



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

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Gov. Evers Delivers 2025-27 Biennial Budget Message

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers tonight delivered his 2025-27 Biennial Budget Message. The governor's address is available on his [YouTube channel](#) and [Facebook page](#).

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

Good evening, Wisconsinites!

Honorable Supreme Court Justices, Tribal Nation leaders, constitutional officers, members of the Wisconsin National Guard and active and retired members of our armed forces, cabinet members, legislators, distinguished guests, and Wisconsinites joining us from wherever you are, thank you for being with us tonight.

My wife, Kathy is up in the gallery tonight. Kathleen Frances—you are my best friend and sounding board. There's no one else I'd rather shovel heaps of snow with or lose a game of pickleball to. I love you so much.

Folks, I'm Tony Evers, and I'm excited to be here tonight to introduce my fourth biennial budget as the 46th governor of the great state of Wisconsin.

Wisconsinites, we're not even 50 days into 2025, but my administration and I have been hard at work doing the right thing for Wisconsin. I'm excited tonight to be able to share some of the good work we've been doing, including laying out our state's policy priorities for the next two years.

Our budget includes my comprehensive plan to lower costs from child care to medication to help working families, seniors, and students. I'm providing nearly \$2 billion in tax relief, including eliminating income tax on tips. And my plan invests in public education at every level while holding the line on property taxes to make sure the average homeowner will not see a property tax increase.

I'm announcing plans to stop price gouging on prescriptions and crack down on insurance companies for denying Wisconsinites' medical bill claims. I also want to invest in fighting PFAS and lead and getting contaminants out of our lands, service lines, bubblers, schools, homes, and child care centers for good. And we're going to keep fixing the darn roads and infrastructure, building more affordable housing, keeping our kids, families, and communities safe, and expanding high-speed internet.

The budget I'm proposing balances our priorities of investing in our kids and needs that have been long

neglected while providing real and sustainable tax relief and saving where we can. So, let's get to work.

Here in America's Dairyland, agriculture is a \$116 billion industry. Everyone knows farmers, farm families, and producers have been the backbone of our state for generations. So when we heard about President Trump's 25 percent tariff tax—which could spark trade wars with Wisconsin's largest export partners, hurt our economy and farmers, and drive up costs for gas and groceries—we got right to work.

Just as that 25 percent tax was set to go into effect, I announced a new plan to help protect Wisconsin's farmers and our ag industry and bolster our supply chain. Under my administration, Wisconsin is on its way to becoming a top 10 state for ag exports—we can't afford to lose our momentum because of tariff wars in Washington.

So, my plan creates a new ag economist position in state government that can help farmers navigate market disruptions and volatility caused by tariffs. I'm also proposing to double our investments in the Wisconsin Initiative for Ag Exports to help increase exports for our dairy, meat, and crops, and help farmers and producers expand into new markets. And we're going to build upon our support for meat and dairy processors to help keep our supply chains strong.

We also have to help make sure farmers and producers can get product to market. We just announced 55 new projects across 36 counties to improve rural roads and infrastructure through our Agricultural Roads Improvement Program that we created last session. Tonight, I'm announcing we're going to invest \$50 million to continue that successful program to help ensure our farmers, producers, and ag and forestry industries have reliable roads they can depend on.

I also kicked off the new year declaring 2025 the Year of the Kid across our state. I want everything we do together this year to be focused on doing what's best for our kids and the families who raise them.

So, I'm asking the Legislature to approve a budget that does what's best for our kids at every stage, in every way, and no matter where they live in our state. In 2025 the Year of the Kid, I'm excited to be introducing the most pro-kid budget in state history.

An important part of doing what's best for our kids is reducing exposure to dangerous chemicals and getting harmful contaminants out of our water. Every Wisconsinite should have access to clean and safe drinking water no matter where they live. Tonight, I'm introducing my plan to combat water pollution and improve water quality across Wisconsin. Lead exposure and poisoning is especially dangerous.

There is no safe level of lead exposure for kids—even a small exposure can affect a kid for life, reducing learning capacity and attention span, and affecting academic achievement. So, I approved an emergency rule strengthening our lead standards statewide and announced new investments to support kids and families when they are exposed to lead.

