any oddities in it, you can work with our amazing technology for that. And then we also need to sync up the cameras in the audio. So hold tight for just a minute. You want to clap when everybody perfect. All right. And then we will sit for about 30 seconds once you the spark. That was Governor Walker's favorite thing about interviews. The clap. He loved the clap.

[00:26:18] **Speaker 2** Did he do the clapping?

[00:26:19] **Speaker 1** Yeah, he found it. You would ask, can I do the clap? Was there as much as a lot of people did not like him. They didn't know him like his personality was kind of infectious. I mean.

[00:26:31] **Speaker 2** It was he was.

[00:26:32] **Speaker 1** Eager and energetic.

[00:26:34] **Speaker 2** And just remember things about you. Yes.

[00:26:36] **Speaker 1** Guess in a different environment. I think he you could have been like a Tommy Thompson type person in terms of his ability to really get people to like him. All right. So you want to quote it, so we'll be quiet for 30 seconds starting. And.