

Gov. Evers: Releases excerpts from 2023 State of the State address

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Address to preview governor's plans to maintain economy's momentum, bolster state workforce, expand affordable childcare

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers, set to deliver his fifth State of the State address tonight, today released excerpts from his 2023 State of the State address. The address is expected to preview the governor's plans to maintain the economy's momentum, bolster the state's workforce, and expand access to quality, affordable childcare.

Additional excerpts from the governor's address as prepared for delivery are available below.

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When we began our work together four years ago, our roads and bridges were in disrepair. We'd sent back tens of millions of your tax dollars to Washington, D.C. that could've been used to expand high-speed internet. Our school rankings dropped to 18th in the country at one point. Support for our university system had been cut by hundreds of millions of dollars. And our state was not actively working to address climate change or invest in clean energy.

Well, I'm proud to say that the state of our state is much different today. We've gotten to work fixing the darn roads—I even helped fill some of those potholes myself, by the way. And as I stand here tonight, I'm proud to report we've worked together to repair and improve over 5,800 miles of roads and nearly 1,600 bridges across our state.

We've also gotten back on track preparing our state, our workforce, and our economy for this century. Over the last four years, we've allocated more than \$340 million into expanding high-speed internet—more than any administration in state history. More than 387,000 homes and businesses will have new or improved access to reliable, high-speed internet, and I want to double that number by the end of this term. And together we will.

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Our state now has a Clean Energy Plan with strategies to help lower energy bills for working families, reduce our reliance on out-of-state energy sources, invest in job training and apprenticeship programs in innovative industries and technologies, and create an estimated more than 40,000 jobs by 2030.

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[W]e convened a Blue Ribbon Commission to help develop solutions and create opportunities for Wisconsin's veterans. And last October, we took the Commission's recommendations and announced \$10 million to support veterans' mental health, create a rental assistance program for homeless veterans, and to expand veterans' access to skills and jobs training.

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We've gotten to work these last four years making smart, strategic investments—and our state's economy shows it. Over the last four years, unemployment has hit record lows, and we had the highest number of people employed ever. Our state has a AAA bond credit rating for the first time in about 40 years—that means we're able to get lower interest rates and save your tax dollars. Our general fund and 'rainy day fund' both ended the last fiscal year at the highest levels ever in our state's 175-year history. We're now expected to end the current biennium with about \$6.5 billion in our state coffers and over \$1.7 billion in the 'rainy day fund.'

And that's great news, Wisconsin. It means we can continue our progress making the wise investments we've long needed to—and not because anyone wants to make government bigger, but because Wisconsinites want a government that works, and works better. We have roads and bridges to fix, schools to fund, kids to support, communities to keep safe, water to keep clean, and a future we've built together after years of neglect that, today, we must work to protect.

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We've worked to invest in public education at every level after a decade of disinvestment. We passed the largest increase in special education aid in state history. Our K-12 schools have now returned to the top 10 in the country.

But we also know our current funding system is not sustainable. For years, communities have raised their own property taxes to keep their local schools afloat. And while some school districts have successfully passed referenda to help keep the school lights on, many have tried and failed. This system means drastic differences in outcomes for our kids—creating winners and losers, haves and have-nots.

Doing what's best for our kids has always been what's best for our state. And, today, we can afford to do more. So, I am going to deliver on the promise I made before the election to use a portion of our state's historic surplus to make an historic investment in our kids and our schools.

We're going to make targeted investments to improve reading and literacy outcomes and expand financial literacy curriculum across our state. We're going to invest \$20 million to increase literacy-related programming and implement evidence-based reading practices across Wisconsin. And our "Do the Math" initiative will help ensure our kids have the tools and skills to make smart budgeting and financial decisions to prepare for their future.

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The bottom line for me has always been making sure our communities have the resources they need to meet basic and unique needs alike. But there are a lot of different ways we can find compromise to achieve that goal, and together we will.

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At the same time, just because we're in the greatest fiscal position in state history doesn't mean we can afford to be careless. Wisconsinites have worked too hard and have gone through too much for us to return to austerity. Now is the time to stay prudent, to save smart, and to be bold with reasonable investments to keep building a lasting legacy of prosperity.

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When we deliver tax relief—and we will deliver tax relief—we're going to do it responsibly by ensuring we can keep taxes low now and into the future, and we'll do it without driving our state into debt or causing devastating cuts to priorities like public schools and public safety.

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We need to bolster the middle class; we need to maintain our economy's momentum; and we need to reduce barriers to work and recruit and retain talent to address our state's workforce challenges.

I have a plan to responsibly address all three priorities, and we'll begin here tonight.

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Through our successful Main Street Bounceback grant program, I'm proud to announce tonight that we've helped more than 8,500 Wisconsin small businesses expand and move into vacant storefronts in communities across all 72 counties. If you travel around the state like I do, you can literally see the transformative impacts these investments have had in corridors and communities across Wisconsin.

Take Fond du Lac, for example, right by where Kathy and I grew up in Plymouth. Some things haven't changed much over the years—like Edith's right downtown, where Kathy bought her wedding dress 50 years ago. But other things have changed—even just in the last year alone.

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When we began our work together, Wisconsin was among the worst states in the country for start-up creation. But, much like downtown Fondy, Wisconsin's changed a lot since then. Since 2019, we've seen significant increases in business start-ups. New business formations increased to more than 71,000—that's a 42-percent increase between 2019 and 2021.

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We fueled our economic recovery by harnessing the ingenuity and homegrown talent we already have right here in Wisconsin. And it's why our focus must continue to be building our economy from the ground up—starting with our small businesses, our Main Streets, and the hearts of our communities.

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Our homegrown innovators and entrepreneurs also need homegrown talent to support our local businesses and our local economies—and that's been a top priority for us these past four years.

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[O]ur state's Clean Energy Plan provides a blueprint for skills training, apprenticeships, and creating good-paying, family-supporting jobs by investing in new, innovative industries and technologies.

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If we want to address our state's workforce challenges, we have to make sure child care is accessible and affordable. And together we will.

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An online version of this release is available [here](#).