But we should be working to prevent our kids from ever being exposed to lead in the first place. In the last few weeks, Wisconsin has seen cases of lead poisoning in kids who were exposed to dangerous levels of lead at school. At school, folks. That should never happen anywhere in Wisconsin. Period. We have to work together to fix this. Tonight, I'm asking for bipartisan support to invest over \$300 million to help get lead out of our service lines, bubblers, schools, homes, and child care centers for good.

And lead is just one contaminant that's affecting kids, families, and water across our state. Let's talk about PFAS. 'Forever chemicals' like PFAS are chemicals that have been used for decades in things like non-stick cookware, firefighting foam, and even food packaging. PFAS exposure at certain levels can mean developmental delays in kids, increased cholesterol levels, reduced immunity response to infections, and

even heightened risk of some cancers.

Addressing PFAS and other contaminants grows harder and more expensive with each day of delay. Republicans and Democrats must work together to finally get something done on this issue. As part of my comprehensive plan to improve water quality statewide, we're working to strengthen Wisconsin's groundwater standards for PFAS. And I'm asking the Legislature to support my investment of over \$145 million to fight PFAS contamination statewide and provide emergency resources like bottled water to families and communities affected by water contamination.

Cleaning up our water is a key part of our work to keep kids and families across Wisconsin healthy and safe. But we should also invest in preserving our natural resources, increasing outdoor recreation opportunities, and expanding access to public lands for hunting, trapping, and fishing. So, let's reauthorize the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program for another decade, and let's do it with bipartisan support. Let's deliver on our promise to our kids and grandkids of a better state—and world—than what we inherited.

This budget is about doing what's best for our kids—yes, by addressing pressing challenges facing our kids today. But we must also work to do what's best for our kids' futures, too. Every Wisconsin kid should have access to a high-quality public education from early childhood to our K-12 schools to our higher education institutions. In 2025 the Year of the Kid, I'm urging the Legislature to do what's best for our kids by approving significant investments in public education at every level in Wisconsin.

Let's start with higher education. Wisconsin has one of the best technical college systems in the country. So, our budget invests in green jobs, our healthcare workforce, and worker training for artificial intelligence. And I'm proposing nearly \$60 million to support our technical colleges and their good work.

But I also want to talk about our universities. This is a make-or-break budget for our UW campuses. I know there's a lot of talk in Washington about higher education, and look—folks, I can't speak to what's happening on other campuses in other parts of our country. But I visit just about every campus every year, so I've seen what's happening on our UW campuses with my own two eyes. And we're doing things differently here.

Politicians in Washington don't know a darn thing about what's going on at campuses across Wisconsin. They don't understand that our UW System has been part of Wisconsin since we first became a state—it's enshrined in our state constitution. They don't know how important our UW System has been to our state's success or how important it is for our future.

At UW-Eau Claire, they're working to improve healthcare outcomes and lower healthcare costs in rural areas. UW-Platteville is helping address rural healthcare shortages by training a new generation of physician assistants. UW-Milwaukee and UW-Whitewater are among the top campuses in the country for supporting students who are servicemembers or veterans. Through a workforce-centered program, UW-Parkside has increased graduation rates by about 20 percent. UW-Stevens Point is training more than 1,200 future educators who are supporting classrooms in over 200 different school districts across Wisconsin. UW-La Crosse is partnering with local businesses to make sure the skills they're teaching meet local employer needs. And I can go on.

UW-Oshkosh supported over 500 Wisconsin small businesses that needed help with digital marketing support efforts. UW-Green Bay is working with school districts to give high school students the opportunity to earn an Associate's degree. UW-Superior's Small Business Development Center is helping entrepreneurs start or expand their businesses across eight Northern Wisconsin counties. UW-River Falls is expanding hands-on learning opportunities to support our dairy industry here in America's Dairyland. UW-Madison is leading national efforts to study Alzheimer's to help improve treatment and find a cure for the more than

110,000 Wisconsinites who live with that cruel disease every day. UW-Stout's Manufacturing Outreach Center has worked on more than 470 projects with Wisconsin manufacturers across 33 of our 72 counties.

