

Gov. Evers: Delivers 2026 State of the State address

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers tonight delivered his 2026 State of the State address, highlighting Gov. Evers' and the Evers Administration's efforts and successes over the past seven years to do what's best for kids and invest in education at every level, build the 21st-century infrastructure Wisconsin needs to support a 21st-century economy and workforce, uplift the state's farmers, producers, and agricultural industries, expand access to affordable housing, lower everyday out-of-pocket costs for Wisconsinites and working families, bolster key industries across the state, including tourism and outdoor recreation, and more. Gov. Evers also made several announcements and detailed key policy priorities for the remainder of the year.

During his eighth State of the State address, the governor declared 2026 the "Year of the Neighbor," highlighting the importance of community and togetherness during divisive times and celebrating the neighbors who make Wisconsin the great place it is to call home. The governor's address is available to watch [here](#) and [here](#).

This speech is Gov. Evers' final State of the State address, who is set to retire in 2027. The governor is expected to deliver a farewell address to Wisconsinites later this year to thank the many people and partners who have ensured his office's and administration's success. A date for the governor's final address to the state will be announced later this year.

Below are Gov. Evers' remarks as prepared for delivery:

Hello there, Wisconsin!

Honorable Supreme Court Justices, Tribal Nation leaders, constitutional officers,

Adjutant General Strub, members of the Wisconsin National Guard, active and retired members of our armed forces, cabinet members, legislators, distinguished guests, and Wisconsinites from near and far, thank you for taking the time to join us this evening.

I'm Tony Evers, and I am honored to be the 46th governor of the great state of Wisconsin as I deliver my eighth and final State of the State address to you tonight.

My daughter, Katie, and my grandson, Keyton, as well as my son, Nick, and his wife, Landa, are here with us tonight. My former Kindergarten classmate and junior prom date is also up in the gallery. Kathleen Frances, you never wavered through all the ups and downs of my 50 years in public service. You're a saint. Thank you.

Before we begin, Wisconsin, today's an Election Day! If you haven't voted yet in the spring primary, there's still time to get registered and vote. And the good news is, if you go right now to participate in our democracy, you can still catch my full speech afterward on Facebook, YouTube, and probably wherever else kids get the news these days.

Polls are open until 8 p.m. So, go to myvote.wi.gov, find your polling location, then grab your photo ID and a proof of residence if you need to register, and get out to vote.

I'm so humbled and thankful for the last seven years and those who've helped make it happen. But tonight, Wisconsin, I want to focus on the work we still have left to do, so I'm going to save my long list of gratitude for my farewell address later this year. And, no, legislators, that doesn't mean my speech got any shorter.

I know many lawmakers are antsy to end the legislative session and pack up to get back on the campaign trail—by the way, if anyone running wants advice from someone who's won five statewide elections, let me know!

Folks, I know many of you are up for election, but here's the deal: after years of delivering historic, bipartisan wins for our state, Wisconsinites have high expectations for the work we can do together over the next 10 months—and they should. Just look at what we've accomplished over the last seven years.

My vetoes are often the focus of news coverage and even political criticism. I know Republicans get upset when I use my veto pen to do good things for kids and

schools, for example. But here's the truth: I've signed over 800 bills as governor, and more than 97 percent of the bills I've signed passed with bipartisan support.

Here are just a few of those bipartisan bills. We improved our justice system, bolstered support for public defenders and DAs, and made the largest addition of circuit court branches in over two decades. We made sure firefighters and law enforcement officers can access workers' compensation for post-traumatic stress. We created a holiday honoring Hmong-Lao Veterans, and our kids now learn about Hmong and Asian American history in school. We fixed gaps in the AMBER Alert System through the Prince Act so we can locate missing kids faster. And, folks, this is all barely a fraction of the more than 800 bills I've been proud to sign as governor.

We expanded tax credits to help lower the cost of child care for working families. We made it so State Park passes can be used for 12 full months, regardless of when it's purchased. We provided Medicaid coverage for telehealth services so folks can access healthcare right at home. We supported peer-to-peer suicide prevention efforts for kids in schools. We invested in helping local communities prepare for and prevent flooding before disaster happens. And we worked together to keep Major League Baseball in Milwaukee until 2050, so future generations of Wisconsin's kids will grow up rooting for the Brewers like so many of us have.

