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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Sorry about the hot dogs and the pregnancy. I love it. It's great. All right, well, Senator, thanks very much for joining us. Great to be with you. So we know that Congress is poised to cut Medicaid and food share. Is it your expectation that the state will have to backfill any kind of those cuts?

[00:00:21] **Speaker 2** I think we need to absolutely be prepared. To do whatever we can to make sure that families can survive. Economic chaos and devastating cuts that are coming out of Washington.

[00:00:33] **Speaker 1** I know that the governor had put, I believe, 500 million dollars in the budget in case of that kind of thing. Did Did that remain? When the Republican Joint Finance Committee members kind of pulled things out.

[00:00:49] **Speaker 2** You know, I think that the Republicans have... Basically just been plugging their ears and trying to pretend that it's not happening. Uh... And What we do know is that almost a third of the state budget is money. That comes from the federal government. So there is no way that we can be fully prepared. Before. Whatever cuts come down and certainly the scale. Of. The cuts are going to be devastating to every Wisconsin family, whether it's nutrition support. Food Share. Educational funding, transportation, public safety. And, of course, healthcare.

[00:01:22] **Speaker 1** Your GOP counterparts say a keen priority of theirs is what... They call tax reform. And they mention the middle class and the elderly. Do you expect compromise around tax cuts in the state budget?

[00:01:37] **Speaker 2** We've had a... Mantra for decades of cutting taxes and... I think my Republican colleagues talk a good game. About the middle class, but when they actually... Show us their work. Their tax proposals are always skewed toward the very, very wealthiest among us in big business. And at a time when people are really gonna be struggling. Struggling with higher costs, things like groceries, housing, child care. Prescription drugs. We cannot be considering more tax cuts for the wealthy. That has gotten us nowhere. And so, you know, Democrats have proposed... Reasonable. Tax relief. That is targeted towards the middle class, the working class, those that are striving to get there. And Republicans have kind of thrown that back in our face and said no. Yet more giveaways for the folks that are already doing fine. And so you don't believe that there's room for compromise around that? You know, my hope is that there would be. I just haven't seen a lot of evidence of that. I mean, I think the compromise position would be. What Democrats have continually proposed. Which is. Let's. Scale that. Tax relief and tax reform. To the people who actually need it. Rather than. Just continuing to double down on. Giving more money away to the wealthiest. As our. Schools, our universities. And our healthcare infrastructure are all struggling for funds. What are Democratic members' priorities? Well, I would say we want to make sure. That we are addressing the high costs of living for everyday Wisconsin families. So things like. Child care. Making sure kids have great funded public education and healthy school meals at schools that we're funding opportunities for advancement so that everyone can thrive. Our universities, our technical colleges. These are the things that. Make Wisconsin a good place to live. And we have to be prepared to fund those things. That's also what we heard as we traveled around the state. And listened to people's public input. The number. One and two issues that people cared about. K-12 public school funding. Child care. Uh... And We haven't had budgets that have. At the moment. Now it is. Pastime for our kids to get what they need.

[00:03:50] **Speaker 1** We know that the governor's budget included $450 million to continue the Child Care Count's child care program. But that was one of some 600 provisions pulled out by Republican members of the Budget Writing Committee. What happens? Uh... In june when the federal subsidy for that goes away If The Republican majority budget writers don't do something around that.

[00:04:18] **Speaker 2** We've been in a child care crisis for a long time in this country. Even before COVID. But child care counts stopped the losses, it stopped the closures because it put more money. In classrooms and teachers. This is really a supply problem. There aren't enough childcare slots to go around. In many places, there are two, three, four, even more kids that need a slot for every one that's available. Because teachers can't afford to stay in early childhood. They can make more at a fast food restaurant or at a gas station. Starting wage. Than they can. With a bachelor's degree in early childhood. And It's because... Parents can't afford to pay more. So this is where. We do need. Uh... The state to step in as we did with child care counts. And help close that gap so that the most talented and dedicated early childhood educators can practice the profession that they love and that our kids get what they need. At a price that parents can afford. Because what happens if... We don't contribute toward that. We're gonna see massive closures of childcare centers. We're going to see. You know, parents completely unable to get a slot and... The few that do are gonna be paying even more than they do now. And a lot of people, if they have a kid... They're paying more for their childcare than they do for their housing. My husband and I. One year, had two kids in college at the University of Minnesota. And we spent less on those two kids than we did for our baby in daycare.