Folks, this is the story of what's happening on UW campuses. Each and every day, UW is helping improve our daily lives here in Wisconsin and the world over. And our ability to compete and be successful—to have a strong economy and workforce, to retain our homegrown talent, to solve problems in our smallest towns to our largest cities, and to make life better for everyone who calls our state home—depends on our UW System. Period.

Today, after years of attacks and disinvestment, UW is facing campus closures and program cuts, students are facing tuition increases, and faculty and staff are facing layoffs. And with new federal efforts to cut higher education funding, things for UW could get a whole lot worse.

So, tonight, I'm keeping the promise I made to the people of Wisconsin, and I'm asking the Legislature to approve the largest two-year increase for our UW System in state history. We have to get this done, folks.

It's up to us—each of us, together—to invest in our UW System, to defend it, and to protect its promise for future generations. And, let me be clear to elected officials in this building whose public education at UW helped get you to where you are today: You share in that important responsibility. Don't tell our kids they don't deserve to have the same opportunity you did.

Doing what's best for our kids will always be what's best for our state. Investing in our kids will pay dividends for their futures—and ours, too. It's why my pro-kid budget makes significant investments in public education at every level, including our K-12 schools.

The cost of shortchanging our kids is expensive, folks. We cannot afford to fail them. We have a responsibility to improve outcomes for our kids, both within our schools and beyond them. I've talked a lot about the work we must do to improve student outcomes in class and how we can finally help shorten the odds. And we have to begin with the basics.

I know some legislators have tried using student outcomes to argue against investing in our kids and our schools. Folks, you've got it backwards. The outcomes we're seeing are exactly why we must do more to do what's best for our kids.

The Legislature should approve my plan to make sure every kid can get healthy meals at school at no cost, regardless of whether their family can afford it. Why? Because our kids will perform better in our classrooms when we do.

The Legislature should approve my plan to make sure kids can access comprehensive mental health services no matter where they go to school. Why? Because our kids will perform better in our classrooms when we do.

The Legislature should approve my plan to help make sure kids have access to clean drinking water no matter where they live. Why? Because our kids will perform better in our classrooms when we do.

If the state isn't committed to meeting our kids' basic needs, then we can't have serious conversations about improving outcomes. It's that simple.

If our kids are fed, healthy, and feel safe, they will perform better in class. So, we have to get back to the basics in this budget.

Reading is fundamental. There are a lot of discussions right now about our kids' reading scores, how we measure student outcomes, and how we improve them, regardless of how they're measured. These discussions are important. But this Legislature and I approved \$50 million in the last budget that could be improving our kids' reading and literacy if it wasn't still sitting in Madison today, nearly two years later. So, we can have those discussions, but let's start by releasing millions of dollars we all agreed would improve reading statewide.

We are going to have to work even harder to reverse these trends and make up for lost time. It's one of the reasons that, in 2025 the Year of the Kid, I'll be asking the Legislature to approve \$80 million to invest in literacy coaches, tutoring, and other key supports to help improve reading scores statewide.

Doing the right thing for Wisconsin begins by doing what's best for our kids. So, my pro-kid budget makes the largest investment in Wisconsin's kids in any budget by any governor in state history.

During my first term, I fought to secure the first special education aid increase in over a decade and the largest increase in funding for special education ever in state history. Tonight, I'm proposing the highest-ever amount of special education aid funding, and we're going to guarantee the state reimburses special education costs at 60 percent to ensure every kid gets the public education they deserve.

But folks, here's the truth: our current system isn't working. Take the Mauston School District, for example. The fate of their school district is on the ballot today, and kids, parents, and educators will be holding their breath tonight to see if their schools will be saved. That's a reality that's become all too common. In 2024, we saw an historic number of school referendums on the ballot. And 169 of those referendums passed. Nearly 400 referendums passed statewide in the last four years.

So, the good news is Wisconsinites have shown this Legislature time and time again they support increasing investments in our public schools. The bad news is Wisconsinites had to raise their own property taxes to prove it.

