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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** I was looking to see if I can get to New Orleans in February and just even like a Thursday night through a Saturday, like a late flight home is way out of the pocketbook range. Just. All right. Well, I guess we'll have to do without any Mardi Gras or any anything. Road trip. Yeah, I've done that was college. The college road trip. Was that. We're good. All right. Well, Senator, thanks for your time. Thanks for joining us.

[00:00:24] **Speaker 2** Thank you for having me.

[00:00:26] **Speaker 1** Give me your take away from the 2022 elections. What do you what do you receive as far as the message from voters?

[00:00:34] **Speaker 2** Yeah. So I think that the message was sent to voters to trust us in the legislature, in the assembly, they added three seats. In the Senate, we added one seat and we're only 700 votes away from a second getting the 23 out of the 33 seats. But I think we also learned that Wisconsin maybe likes divided government as well by reelecting Tony Evers. You know, I think it's a reflection somewhat on the way we've governed over the last ten, 12 years, responsible budgets. You know, the governor signed two of our budgets now in a row, and I think that helped him helped him get reelected, citing responsible budgets that provide tax relief, hold the line on spending. And unfortunately for us, it worked for him. But we'll continue to do what we think is important for the state of Wisconsin.

[00:01:23] **Speaker 1** Coming out of 2020, Republicans were concerned about what their voters believe and how much they trusted elections. Do you think some of that's been put to bed by we really haven't heard any problems coming out of this last election?

[00:01:36] **Speaker 2** Yeah, there was a there was a hand count in Washington County where on Dominion Machines and the votes came out accurately. I think there are still some areas where we can shore up election law that we found of the Legislative Audit Bureau. Unfortunately, we put some of those bills on the governor's desk and he's vetoed them already. But I think there's some simple solutions just to help continue to build that confidence in the electorate. You know, it's important to have fair elections where it's it's hard to cheat and easy to vote. But, you know, I think the second most important thing outside of that is having the electorate having confidence in elections. If people don't trust that their their vote is counted, they you know, it's it's not a good thing. So, you know, anything we can do to try to help continue to build that confidence in our election systems, hopefully we can get non-controversial election bills that the governor will sign this session.

[00:02:32] **Speaker 1** It's been a while since the legislature has been in session. Do you anticipate any any bills moving rather early right away?

[00:02:40] **Speaker 2** I think well, we'll probably have some bills that move early on in the session. You know, in in my caucus, there's there's five new members, some who were in the assembly at one point or another. So but it would be great to have, you know, five fresh voices in our caucus, you know, a new committee structure, new committee chairs. So I think there's work that we can get done since we haven't been in session since the beginning of of of this year.

[00:03:05] **Speaker 1** And we talk about elections, but they're not entirely over for the Senate. What's your view on the Republican primary for the eighth?

[00:03:12] **Speaker 2** Well, it's not set yet. People are still announcing people are still getting signatures. So we'll see who's actually in the race January 3rd, when, when second or second, when signatures, whenever that data is, when signatures are due. And, you know, my job as it was, as it was this fall is, you know, whoever comes out of a primary, it's my job to support them. And it's a seat that we've held for a long time. And it's hopefully we are set. We can continue to hold.

[00:03:42] **Speaker 1** There are a couple of members coming out of the assembly that at least talked about running. Whether they make the ballot is another thing, obviously. Do you have a preference for someone that maybe new that no experience in the building versus someone that actually knows the ropes just coming from the other chamber?

[00:03:55] **Speaker 2** So I think different people who are in the race and others who might jump in the race here shortly have had relationships with different senators in the caucus, some having served with some of them in the assembly and different friendships. So I think it's it's not my place as the majority leader to pick a favorite out of the field at this point. And, you know, each individual senator and legislator can, you know, try help out the candidate that that they've worked with in the past or would feel would be a great addition to our caucus.

[00:04:29] **Speaker 1** That race will be paired up with the Supreme Court election, which obviously is a very important race. Do you think that they will have a hand, an impact on each other as far as turnout goes?