We've also managed to do all of this important work while still saving where we could and paying down our state's debt. We've saved taxpayers over \$600 million by paying off about \$3 billion of our state's debt. After 30 consecutive years of our state's checking account running a deficit, we've ended every full fiscal year I've been governor with a positive balance.

Thanks to our bipartisan efforts to cut taxes, Wisconsin taxpayers will see over \$2 billion in tax relief annually, with most of those cuts going to the middle class. And I not only kept my campaign promise to Wisconsinites that I'd deliver a 10-percent tax cut for middle-class families. In fact, middle-class taxpayers have seen an income tax cut of 23 percent—more than double what I promised. Wisconsinites, you're keeping more of your hard-earned money today than at any point in the last 50 years.

I'm also grateful the Legislature supported a key part of my affordability plan last year to help lower monthly energy costs for working families. Because of our bipartisan work, Wisconsinites are no longer paying sales tax on household utility

bills, which is expected to save Wisconsinites over \$178 million over the next two years.

Not only are Wisconsinites keeping more of their hard-earned money, Wisconsinites are making more money, too. Average annual wages in Wisconsin went up nearly 26 percent over my first six years in office, and median wages in 2024 reached an all-time record high.

Giving working families a little more breathing room in their household budgets is something we've worked on together over the last seven years. I'm hopeful we can continue building upon those efforts this session, including reaching bipartisan agreement on a plan to get meaningful resources to K-12 schools and provide property tax relief. And it must balance these important obligations a heckuva lot better than the plan Republican leaders sent me this week.

Another important priority for us over the last seven years has been addressing the workforce challenges that have plagued our state for generations. We've been working to build the 21st-century workforce Wisconsin needs to compete in a 21st-century economy. We've reduced barriers to joining our workforce by investing in child care slots for working parents and making sure they can get to and from work. We've helped over 127,000 Wisconsin workers get career and skills training thanks to investments I directed. Wisconsin's seen record-high employment and record-low unemployment, and we've had the highest ever enrollment in our youth and registered apprenticeship programs ever in state history for several years in a row. And by cracking down on worker misclassification, we've made sure over 134,000 workers got the wages and benefits they were owed.

And a key part of our work to support working families, strengthen our communities, and grow our state's workforce has been ensuring folks have the housing they need in the communities they work in. It's about connecting the dots, and expanding access to affordable housing is an issue I hear about almost everywhere I go in Wisconsin. We worked together to pass the largest state investment in workforce housing in Wisconsin history, and my administration has supported over 30,000 new housing units across our state.

Much like housing, having access to affordable, high-speed internet in the 21st Century is a necessity, not a luxury. It's why no administration has done more to expand access to high-speed internet for working families than we have. I declared 2021 the Year of Broadband Access and created a Broadband Access Task Force.

We also created new tools to help folks get connected and find affordable internet options. Thanks to our investments, including federal funding I directed, more than 410,000 homes and businesses across our state will have new or improved internet.

Supporting our farmers and their families and our state's agricultural industries has also been part of our work over the last seven years. I created the Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity and the Office of Rural Prosperity. And we worked together to create the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports to increase dairy, meat, crop, and other product exports by 25 percent. Today, Wisconsin is well on its way to becoming a top 10 state for agricultural exports after being ranked 13th just a few years ago.

And from our smallest rural towns to our largest cities, after a generation of state government asking local partners to do more with less, we also worked together to approve a historic increase in support for our local communities. Thanks to our bipartisan efforts, Milwaukee is no longer on the brink of bankruptcy, and state support for most municipalities increased over 20 percent to help them meet basic and unique needs alike.

We're also making sure the state helps support local communities by investing in infrastructure needs across Wisconsin that have long been neglected. When I took over, our transportation fund was on the brink of insolvency. For years, the state spent money that was meant to improve our infrastructure on other things, leaving our roads and bridges in disrepair. I made a promise to Wisconsinites that I'd work to fix the darn roads—I've even gone out on my annual Pothole Patrol as governor to fix our roads myself! We approved the largest investment in local road construction and maintenance in state history. Thanks to our bipartisan work, local partners will receive nearly \$600 million in funding this year.

We also created a new agricultural roads program with bipartisan support to make sure our farmers and producers can get product to market safely and efficiently by improving local rural infrastructure across our state. It's already supporting over 90 projects across 48 counties to help improve and repair roads that our farmers, agricultural industries, and rural communities depend on. Folks, all of these efforts have played a key role in our work to fix the darn roads across Wisconsin. And we've delivered! Thanks to our work together, my administration has been able to improve or repair over 9,600 miles of roads and over 2,400 bridges across our state.

