

## **People First**

### **Senator Vinehout's Announcement of her Candidacy for Governor**

*Prepared Remarks*  
September 25, 2017  
Black River Falls

Tonight, I am announcing my candidacy for Governor of Wisconsin.

I am running for Governor to turn the state's priorities upside down.

I am running for Governor to put people first.

At the center of state policy.

As the top priority when it comes to spending the state's dollars.

My vision for tomorrow is very different from where the state is today.

Since 2011, the current administration has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on tax breaks and cash payments to private corporations. And the Governor and Republican legislators just committed \$3 billion more to Foxconn. Three billion that could have been used for public schools, local government, transportation and health care – all the things our state does to help people.

Right now, those systems that help people have been cut or have not kept up with rising costs. We feel these cuts in our communities. Public schools are going to referenda to keep the doors open and classes from being cut. Counties are turning roads back to gravel to keep them passable. Over four hundred thousand people in Wisconsin don't have health insurance.

If I am elected your Governor, we will turn priorities upside down and put our people and building our communities first.

Our current Governor argues we need to give a few, select corporations cash subsidies so they will give our people jobs. But that hasn't worked.

When the job numbers are reported, Wisconsin consistently trails other states.

We recovered the jobs we lost in the Recession one full year after the rest of the nation and two years after Minnesota. Audits of economic development programs showed few of the promised jobs were ever independently verified.

When looking to build, relocate or expand in a state, company after company emphasizes they look for good schools, skilled workers, a transportation network, high speed internet, safe streets, efficient local services, clean air and water, recreation opportunities, and cultural amenities. Those are the characteristics that have brought 3,000 jobs to Eau Claire in the last four years – to name just one example.

But those are the very areas that have been cut by the present administration even as they expanded cash subsidies to select companies.

We need a new plan. We need a new direction. That is why I am running for Governor.

Democrats are the “Party of the People”. Our slogan is our task, and our task it to put People First. This vision must be so clear, compelling and relevant that everyone should be able to speak it. Nobody should be able to say, on Election Day, “They’re all the same. It’s not going to make a difference for whom you vote.”

Tonight, I want to talk about how we go about putting people first. These are practical steps that contribute to building our local communities. Many are included in the alternative budgets I’ve written over the past four budget cycles. These steps work AND they can be achieved using existing dollars.

**Here are five practical steps to putting people first:**

**Investing in our workers.**

**Making public schools our top priority.**

**Ensuring affordable health care is available to everyone.**

**Building and maintaining our infrastructure.**

**Providing the supports that give everyone opportunities.**

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**Putting people first means investing in our workers.**

People don’t have money in their pockets. Wisconsin has a wage problem. Our wages are 18th lowest in the nation, below such states as Tennessee, Missouri, Georgia, and Louisiana. I support a living wage. A person working full-time for a year at the minimum wage will earn about half what the federal government defines as poverty for a family of four. It is time to put money back into workers’ pockets.

Wages of employees should go up as fast as the salary of the CEO.

It is time that workers get the respect and credit they deserve. We keep hearing that workers should be grateful to investors and entrepreneurs because they create the jobs. What is overlooked is that workers create the profits enjoyed by the investors and entrepreneurs. They should be grateful to their workers. The economy is a partnership. Workers should be respected and rewarded as the full partners they are, in producing our state’s wealth.

More than 3 1/2 years ago, I proposed making tuition free at our tech colleges and 2-year UW campuses. Our high school graduates and workers looking for new opportunities need to be assured they can learn the skills they need to participate in a rapidly changing economy without worrying about costs. Other states that have done this – particularly Tennessee – have seen great results.

When I graduated from high school, my only option was to go to a two year college. Getting to college was difficult. Worry about money was constantly with me. This is why free tech colleges and two-year colleges are so important. It's the perception of the financial barrier that keeps you from going. If it's free, the perception isn't there. Tennessee has shown us. With a vigorous outreach program to high school students, Tennessee has successfully increased the number of high school students taking advantage of their tech colleges.

## **We Put People First when we make public schools our top priority.**

Public schools educate our children, represent our future and are at the heart of community life.

I support a new funding formula for K-12 that relies less on the property tax. One that recognizes that not all school districts have the same costs and not all students have the same needs.

I will restore the cuts to the University of Wisconsin system and stem the exodus of top professors to states where political leaders give them respect.