[00:04:39] **Speaker 2** You know, I think it's good that the governor signed it up alongside with the with the spring elections. First of all, you know, it's not an added cost to the local government. So if it was on a data side, but I think, you know, it should be the Supreme Court will probably be a fairly big race this spring. So I think that's good to have more. Voters turn out to vote on the Senate race rather than a spring race which might not have as or a standalone date which might not have as many people voting, because then you get more of a true representation of the district with higher turnout. So yeah, I think it's it should be a good year for it's not a presidential primary year, but it should be. It's a high stakes Supreme Court race. So that should hopefully drive voter turnout this spring.

[00:05:25] **Speaker 1** It's an interesting setup in that because the Supreme Court race is technically nonpartisan. There isn't a party primary, even though there are two more conservative and two more liberal candidates. Is there a concern that boosted primary either for Democrats or Republicans, could lead to both of their preferred candidates getting through, as opposed to one from each.

[00:05:44] **Speaker 2** Side on the Supreme Court race?

[00:05:46] **Speaker 1** Yes.

[00:05:47] **Speaker 2** I doubt that would have that would happen. That would have to almost mean that each of the four candidates gets about 25% of the vote with one party getting a little higher turnout than the other. That seems highly unlikely, I would think. But I'm not an expert on spring elections.

[00:06:07] **Speaker 1** How big is that race, considering the impact that the Supreme Court has on legislation overseeing legislation and on a lot of the things that have just naturally been, you know, brought up to the court?

[00:06:17] **Speaker 2** Oh, yeah. That's that that elections, it's going to be incredibly huge this spring. We we've had with our current Supreme Court being held by strict constructionist constitutionalists for quite a while now, I think we've had a very stable state and it's made they haven't been overturning laws. They haven't been legislating from the bench for the most part. And so that that provides certainty to businesses who want to expand and grow here. It's just vitally important that we have that stability in the Supreme Court.

[00:06:53] **Speaker 1** One of the obviously the big thing is the budget coming up this spring. What do you anticipate being a priority for Republicans other than tax cuts? Obviously, that's the top line issue. But what other elements are you most focused on?

[00:07:05] **Speaker 2** We. Well, I'm going to talk about tax cuts, because that is the most important thing that we can do. We have an unprecedented surplus. And granted, this is just a projection at this point, the $6.6 billion in April, we'll get a new estimate from the from the fiscal bureau. And so those will be the real numbers that we're working with in our budget cycle. But, you know, it's such a exciting time. It it lends to the decade long of responsible budgeting that we've done in Wisconsin, holding the line on spending and working on hold and holding the line and reducing taxes. And, you know, we see states around that haven't been as as responsible for us. And now, you know, with all the federal money that's been dumped into the system causing inflation, we have this huge surplus. So it gives us a huge advantage opportunity to make historic and transformational tax cuts. When you're when the state is collecting $6.6 billion more than they're spending, people are being overtaxed. We need to provide permanent tax relief in that situation. But we also have an opportunity to continue to invest in things that that we have in the past. In the last budget, we put 450 million additional dollars into the health care system to help nursing homes and areas like that. So we can build on some of those those investments that we're making to make sure Wisconsin has great health care and takes care of those who are least among us that can take care of themselves.

[00:08:42] **Speaker 1** It's interesting when you talk about tax cuts, because over the last decade plus of Republican leadership in the legislature, you've cut taxes nearly every session. And each time you hear Democrats or opponents say, well, this is going to cause a problem with the next budget, and that in some cases hasn't really come to fruition. So what is your response when you hear them say again that you cut taxes on the rich too much, you're just going to create a hole in the next budget. That's not where it should be.

[00:09:06] **Speaker 2** Right. If you look at tax cuts just statically, then that's the view you're going to have. Well, we're going to get less revenue. But if you look at it dynamically that when people have more money left over, they're going to spend it there. So it's going to. So sales tax is going to go up. You know, it gives people the opportunity to send that money back through the cycle and not just burn it into into government programs. And it also, you know, helps people stay in the state of Wisconsin. If we have a competitive tax code, it invites people to come to move to Wisconsin if we have a competitive tax code as compared to our neighbor. So continuing to reform our tax code to be an island, when we have states like Illinois to the south of us, Minnesota to the west, Michigan to the east, it's just going to help us be a nice island in the upper Midwest of states where people can live. And, you know, if we get those tax rates low enough, maybe people will live here. Seven. And so the year instead of Florida for seven months or the year makes that decision a little more palatable to stay up here.