And it's a darn good thing we've been fixing the roads, because, under my administration, Wisconsin's been welcoming more visitors than ever before. Investing in our tourism industry has been an important part of our work over the last seven years—and it's paid off. Wisconsin's travel and tourism industry has been setting records for three years running. In 2024, we had a hat-trick year: Wisconsin tourism brought in more money, welcomed more visitors, and generated a record-high \$25.8 billion in total economic impact.

A big driver of our tourism industry's success is Wisconsin's outdoor recreation economy. Biking and hiking, camping and canoeing, fishing and hunting, snowmobiling and skiing—you name it!—outdoor recreation is a part of our DNA as Wisconsinites. It's also become an \$11 billion industry that drives and supports local jobs and economies across our state. I proposed creating our state's first-ever Office of Outdoor Recreation, and we worked together to get it done so that Wisconsin now has a dedicated office to support this critical economic industry. Our bipartisan budget last year also approved my request to create a new film office at the Department of Tourism and a new film tax credit program. I'm excited to announce we're launching the new program this week, which will help bolster our travel and tourism economies and bring exciting, creative endeavors right to Wisconsin's doorstep.

Folks, we've gotten a lot done for Wisconsin over the last seven years. Our work during the Year of the Kid is another good example. From teaching science in Baraboo to getting the scoop from students on smoker's corner as a principal in Tomah to the decade I spent as state superintendent to becoming your governor, I've devoted most of my life to doing what's best for our kids. After watching a Republican governor and Legislature shred my education budgets as state superintendent, I knew we could do more and better for our kids. Our kids are why I got into this gig in the first place.

So, while every year is the Year of the Kid for me, I declared 2025 the official Year of the Kid and introduced the most pro-kid budget in state history. And then we went to work.

When it comes to doing what's best for our kids, we have to start early. A top priority for me during the Year of the Kid was to lower the cost of child care so more kids and families can access early childhood education. Getting direct support to child care providers in our state budget was a bright-line issue for me in negotiations with Republican leaders. I fought hard to make sure our pro-kid budget

included \$360 million to support our child care industry and working families, more than one-third of which will go directly to providers to support care for nearly 170,000 kids.

We also created our state's first-ever fully state-funded child care program called "Get Kids Ready." Get Kids Ready is a new, first-of-its-kind program in Wisconsin to help give four-year-olds a boost getting ready for Kindergarten. Here's how it works: qualifying child care providers will focus on making sure kids have the academic, physical, and social-emotional skills that kids need to be successful at school. And, in return, the state pays child care providers directly for the time kids spend in Get Kids Ready programming, making that part of the day free for families. This is a big deal for Wisconsin's kids and our future. And I'm excited to announce tonight that nearly 1,400 providers have signaled they are ready to be a part of this program, an effort that is projected to help as many as 24,000 kids across Wisconsin get a head start on their education in just the first year.

A key part of our work to do what's best for our kids includes making sure our kids can bring their best and full selves to our schools and our classrooms. A kid who's hungry or facing mental health challenges isn't going to be able to focus on their studies or their coursework at school. It's why I fought hard to secure \$10 million for food security and \$30 million to help support mental health resources in schools across our state.

When I delivered my State of the State address last year, I said I'd be asking the Legislature to make meaningful investments in public education at every level, from early childhood to our universities. And I made sure that's exactly what our bipartisan budget did. Republican lawmakers, who've spent the better part of two decades waging war on higher education and the Wisconsin Idea, planned to cut our UW System by nearly \$90 million—that was a nonstarter for me. I fought hard to make sure the final budget I signed included the largest increase for our UW System in nearly 20 years and over \$1 billion for UW projects across our state.

Folks, I declared 2025 the Year of the Kid because I wanted everything we did last year to be focused on doing what's best for our kids at every age, in every way, and no matter where they live in our state. But, Wisconsin, I've always promised to give it to you straight. And that's exactly what I'm going to do. So, I want to talk about how our bipartisan budget delivers for our K-12 kids and schools. And I also want to talk about the ways it fell short and the work the Legislature must do to make good on the bipartisan promise we made to our kids in our last budget.

A decade of Republicans consistently failing to meaningfully invest in our kids and K-12 schools has consequences. Wisconsinites have been going to referendum in high numbers for years, raising their own property taxes just to keep their school lights on. That started long before I became governor.

