

Hughes campaign: Announces next phase of **UNLOCK WISCONSIN** - ensuring affordable, high-quality childcare for Wisconsin families

Posted on Thursday, Feb 26, 2026

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VIROQUA, WI – Missy Hughes today announced the next phase of her **UNLOCK WISCONSIN** economic agenda: lower childcare costs and increase access across Wisconsin. These proposals will help our state’s families, workers, and businesses thrive and overcome the affordability crisis hurting our state, with the **UNLOCK WISCONSIN** childcare agenda saving a typical Wisconsin family an estimated \$20,000 each year*.

Currently tens of thousands of children across Wisconsin are on waitlists because of a lack of educators, leaving families without the care they need and driving costs too high for those able to access it. Childcare providers are doing heroic work just to survive, but the current system is broken.

The scarcity of childcare is costing Wisconsin’s economy an estimated \$4.2 billion to \$6.4 billion* over a 10-year period, considering lost wages, lost tax revenue, and lost productivity for businesses. Research shows that every dollar invested in early childhood education results in over \$8 in economic activity*. Every family loses income when someone has to stay home because there’s no available childcare. Missy recognizes this as a critical issue affecting Wisconsin’s families and the state’s economic growth. She will make childcare a key focus in her administration, as she did while serving as Secretary & CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. Her plan includes two foundations, both critical to moving quickly on fixing our system:

1. **Give immediate relief to families** at or below Wisconsin's median household income immediate relief, and increase the number of families over her term, allowing thousands of families to save thousands of dollars and thrive; and
2. **Support our childcare workers**, the backbone of the programs, with good pay and benefits.

"Right now so many Wisconsin families are forced to make impossibly hard decisions because of skyrocketing childcare costs and limited household budgets. This is unacceptable, and as your governor I'll lower costs and increase access to high-quality childcare. My **UNLOCK WISCONSIN** agenda is about providing opportunities and removing barriers for Wisconsinites, and there is no greater barrier holding families back than unaffordable childcare," **said Missy**.

Missy continued, "Every time a Wisconsinite is forced to leave the workforce, Wisconsin loses. The family loses income, our businesses lose a worker, and opportunity is left on the table. Making childcare affordable will not only help families, but it will unlock parts of the economy that are stalled because of workforce shortages. As Secretary of the WEDC, I always said that childcare is economic development. For everyone in Wisconsin to truly succeed and prosper, our people must be able to care for their families without fear of losing their economic livelihood. This is how we **UNLOCK WISCONSIN**."

Lower the cost of childcare for families across Wisconsin

Today Wisconsin families are paying tens of thousands of dollars a year for childcare, and for many families these expenses far exceed the recommended 7% of a family's income*. These costs are not only making quality childcare out of reach for too many, they are forcing many young Wisconsinites to delay, or even put off, starting a family. By expanding the number of families eligible under the Wisconsin Shares program, more families will be able to have predictable, stable and affordable childcare costs.

The **UNLOCK WISCONSIN** agenda will lower the cost of childcare for families by:

1. Increasing the number of families in Wisconsin Shares
 - In Year One of Missy's term, all Wisconsin families at or below Wisconsin's median household income will be eligible for Wisconsin Shares, allowing

thousands of families to join the program;

- In Year Two of Missy's program, **UNLOCK WISCONSIN** will expand eligibility to 200% of the MHI, allowing thousands of middle class families to find relief from staggering childcare costs.

2. In Year One family childcare payments for Wisconsin Shares families will not exceed 7% of a family's income;

Support childcare workers to ensure access to childcare in every Wisconsin community

Across the state childcare classrooms are empty because of a lack of childcare workers. Programs operate at only about 75% of licensed capacity, resulting in a total of approximately 33,000 unfilled seats. Currently tens of thousands of Wisconsin children are on wait lists because of a lack of educators. An estimated 4,000 additional educators are needed to meet current licensed capacity, and a pipeline of workers is critical for continued stability. In addition to lowering costs for families, we must expand the number of educators so that these underutilized centers operate at full capacity. We must make childcare a sustainable career to attract and keep the best early care educators, while helping our childcare businesses succeed.