[00:10:05] **Speaker 1** When it comes to other priorities for spending. Obviously, public schools and local governments have been crying out saying that they haven't been getting what they need from the state. You've seen local referenda to increase operating budgets for them. Do you see that the state needs to continue to contribute more to local governments in schools? Or do you like the idea that if they need the money locally, they'll ask their local taxpayers?

[00:10:26] **Speaker 2** No, we can make an investment in K-12 education as well. That's the beauty of having a projected $6.6 billion surplus and having even more revenue probably to work with over the next two years. Our last budget was sort of unique with the Federal Government dumping $2.6 billion into local governments, school districts, municipalities, counties, townships, and we took advantage of that by not increasing in a lot of those areas. They're not increasing as much as we probably normally would have in the last budget. But having this huge surplus gives us an opportunity to invest in K-12 education, gives us an opportunity to invest in in counties and municipalities.

[00:11:11] **Speaker 1** The last two budgets that the Governor Evers has introduced have included a lot of proposals that are more of his his vision, his priorities or what he's campaigned on, but that everyone knew were not going to get passed by a Republican legislature. Do you think this time around he'd be better off creating, proposing a budget that he knew was more likely to be passed? Or is it okay if his first draft of the budget includes things that he knows that you don't agree with, but he wants to put them out there to the public?

[00:11:38] **Speaker 2** I think a better question not to correct your questioning, but I think a better question is, is the governor willing to actually negotiate with us during this budget cycle? You know, if he wants to put out a budget with his political priorities, that's fine. But we'll do what we've done in the past to sort of start from base and go forward. But, you know, if the governor is willing to work with us and negotiate, you know, I think we can accomplish some of the things that he wants to accomplish while still doing important tax relief, investing in education, expanding school choice. There's a lot of great things we can get done, and hopefully the governor's willing to sit down and we can start working on that.

[00:12:19] **Speaker 1** When does that process start? Because obviously the governor has a staff of budget writers as well. Is that when it gets to Joint Finance or should that be happening earlier in the process?

[00:12:27] **Speaker 2** I think it should be happening earlier. The good thing is the governor has already reached out and we're working on scheduling a meeting. So, you know, that's a nice start to the process. So hopefully we can have regular meetings and that way I can get feedback from my caucus on the direction we want to go and and see us and the assembly and and the governor can work out a plan.

[00:12:50] **Speaker 1** The last two years, everyone's been kind of looking towards that next election with Republicans in some cases explicitly saying, we're hoping a Republican governor is who we're working with next. Since Governor Evers is the governor for the next four years. Do you think that changes the relationship? Do you think this will be a more productive two years than the last two years?

[00:13:09] **Speaker 2** You know, I hope so. I really do hope so. It's you know, I was only majority leader for two of the four years of Governor Evers term. And I know there were some mistrust from the first session with recording in meetings and things like that. But I'm hopeful that, you know, there's the electorate elected us and elected him. So obviously there are some who people in the state who voted for Republican legislators and a Democrat for governor. So we need to try, work together, find some solutions while still making sure we're being responsible in our budgeting.

[00:13:44] **Speaker 1** One of the things that Governor Evers has stressed is getting his appointees through the full Senate process. You talked about the meeting being set up. What other communications need to happen for that to happen?

[00:13:56] **Speaker 2** We're going to treat appointments to through the normal committee process, send them to the standing committees. They'll vet them. The committee chairs will get them. But I think we've seen some of the appointments lately, have both seemed from the governor seem to be more politically charged. I don't know if that was going into an election cycle that that happens. But we can't have, you know, environmental extremists being appointed to the DNR board. We need a DNR secretary because of the vast impact that the DNR has in the state of Wisconsin. So, you know, if we're going to confirm some of these appointments, they need to be people who are qualified and serious in these positions and not just political operatives doing the will of, you know, environmental extremists or other other types of people.