I get Republicans want to blame my 400-year veto for property taxes going up. Why? Politics, of course. Republicans running under fair maps need someone else to blame for failing to fund our schools at the levels I've asked them to for about two decades of my life.

Here's the truth: funding our schools is a responsibility that the state and local partners share. Local property taxes go up when the state fails to do its part to meet its obligation.

I'll go ten toes with any lawmaker about school funding. My 400-year veto isn't an automatic property tax increase, folks, because that isn't how school funding works in Wisconsin. The Legislature has rejected over \$7 billion for K-12 schools that I requested over the last four state budgets. If lawmakers want to have an honest conversation about property taxes, start there.

Folks, a decade-plus of disinvestment can't be undone overnight. But I've spent the last seven years working to reverse the trend. We've secured an additional over \$2.3 billion for our K-12 kids and schools in my budgets. I fought hard for the nearly \$1.4 billion in spendable revenue we approved in our bipartisan budget negotiations last year. This included a net categorical aid increase that was roughly five times larger than our previous historic budget.

We also fought for and secured the largest increase to the special education reimbursement rate in state history. We raised the state's commitment to reimburse special education aid at 42 and 45 percent over two years. But here's the problem: the Legislature refuses to set aside enough state money to actually meet those percentages. So, in reality, DPI estimates the state's only reimbursing at a rate of about 35 percent instead, well short of the budget we negotiated. We have a constitutional obligation to fund our schools in this state. Folks, the Legislature must approve the level of funding necessary to meet the percentages our kids and our schools were promised in the last budget. Period.

With all of the success we've had over the last seven years, Wisconsinites are eager for us to continue our progress. We can't afford for lawmakers to lose focus on the

future we've been working hard to build together just because it's an election year. So, I know the Legislature would rather hit the road and take the rest of the year off, but I'm going to ask lawmakers to stick around until our work here is finished.

There's always more work we can do, folks. Let's start with public safety. I wish Republican lawmakers would've been willing to do more during the Year of the Kid to help keep our kids, families, and communities safe. I was really disappointed that, for all of the rhetoric about who cares about crime and who doesn't, Republicans voted against my proposal making the Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention permanent. We could be doing so much more to address domestic and intimate partner violence, for example. These statistics get me really wound up. Domestic violence homicides in Wisconsin jumped by 20 percent between 2021 and 2022. 20 percent. We hit a new record high of 96 Wisconsinites murdered in domestic and intimate partner violence incidents. That record only lasted until 2024, when 99 Wisconsinites were killed.

Folks, this trend is headed in the wrong direction. The Legislature cannot find these statistics acceptable. Yet, on top of voting not to make the Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention permanent last year, Republican lawmakers also voted against my request to provide \$66 million for Victims of Crime Act programs, many of which help survivors of domestic violence and their families get back on their feet. I urge the Legislature to send bills to my desk to codify the Office of Violence Prevention and fund Victims of Crime Act programs. Do the right thing and get this done.

In the meantime, my administration and I will continue our work, however we can, to reduce crime and violence and help make kids and families safer. So, one of the things I'm jazzed to announce tonight is that my administration will be partnering with our own Milwaukee Bucks on a public campaign to help combat domestic violence across Wisconsin.

I also want to talk about gun violence, which was why I created the Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention. The very first special session that I ever called as governor was to ask Republicans to pass universal background checks and a "red flag" law—two concepts that 80 percent of our state support. I could spend the rest of my speech listing everything I've proposed to crack down on gun violence, keep guns out of the hands of violent people, and make our communities safer. Instead, I'll cut to the kicker: all of them went nowhere because in seven years, there's no issue Republicans have done less about than guns. This much is clear: if Wisconsinites want to get something—anything—done about gun violence, we

must elect legislators who will do a damn thing to change it.

I've also spent years urging Republican lawmakers to approve reasonable, commonsense policies to move Wisconsin's corrections, courts, and justice systems into the 21st Century. I introduced a sweeping corrections reform plan last year that would close GBCI by 2029, get kids out of Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake, and turn Waupun into a state-of-the-art vocational facility. Republicans quickly dismissed it, insisting they'd come up with a better plan and pass that instead. It's been over a year now, and Republicans have neither enacted my plan nor proposed a plan of their own.