This system isn't sustainable—it creates winners and losers, haves and have-nots. But referendums are not inevitable. Wisconsinites wouldn't have to raise their own property taxes to keep school lights on and doors open if this Legislature invested in K-12 education from the get-go. And the budget I'm announcing tonight proves we can both make the investments in our kids that we need to and hold the line to prevent property taxes from going up.

All told, our pro-kid budget will do what's best for our kids by providing more than \$3.15 billion, nearly all of which is spendable revenue for schools across Wisconsin. And we're going to make those investments while holding the line on property taxes to ensure the average homeowner will not see a property tax increase.

My budget would create a new incentive for local governments to freeze their local property taxes. If local governments agree not to raise local property taxes, they'll get a direct payment from the state. This will ensure local partners can still afford to pay for basic and unique local needs alike without property taxes going up.

Working to prevent property tax increases is a key part of my plan to lower costs for working families. But we can do more to reduce everyday, out-of-pocket costs for folks across our state.

More Wisconsinites are working than ever before, but paychecks today aren't going nearly as far as they used to. I'm really concerned President Trump's 25 percent tariff tax will not only hurt our farmers, ag industries, and our economy but that it will cause prices to go up on everything from gas to groceries. Some

estimates indicate this could raise costs on the average American by as much as \$1,200 a year. That will make it even harder for Wisconsinites to make ends meet.

So, I'm asking Republicans and Democrats to work together to pass my comprehensive plan to lower everyday, out-of-pocket costs for working families.

Wisconsinites need a leg up to be able to finally get ahead—on utility bills, on child care costs, on groceries, medication, and doctor visits, and everything in between. And I've got a plan to do just that. Here's how we get it done.

Let's save Wisconsinites money on their monthly utility bills. I'm proposing to eliminate the sales tax on electricity and gas for Wisconsin homes, which will save Wisconsinites about \$100 million in out-of-pocket costs each year.

Wisconsinites also need the Legislature to get serious about lowering out-of-pocket costs for child care this session. No more excuses, folks. Putting two young kids in child care in Wisconsin costs more than the average rent or mortgage. In 2023, child care costs consumed as much as a third of a family's household income. Our workforce and economy can't afford more parents leaving their jobs because they can't afford child care. Let's invest in our child care providers so they can hire more staff, reduce wait lists, and lower the cost of child care so we can get working parents and families a little more breathing room in their household budgets. That's a win-win-win-win for our kids, our families, our workforce, and our state.

My plan will provide nearly \$2 billion in tax relief through efforts to lower property taxes, eliminate the sales tax on several everyday expenses, and cut income taxes for middle-class Wisconsinites, including homeowners, renters, veterans, and seniors.

Let's also make sure Wisconsinites can keep more money in their pockets. I'm proposing to nearly double Wisconsin's personal income tax exemption. That means Wisconsinites will pay no income taxes on the first \$1,200 they earn, period. And I want us to work together to pass my proposal to support students and workers in our service industries by letting them keep the tips they earn tax-free. Let's eliminate taxes on cash tips.

My plan will also give Wisconsinites more tax relief back based on the mortgage and rent they pay. By building upon our Homestead Tax Credit, my new Property Tax and Rent Rebate will provide nearly \$150 million in tax relief for about 165,000 homeowners and renters across our state.

A key part of my plan to lower costs for working families includes making it easier for folks to get the healthcare they need without breaking the bank. Healthcare should not be a privilege afforded only to the healthy and the wealthy. It's why I'm again proposing to expand BadgerCare, which would save Wisconsin taxpayers nearly \$2 billion over the next two years and expand quality, affordable healthcare coverage for about 100,000 Wisconsinites. And I'm also providing new hospital investments to improve access to healthcare across Wisconsin, including in our rural communities.

As part of my comprehensive plan to lower costs for working families, I'm also proposing sweeping plans to lower costs for prescriptions and medication and crack down on price gouging and health insurers. My "Less for Rx" plan will lower costs for life-saving prescription drugs and insulin. We'd create a Prescription Drug Affordability Review Board to crack down on prescription price gouging. We'd cap the cost of insulin copays at \$35. We'd set price ceilings for prescription medication. And we'd save Wisconsinites a projected \$70 million over the next two years alone by eliminating the sales tax on over-the-counter medications. Let's finally make lowering everyday, out-of-pocket costs for medication a bipartisan priority this session.