[00:14:47] **Speaker 1** There were a number of appointees for the last four years that made it out of committee but never received a full vote on the floor. What is the process that needs to happen if they make it through committee to actually either get that up or down vote? When it comes to final approval.

[00:15:01] **Speaker 2** You know, a lot of those appointments was just timing the end of session. That happened at the end of Governor Walker session as well, where we had a bunch of appointees to various committees that didn't quite make it through the entire process. But, you know, we're it's our job in the Senate to be have oversight over these appointments. We're going to take that job seriously and and vet the governor's appointments.

[00:15:25] **Speaker 1** Do you expect Fred Brain to stay on the DNR board?

[00:15:28] **Speaker 2** You know, I haven't talked to him, so I'm not sure.

[00:15:31] **Speaker 1** I mean, we hear a lot over the years generally from Republicans about unelected bureaucrats. He would seem to fit the definition of an unelected bureaucrat and that he was appointed in his state on past this appointment. And there is no political process to remove him from that appointment.

[00:15:47] **Speaker 2** That is accurate.

[00:15:49] **Speaker 1** Would you. Do you think he's been doing a good job in his position?

[00:15:52] **Speaker 2** Oh, he's a great member of the DNR board.

[00:15:55] **Speaker 1** So is anyone that Governor Evers would appoint, does he need to be would they need to be compared to Fred Prehn or his political views on Fast or the Wolf Hunt or any other serious issue?

[00:16:06] **Speaker 2** I think his appointment needs to be someone who's not an environmental extremist.

[00:16:12] **Speaker 1** Okay. In terms of what other big issues are out there for this next session, are there any other controversial things that you think your chamber is going to have to work through? Or do you think this will kind of be a normal get past the budget and then move on kind of session?

[00:16:27] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think at the beginning of the session, we need to focus on Jasper, continue to focus on this piece. They need. The governor needs to fix that, that agency. It's just unacceptable. The amount of time people are waiting for licenses. They didn't even participate in the study committee, which was unfortunate and disappointing, to say the least. The governor needs to fix this piece immediately. We need a new secretary who's going to get the job done, and we need to bring the employees back into the building, sort of working remotely and and get that that fix. It's we have we have a worker shortage problem in Wisconsin already. And when it's exacerbated because a nurse practitioner doesn't get his or her license for six months and can't start doing the job they're trained to do, it's a problem.

[00:17:16] **Speaker 1** How much of that is funding versus regulatory process?

[00:17:20] **Speaker 2** In the last budget, we funded 99% of the governor's requests.

[00:17:24] **Speaker 1** At what point does that start to impact everyone else? I mean, to the degree that already has those that are involved in it. But the larger workplace environment in Wisconsin.

[00:17:34] **Speaker 2** That's unfortunate is, you know, a constituent will call my office and then will accelerate it to disperse and then they'll get their license. That should be the process. They should have their license already. It just needs to be fixed.

[00:17:47] **Speaker 1** Is that actually a legislative fix? Do you need this or is it more of, like you said, a cabinet level and worker issue?

[00:17:55] **Speaker 2** If there's legislative suggestions, I wish the department would bring it to us. That would be helpful. If they would have participated in the study committee, that might have been helpful. But, you know, the governor is charged with overseeing an agency. He needs Lou's job.

[00:18:10] **Speaker 1** So you are at 21 members hoping to get back to 22. Does the caucus get too big at any point with too many personalities or how do you manage it?

[00:18:21] **Speaker 2** Oh, we'll see. We added one more. I'm excited about our new members coming in. We had a chance on the campaign trail to get to know them all pretty good along the way. So I'm excited about our new members. I don't think you can never have too many. If I can come back with 23, 24 at some point, I'd be excited for that.

[00:18:43] **Speaker 1** All right. Anything else that you'd like to add along these lines? No. All right. Well, Senator, thank you very much for your time.

[00:18:49] **Speaker 2** Thank you.

[00:18:51] **Speaker 1** All right. Well, enjoy the holidays. Too bad about Phenix, right? Yep. Before I cut, can I get a comment from you? Sure. We're ready. That we will work. All right. Okay. Got to sync up the cameras in the sound truck. All right. Thank you again. Good to see.