I'm still hopeful we can work together to pass a bipartisan bill this year on comprehensive corrections reform to set an achievable goal for GBCI to close, convert Lincoln Hills, and revamp Waupun. We also need to make sure that plan includes evidence-based efforts to stabilize our skyrocketing prison population and reduce the likelihood that people will reoffend, making our communities safer and saving taxpayers on corrections costs down the road. We don't need to ask taxpayers to pay for a brand-new prison that won't be done for a decade. My plan remains the safest, fastest, and cheapest option available. I don't care who gets the credit; let's just get it done.

In the meantime, I will continue to exercise my constitutional powers as governor to do what I can to improve community safety and change Wisconsin's justice system for the better. Before I took office, Wisconsin got an "F" in judicial diversity due to a lack of women and people of color on our bench. So, it was important to me to appoint judges who are a reflection of the people of our state. I'm especially proud that no governor has appointed a more diverse class of judges in state history—more than a third of the judges I've appointed are people of color, and more than half are women.

I also exercised my constitutional powers as governor to grant pardons for the first time in a generation. A pardon is an official act of forgiveness that signals an individual has paid their debt to society, worked to make amends, and tried to turn their lives around. I've issued more grants of clemency than any other governor. This month, I'll hit 2,000 pardons as governor, and we're not done yet.

We also have important things to get done this year to clean up our water and protect our natural resources. We make a promise to our kids and grandkids that

we'll leave them a better state and world than the one we inherited. That's the future we've promised them, and that's the future they deserve. And my administration has worked to lead the way.

For starters, science and the words "climate change" have returned to the Department of Natural Resources. I also created the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy, and we released Wisconsin's first-ever Clean Energy Plan to help lower energy bills for working families, reduce reliance on out-of-state energy sources, and create more than 40,000 jobs by 2030. We also joined the U.S. Climate Alliance, took the Trillion Tree Pledge, and committed to planting 100 million trees by the end of 2030. We planted over 42 million trees and saved over 76,000 acres of forestland in just the first four years alone. We created a new Wild Rice Stewardship Council to help protect wild rice resources that are culturally significant and an important food source for Indigenous communities. And we continue to work with—and learn from—the Tribal Nations of Wisconsin, like the Menominee and the Bad River Band, who are investing in clean and reliable energy sources to become energy independent.

And my administration is doing our part. For years, the state has purchased renewable electricity certificates from Wisconsin utilities to power our state agencies. I want to make sure we continue to work toward our clean energy goals. Thanks to the steps I'm announcing tonight, we're ensuring the state will continue doing so long after I'm governor. Tonight, I'm announcing that the state is going to purchase about 225,000 megawatt hours of renewable energy every year for the next 20 years. Folks, just to put that in perspective, that's enough renewable energy to power more than half a million Wisconsin homes.

We're also continuing to explore new ways for Wisconsin to be a leader in clean energy. I'm excited to announce that we're going to be partnering with the UW-Madison's Department of Nuclear Engineering and Engineering Physics to study nuclear energy opportunities in Wisconsin. Nuclear energy is the largest source of clean power in our country, and it's a safe, reliable, carbon-free option to power our homes and businesses. This could be a game-changer for our state, and I'm glad this work has received bipartisan support this session.

Folks, this partnership on nuclear energy is the Wisconsin Idea in action. The Wisconsin Idea has always been about harnessing the extraordinary research and innovation that's happening on UW campuses and using it to improve public policy

in Wisconsin and beyond. It's why I'm also excited we're continuing that tradition to support small businesses across our state. Our newly created Ignite Wisconsin program is going to make strategic investments to advance startups in our state in targeted sectors to boost our homegrown innovation. This includes connecting the dots to invest in the Wisconsin Fusion Energy Coalition, anchored by UW-Madison's fusion research, so Wisconsin becomes a national hub for commercializing fusion energy.

A key part of our work to build a more sustainable future is building a 21st-century workforce to meet 21st-century needs. If Wisconsin wants to continue to compete and be a leader in new and innovative industries, we must invest in workforce training to prepare our workforce for the future. It's why my administration worked to secure over \$7 million to launch new workforce training programs focused on developing our advanced manufacturing and AI workforce in Wisconsin. Folks, AI is here to stay. So, making sure Wisconsin is prepared to create jobs for the future and meet the rapidly evolving needs of a 21st-century economy must be a top priority. At the same time, we also have to make sure we don't jeopardize the work we have done—and are doing—to build a more sustainable future for our state.