Missy will **UNLOCK WISCONSIN** by recruiting and training 10,000 childcare workers by the end of her first term, by:

1. Raising wages and increasing benefits for childcare workers, so careers in these fields can support a family;
2. Increasing recruitment efforts, training programs, and scholarships for careers in childcare to grow the pool of skilled workers;
3. Funding innovative regional pilot programs and initiatives aimed at increasing the supply of, and improving the lives of, care providers;
4. Deploying innovative, cross-generational care models that benefit both children and the elderly, such as co-locating childcare and eldercare facilities, or standing-up intergenerational care hubs;
5. Supporting childcare businesses by lowering overhead costs through a state-backed insurance pool, shared administrative systems, and state-provided low-interest revolving loans; and
6. Making qualifying childcare providers exempt from paying Wisconsin state sales tax for their business expenses, saving childcare providers thousands of

dollars each year.

- From diapers and cleaning supplies to classroom materials and energy bills, providers will no longer be taxed on the everyday items they need to keep children safe, healthy, and learning. Childcare is workforce infrastructure, and just like manufacturers and farmers, providers shouldn't be taxed on the basic inputs required to do their jobs. This targeted tax relief will help stabilize providers, strengthen small businesses, and ease cost pressure for Wisconsin families.

**1. The estimated savings of \$20,000 each year is based on capping the cost of childcare at 7% of a family's income. According to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), the median household income for a family of four in Wisconsin is \$96,000, meaning a 7% cap would limit annual childcare costs to approximately \$6,000 a year. According to a [2023 Forward Analytics report](#), the average cost of childcare for two children is \$25,000, meaning a 7% cap would save a typical Wisconsin family approximately \$20,000 a year.*

**2. Scarcity of childcare is costing Wisconsin's economy an estimated \$4.2 billion to \$6.4 billion based on a [2024 WEDC report](#).*

**3. The [Washington Center for Economic Growth](#) found that every dollar invested in childcare generates approximately \$8.60 in economic activity.*

**4. In 2024 the [Health and Human Services Department](#) set the standard that childcare should cost no more than 7% of a family's income.*

About UNLOCK WISCONSIN

In January Missy unveiled her first three proposals in her **UNLOCK WISCONSIN** agenda to create 50,000 new businesses, lift up to 100,000 more Wisconsinites each year into highly-skilled, high-paying jobs; and build 200,000 new homes by the end of her first term.

As your governor, Missy will use her economic skill and experience to unleash economic growth and opportunity in all 72 counties of our state, and provide Wisconsin workers, families and businesses real affordability relief. Missy will continue to unveil a series of proposed policies to **UNLOCK**

WISCONSIN throughout the course of this campaign, all focused on growing economic opportunity and prosperity in all 72 counties; creating more good-paying, family-supporting jobs; and reducing costs and prices to relieve the affordability crisis hurting Wisconsin workers, families and business.

About Missy

Secretary Missy Hughes led WEDC for over six years in the Evers Administration. Under Missy's leadership, major companies like Milwaukee Tool, Microsoft, Eli Lilly, Kikkoman and more invested over \$10 billion to create 45,000 good-paying jobs across Wisconsin. Missy also helped more than 9,500 Wisconsinites start small businesses on Main Streets across all 72 counties, launching the Main Street Bounceback Program which filled empty storefronts with small businesses.

Missy understands Wisconsin agriculture inside and out, and knows what it takes for rural communities to prosper. Prior to her public service, Missy served for 17 years as an executive at Organic Valley, helping the farmer-owned dairy cooperative grow to \$1 billion in sales while keeping 1,600 family farmers on their land.

Missy lives in Southwestern Wisconsin, just outside of Viroqua with her husband Tripp, their dogs, two donkeys, and a flock of seventy sheep. Missy is the youngest of seven and a proud mom of three. To learn more about Missy's experience and vision to grow Wisconsin's economy, please visit MissyForGovernor.com.