[00:05:44] **Speaker 1** Speaking of K-12 funding. And uh... Education funding in general special education is a priority for the governor how you think that will fair

[00:05:57] **Speaker 2** special education is a huge problem for our local school districts because It is a mandated service, we must provide. A great equitable education to every student. No matter what they're coming into the classroom with. And yet... The state only reimburses local school districts about 30% of the cost of that special education. That means the. Rest of those costs are all coming out of the school district. Bank account. So local districts have to make up the cost. Private voucher schools that are. Funded by taxpayer dollars but not accountable to taxpayers. They get 90 percent. Reimbursement. For serving special ed kids. And of course, they can discriminate. They can pick and choose who they want. To have in their student body. I think it's totally unacceptable that we continue to subsidize this private voucher scheme. Uh... Especially to the tune of ninety percent reimbursement for special ed Meanwhile. The vast majority of Wisconsin kids are educated in our public schools. And they're having to scrimp and scrape. And cut really important services that... For all kids. So that they can meet the needs. Of students with special education.

[00:07:02] **Speaker 1** What do you think will happen with funding for universities?

[00:07:09] **Speaker 2** Well, this is another area where. We've had 15 years of cuts. And failure to provide inflationary increases to the universities of Wisconsin. And it's put our colleges, our public higher education, into a really dire situation. They can raise tuition and they have certainly done that. They have done an incredible job of getting more federal grant money that's now at risk. Really increase the number of private contributions that they're getting. But at the end of the day, if we want our public universities to be a place where... Every Wisconsin kid can go. To. Build a better life for themselves. We need to make it accessible. And we have to fund these universities. The amount that they are asking for. Really just gets them back to the place where they would have been. Had they not received the devastating cuts of the Walker era and sort of kept pace with inflation. That's what we're doing here.

[00:08:03] **Speaker 1** When when you discuss that kind of funding with your Republican counterparts. What is their persuasion? Well, I think...

[00:08:12] **Speaker 2** That... You know, a lot of Republicans are very skeptical of. The idea of public education. And especially... You know at the at the higher ed level they just say. Why should? Why should the state support this endeavor? And my answer is because we can't afford. For anybody who has the talent and the drive and wants to pursue higher education to not be able to do that. We shouldn't be rationing. Opportunity in life. Based on who you are, who your parents are, where you're from. And when you don't have a public education system, that's what happens.

[00:08:46] **Speaker 1** We know that budget riders and the state of Wisconsin is working with about a four billion dollar surplus which we also know can for a variety of reasons be whittled down. But Do Democrats have any kind of one-time priorities for such a budget? I mean for such a surplus.

[00:09:07] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think it's really important when we talk about the surplus to recognize that It is in large part born of. Chronic underfunding of these core public services. K-12. Being right at the top of the list and public higher ed. Being closely behind. Let's make sure that the money that the taxpayers paid is actually going to the things that taxpayers expect to be funded. We also want to make sure. But things like building projects. And when we borrow money that we're doing it in a fiscally responsible manner, so There are things that we can do with one-time money that will help create future revenue sources. And will help. The state's bottom line moving into the future. Funding for child care is a great example of that. Uh... Because The return on investment... When 90% of brain development happens, that birth to five period is enormous, right? I mean, we could stop building prisons if we were investing in early childhood education. Think about the workforce impact too. You know, every child that can't get into child care. That means a parent is out of the workforce. And our tax collections are going down. Entire economy is slowing down. We should be prioritizing things. Help the state's bottom line, not just now, but into the future. Is it?

[00:10:22] **Speaker 1** Your sense that the Republican majority is kind of emboldened by what's happening in Washington with Doge cuts and others from the administration? You know, I.

[00:10:33] **Speaker 2** I think that... They're, they have a lot of different perspectives. I think there's a lot of infighting right now amongst the Republican caucus here in Wisconsin. Certainly, I think many of them are really enthusiastic. About the devastating cuts that are. Being contemplated and the illegal funding freezes that we've already seen. And then there are others that are kind of laying low and waiting to see what's gonna happen. But I can tell you that... Not one of them has focused on. How can we help mitigate the harm that is happening to Wisconsin workers, to families, to kids, right? We have seen them offer. NO PROPOSALS! And spend very little time. You know on any floor session or in any committees thinking about how are we gonna lower costs for families for groceries, for utility bills. They just are pretending that it's not happening. Or they they don't care about the impacts you know meanwhile Democrats are trying every day with legislation that we're offering. Our focus. To say this is not okay and it's our job to step up and make sure. That were responding to the needs of Wisconsinites who were being harmed. Is there anything you'd like to add? No, I really appreciate the time. All right, Senator. Nice.