Wisconsin is ready for bold and urgent solutions that will stop treating these goals as mutually exclusive. And that's especially true when it comes to data centers. Ensuring our state is prepared for the 21st Century doesn't mean abandoning all of our state's history and traditions—we aren't and we won't. Wisconsin must embrace a future where we don't have to choose between mitigating climate change and protecting our environment, or creating good-paying jobs and having a strong economy. We must do both.

We also couldn't reach consensus during state budget negotiations on a comprehensive plan to reauthorize the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program—the namesake of two Wisconsin conservation heroes. The Stewardship Program, which has been a proud part of Wisconsin's heritage for decades, is now set to expire at the end of June. Let's get a bipartisan bill done to reauthorize the Stewardship Program that both supports land acquisition and management of Wisconsin's valuable natural resources and public lands. We have to.

I've also repeatedly asked the Legislature to do more to improve water quality and get contaminants like lead and PFAS out of our water. Wisconsinites should be able to trust the water coming from their tap. So, we must find common ground on

bipartisan PFAS legislation to help Wisconsinites get contaminants like PFAS out of their water and release the \$125 million we approved over two years ago.

Now, we've gotten a lot done for Wisconsin over the last seven years. But tonight, I don't just want to reflect on our work together. I also want to talk about what's next. Where Wisconsin goes from here—what worries me about our future and keeps me up at night as governor.

I'm worried about the impacts of reckless decisions being made in Washington, and that these decisions will have disastrous consequences for Wisconsinites, taxpayers, and our state budget moving forward. I'm worried about the tens of thousands of federal employees who were fired for no reason, including thousands of Wisconsin workers. Many served our veterans and our farmers and agricultural industries. I'm worried about the people who suddenly found themselves without jobs due to no fault of their own. And I'm worried about the Wisconsinites, especially our veterans and farmers, who depend on the services these folks are supposed to provide.

I'm also angry when I think about our neighbors—young kids and families across our state—who aren't going to school or work or anywhere else, because they're scared leaving their home may mean their family will be torn apart. I worry about our kids who are being traumatized by violence on social media, in the news, on our streets, and in our neighborhoods. And I worry about what all of this means for America's Dairyland, which has depended on the hard work of immigrants for generations.

I'm also worried that, even with our successful efforts to help folks make ends meet, Wisconsinites are feeling the squeeze due to tariff taxes and erratic trade wars. Prices are going up on things like school supplies, groceries, clothes, gas, and more. Americans last year footed the bill for 96 percent of the costs from tariffs. I noted earlier that our state has seen historic economic success under my administration, which has seen a budget surplus and a 'rainy day' fund at record-high levels. Based on what's coming, I worry how long that will last.

I'm also worried about the impacts of President Trump's so-called 'Big Beautiful Bill.' If Republican lawmakers don't approve resources the state needs to keep FoodShare payment errors low, Wisconsin taxpayers could have to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in penalty fees to the Trump Administration every year under the 'BBB.' And let me be clear: that's on top of the more than \$284 million we're

already estimating Wisconsin taxpayers will have to pay in future budgets.

The sooner the Legislature invests in FoodShare quality control efforts, the more time the state has to keep FoodShare error rates down. It's pretty simple. We can save Wisconsin taxpayers potentially hundreds of millions of dollars in penalty fees a year we could have to pay the Trump Administration if we don't. I'm not negotiating with Republicans about a \$70 million investment the state must make right now to save Wisconsin taxpayers as much as \$200 million in penalty fees later. We've been asking for this for months, and it has to get done. If the Legislature fails to provide the funding the state needs, Republicans will be to blame for the penalty fees taxpayers will be forced to pay. It's pretty simple. Get it done.

And that's not all. Healthcare costs are skyrocketing. Wisconsinites already don't feel like they're getting a fair shake when it comes to insurance coverage. And now, because of that so-called 'Big Beautiful Bill,' over 270,000 Wisconsinites will lose their healthcare. Because Republicans in Congress refuse to extend the tax credits under the Affordable Care Act that make healthcare more affordable for millions of Americans, many are going to be priced out. I talked to Kim, a small business owner in Green Bay, whose healthcare coverage went up 500 percent this year. She had enough money to pay for one month of healthcare coverage. And then she's going to go without. Wisconsinites across our state will be forced to do the same.

