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Capitol Update

By Senator Howard Marklein

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The Things I Heard and Didn't Hear in the State of the State

Governor Tony Evers gave his first State of the State address on Tuesday, January 22, 2019. This annual speech is designed to provide the Governor with a formal platform to describe his or her plans for the year. In the case of Governor Evers, this was his first opportunity to lay out an official wish list and agenda for the future.

No matter the political combinations of the Executive and Legislative branches, the State of the State is an important event. It helps the Legislature gain a better understanding of the Executive branch's intent and direction. Governor Evers' speech told us a lot about his goals and how he feels about the current state of Wisconsin. I share some of his goals, such as the middle class tax cut, water quality and improving our transportation infrastructure. I share his prioritization of schools and making sure that all children have opportunities to learn. I agree with these goals in concept. But I disagree with several of his assertions about the state of our state and his proposed approach on several key issues.

One of the first things the Governor told us is that "fixing our economy remains a priority." I don't understand this statement. Wisconsin's economy and the financial condition of our state is better than it has been in decades. After the reforms we have made over the last eight years, more people are working in good jobs than ever before. Our unemployment rate has been at 3% for 11 months! Wisconsin has added 225,000 private sector jobs in the last eight years.

We are starting this year, after eight years of reform, with a \$588.5 million surplus. Our state had a structural deficit of \$3.6 billion when former Governor Jim Doyle left office. Property taxes are at the lowest point in eight years and our rainy day fund is over \$320 million.

The only economy that is in trouble right now is the Agricultural economy and related businesses, including our Main Streets. How many times did Governor Evers talk about agriculture and rural issues in his speech? Zero. This is a serious concern for me.

Rural Wisconsin, our farmers, ag producers and the entire agricultural industry requires our attention right now. They need us to provide relief, resources and support. They need us to remove obstacles and protect their investments until we solve national and international market issues. The only time he mentioned an initiative that would touch farmers is when he talked about ending the Manufacturing and Agriculture Tax Credit (MAC) to pay for his middle class

income tax cut. And even then, he didn't talk about how this would negatively impact the larger family farms in our communities that sustain many of our main streets. I don't think any of us want a tax cut at the expense of our neighbors.

Again, I agree with the Governor's focus on schools, health care, roads and tax reform. We share these priorities. The Legislature has already taken steps toward the Governor on several of these issues. However, the Governor talked about making a lot of big investments, without discussing where the money comes from. He shared a lot of statistics, without describing the details of the statistics. The details are key and I am hopeful that this is where we can find common ground.

My biggest takeaway from the State of the State is that I will need to be increasingly diligent in my representation of rural Wisconsin. I will need to remind cabinet secretaries and the Governor that rural communities need attention as much as our urban neighbors. I will also need to keep watching our checkbook closely and make sure that any new spending is responsible and within our means. There are ways to accomplish several of his goals with reasonable reforms and within responsible spending.

I hope Governor Evers is as willing to listen to my ideas as he has asked us to be of his. He won the election in November and I respect that. But I won re-election too and the voters in the 17th Senate District are trusting me to represent our rural interests as well. I promised to do that and I stand by my commitments.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have any questions or need assistance with any state-related matters.