

Don Vruwink: A new course for Wisconsin

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Last Tuesday Gov. Tony Evers gave his first State of the State address, an annual report from the Governor on the condition of our state, what is going well, and what we can work on.

There was a lot to applaud in Gov. Evers' speech. One proposal received resounding applause from both sides of the aisle: a 10 percent income tax cut for individuals and families.

It is rare that legislators on both sides of the political aisle rise up to applaud a proposal in the State of the State address, but this was one of those rare occasions.

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Under Gov. Evers' proposal, the income tax cut will be funded by capping a corporate tax credit. That means a slightly smaller tax break for corporations, and a little more income for individuals and families.

The Governor also called for making more efficient use of state tax dollars by accepting federal Medicaid funds that are currently available to us but which the last Administration declined to accept.

By accepting the available Medicaid funds, an additional 76,000 Wisconsinites will have health care coverage, according to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau. This will save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars – money that can be allocated for other critical needs.

Gov. Evers called for increasing state funding for schools to reduce reliance on the property tax. Under this proposal, the state will restore its commitment to funding two-thirds of school costs. Increased state funding for schools is property tax relief. Assembly Speaker Robin Vos endorsed this proposal.

The Governor noted that our state falls behind other states in broadband expansion. This hurts economic development in places with spotty or no Internet service. It hurts school kids who don't have access to the Internet to help with their school work. In this Information Age, a lack of reliable, high-speed Internet puts every citizen at a disadvantage when they cannot access information quickly and easily.

The Governor touched on transportation, saying he is committed to getting bipartisan support for a long-term, sustainable funding solution. When the Governor unveils his state budget proposal in late February or early March, I expect to see specific details on each of these items.

I want to conclude with a quote directly from the Governor's speech. He said, "I have never been more hopeful about our state and our kids' future. I have no doubt that there will be issues on which we disagree. I have no doubt that there will be times when we will be frustrated by the deliberative process of democracy. But we will engage civilly. We will have discourse and dialogue, but it will not devolve into disrespect. And we will govern with a humble appreciation that the will of the people - our people - is the law of the land."

I too am hopeful about the future of our state. With the election of Gov. Evers, we now have a Democrat heading the executive branch while Republicans control the Legislature. This will force us, Democrats and Republicans, to at least talk to each other to pass legislation. For some of us in the Assembly, this has already begun. We need to work together in a bipartisan way - a way that reflects the make-up of our state.

-Vruwink, D-Milton, represents the 43rd Assembly District.