Congress must fix the healthcare crisis they've created, or every member of Congress from Wisconsin and beyond who allowed this to happen should be held accountable at the ballot box.

I'm not a rocket scientist, but I did teach biology in Baraboo. Maybe if we want to make Americans and Wisconsinites "healthy" again, making healthcare affordable and accessible would be a great place to start. We could also start by trusting the science, public health experts, and medical professionals who have eradicated diseases and found cures and kept us healthy and safe for decades.

Folks, public health isn't a partisan issue, and it isn't up for debate. And real lives are at stake if we fail to listen. It's why, in the coming weeks, I'll sign an executive order to have Wisconsin join the World Health Organization's Global Response Network. We must do what we can to keep our kids, our families, and our

communities healthy and safe.

Wisconsin is as purple as ever, but we've shown we can put politics aside and work together to get good things done. Compared to all of the chaos, dysfunction, and recklessness in Washington, here in Wisconsin, we've worked to lead by example. And a big part of that is the fact that, today, lawmakers are elected under the fair maps I signed into law. But here's the problem, Wisconsin: new maps are redrawn every ten years. While we have fair maps today, we still don't have a nonpartisan redistricting process in place. That means there's no guarantee Wisconsinites will still have fair maps after the next U.S. Census.

Wisconsinites and Americans across our country have watched the President of the United States of America pressure Republican Legislatures into adopting new maps that will benefit him. And, as a result, Democratic Legislatures have been put in the unthinkable position of having to respond by trying to restore balance to our elections. Well, very few people in this country know what it means to live under some of the most politically gerrymandered maps in America. But Wisconsinites do—and they know because they lived it. And we aren't going back.

I know people here disagree sometimes. Politics could get in the way of creating a nonpartisan redistricting commission that everyone can support. But there's one thing that we should all be able to agree on, which is that politics should stay out of redistricting from start to finish. So, tonight, I'm announcing that I'll be calling a special session of the Legislature this spring to take up a constitutional amendment to ban partisan gerrymandering once and for all in Wisconsin.

And let me be clear: I won't hesitate to bring the Legislature into special session later this year in August. Or September. Or October. Heck, I'm old enough to remember when the Legislature was willing to meet in December!

Folks, Wisconsin has fair, safe, and secure elections. We must continue to fight every effort by any politician to interfere with or make it harder for eligible Wisconsinites to cast their ballots. A big part of the reason we have fair, safe, and secure elections is because of the amazing election officials and poll workers across our state. So, next time you cast your ballot—and I hope you did so today—thank the folks who're making it happen. These folks are our friends and neighbors who often volunteer their time to make sure we can exercise our most basic and fundamental rights as Americans. And they do so out of a sense of duty. They do it

because it's the right thing to do. They do it because they're a good neighbor. That's extraordinary.

As governor, I've often declared a theme for the year—a topic or issue I want us to focus on. We had the Year of Clean Drinking Water, the Years of Broadband Access, Mental Health, Workers, and, of course, the Year of the Kid. This year, I want to keep it simple. I want us to focus on our Wisconsin values of kindness, respect, empathy, and compassion. I'm declaring 2026, the Year of the Neighbor, because we could all use a good neighbor, and we could all be better neighbors. And we're going to spend the next year celebrating the neighbors who make Wisconsin the great place it is to call home.

The first responders who answer our call in our darkest hour. The librarians who help us find our new favorite book. The teachers who comfort, inspire, and educate our kids. The state worker who helped us find and apply for healthcare or job training. The veteran who served our country. The farmer who feeds our families. The nurse taking care of our loved ones. The helpers who work every day to make life just a little bit better for everyone who lives here.

Wisconsinites are helpers by nature; it's in our DNA. When things are tough, we roll up our sleeves and get to work. We shovel a driveway or bake a casserole, and we show up for our neighbors. Because we know that, whether it's unpredictable weather or the unpredictable nature of politics, we're all in this together, and we're going to get through it together, not by alienating our neighbors, but by getting to know them, by looking out for one another, and by maintaining our Wisconsin values of kindness, empathy, compassion, and respect. Because it's the golden rule. Because it's the right thing to do. Because it's who we are as Wisconsinites.

I've always promised to be a governor who works for all Wisconsinites and who does the right thing when it matters most. I'll never stop working to make good on that promise as long as I'm governor.

We have lots of work to do, folks, so let's get back to it.

Thank you, and On, Wisconsin!

UW Marching Band, let 'er rip!