The fallout from Act 10 and the bashing of public school teachers have had profound results. Teachers have left and retired. Fewer college students are going into education. School districts have trouble filling vacancies. Standards for teachers have been lowered. Morale is low. Student opportunities are diminished. Cuts in state aid have forced taxpayers to pass referenda and raise property taxes just to keep their schools running.

Our children - our schools - are our future. We must push for excellence. One of my most treasured experiences as Senator came when the state school administrators gave me their Legislator of the Year award saying, "No state legislator had a greater positive impact on Wisconsin schools than Kathleen Vinehout."

## **We put people first when everyone has access to affordable health care.**

We know how to make health care accessible and affordable. Most of the rest of the world has figured out how to get the job done. There are a lot of different models, but the same goal – health care for everyone.

Everyone is only a day away from a medical crisis. No one should face bankruptcy because of an illness or an accident. No one should hesitate to get care because they don't have insurance. No one should have to limit their dream job to a company that offers health insurance.

I know what it is like to go without health insurance because I couldn't afford it. I know what it is like to be without health insurance and get a telephone call saying my son was in the emergency room and needed immediate surgery.

In my first term as senator, I was one of three authors of Healthy Wisconsin, a Bill that passed the Senate and died in the Assembly. If enacted, the plan would have provided health care to all state residents. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel called the health bills I was able to pass, "the most extensive changes in a decade". Planned Parenthood recognized my record in supporting women's health issues, "We know that you share our dedication to protecting access to women's health care in Wisconsin and are committed to restoring freedom and opportunity to women and their families in our state."

## **We Put People First by building and maintaining our infrastructure.**

I support rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges. I support expansion of mass transit. And I support bringing high speed internet to every corner of our state. We can't afford to depend on increased borrowing to pay for infrastructure. That is not sustainable.

Our infrastructure includes our sewage and water treatment plants, replacing lead pipes, air scrubbers on utility plants, all of which affect the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink.

We must open our eyes to climate change. Hire back our scientists and post their findings on our state website. Use our knowledge of science and climate change to protect and upgrade our infrastructure to keep our communities safe.

We put people first when our air, water, natural resources are preserved and enhanced for everyone's use and enjoyment. We put people first when our children, our grandchildren, our great grandchildren inherit the blessings of the land, sky and water from us. Their future welfare is our obligation.

## **We Put People First by providing the supports that give everyone opportunities.**

We put people first when those who work don't have to worry about child care. Just a week ago, a mom told me she spends half her salary on infant child care. Wisconsin is ranked third worst in 50 states for affordable family-based infant child care.

We put people first when we fund alternatives to incarceration. When we provide treatment instead of punishment for addiction and mental health illness.

We put people first when we provide support for those with disabilities. Everyone is one bad day away from being disabled. Let's make sure getting out of bed and getting dressed doesn't become a barrier to leading a full life.

Many of these and other services are delivered by our local governments. They need to be adequately funded. The revenues the state shares with local governments have not kept up with either inflation or the increasing need. Especially serious is the need for community-based mental health and drug addiction treatment. In addition to providing adequate funding, I will make sure the State recognizes counties and municipalities as full partners in delivering services. Our local governments know the need. They are on the ground doing the delivery. They should be partners in making decisions.

Putting people first cannot be accomplished unless the decisions that affect people and our local communities are made by the people who live in the local community. I trust local elected officials. I trust local voters.

Back last December, just before Christmas, Governor Walker wrote to then president-elect Trump. Listen to what he said. "Too often states have become mere administrative provinces of an all-powerful federal government ... forcing states to accept policies and priorities that do not meet the needs of taxpayers, and do not reflect local needs, conditions or values."

I repeat those same words loud and clear tonight to the Governor and our Republican legislative leaders: stop forcing local communities to accept policies and priorities that **DO NOT REFLECT LOCAL NEEDS, CONDITIONS OR VALUES.**

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Over the last four budget cycles I have written alternative budgets that put people first, that took money from corporate tax breaks and cash payments that haven't worked and put those same dollars into our schools, our technical colleges and UW, support services for individuals, and expanding health care.

The dollars are the same.

The direction is different.

This is my vision for Wisconsin:

A state where we build from the bottom up, not from the top down;

A state with vibrant communities where people want to live, work, play, raise families and start businesses. Communities in which we all share the effort. We all share the rewards. Where everyone's participation is honored and respected.

I am ready to run. And with your help and your votes, we will win.

Thank you.