Here's something else we can do with bipartisan support. In the Year of the Kid, let's finally do what's best for moms and babies. Let's extend postpartum coverage for pregnant women on BadgerCare to up to one year after giving birth. Wisconsin and Arkansas are the only two states in America that haven't done this. I mean, nothing against Arkansas, but come on, folks. I've proposed this in every budget I've introduced as governor. There's also a bipartisan bill to get it done that almost 90 legislators support. One legislator should not be able to single-handedly obstruct a bill that's supported by a supermajority of the Legislature. Let's just get it done.

Wisconsinites should be able to get the healthcare they need when they need it. But I hear from folks all the time who feel like they're getting ripped off by the healthcare industry and insurers. Folks can't get a straight answer on what's covered by insurance and what's not. People get sicker and health problems get worse because it takes too long to get an appointment or be approved for care—if it's ever approved at all. People try to get their care paid for but insurance companies refuse to cover it. Families get a medical bill and see all sorts of charges they didn't know about. Or, even worse, suddenly, collections agencies are calling about unpaid medical bills they didn't even know they hadn't paid.

Wisconsinites aren't getting a fair shake when it comes to healthcare, and I want to change that. So, first things first: I want to make Wisconsin the first state in America to start auditing insurance companies over denying healthcare claims.

If an insurance company is going to deny your healthcare claim, they should have a darn good reason for it. It's frustrating when your claim gets denied and it doesn't seem like anyone can give you a good reason why. So, here's how I propose we fix that: under my plan, if an insurance company is denying Wisconsinites' claims too often, we're going to audit them. Pretty simple.

And here's what else my plan would do: we'd create a new office to help Wisconsinites whose health insurance claims are denied. For the first time in state history, we'd have an office in state government devoted to helping Wisconsinites hold health insurers accountable and ensuring folks get the health insurance coverage they pay for. That's a big deal, folks.

Another thing that gets me wound up is how health insurance companies require healthcare professionals to get permission before they prescribe medication or care that you need. Basically, that means health insurers—not your doctor—are deciding whether your prescribed treatment is medically necessary. Health insurance companies try to use these so-called "prior authorizations" to help their bottom line and cut costs. They're banking on being able to avoid covering the services and treatment you need.

And Wisconsinites, you pay the price. Folks have to wait to get care until doctors get permission or may end up forgoing treatment altogether because of all the hassles with insurance. That can cause health conditions to get even worse—even dangerous and life-threatening.

So, my plan would create new standards to expand the healthcare services and procedures that insurance companies are required to cover. That means more healthcare services and procedures will be covered by your insurance automatically—no delays, no hassle, no questions asked.

Wisconsinites should know what you're getting when you buy your health insurance plan. You should know which services and treatments will need prior authorization. So, we want to require health insurance companies to be transparent from the get-go—they'd have to tell you right up front which services and treatments will require prior approval so you can find a health plan that's right for you.

And here's one thing we have to make sure of: no one should be in a mental health crisis wondering

whether insurance will cover an in-patient stay to get help. So, we're going to ban health insurance companies from requiring pre-approval for in-patient mental health services so Wisconsinites in crisis can be safe and get life-saving care.

Wisconsinites, you should be able to get healthcare when and where you need it—and you should be able to get it quickly and close to home. Folks can't afford to travel hours away to get basic services. And you shouldn't have to wait weeks and months to get an appointment. So, my plan would enable creating statewide standards for maximum wait times for scheduling appointments. And I'm proposing to require health insurance companies to make sure the services they cover are available within a minimum time and distance of where you live.

Even if folks can get care, far too often, unpaid medical bills are sent to collections agencies because Wisconsinites can't afford to pay them. Other times, Wisconsinites might not even know about unpaid medical bills before they're sent to collections or reported to credit bureaus. My plan would require health providers to give Wisconsinites notice of unpaid medical bills. And we'd give Wisconsinites a six-month grace period, banning healthcare providers from reporting unpaid medical debt to consumer reporting agencies during that time.

In this budget, we found ways to cut taxes and save where we could while investing in key priorities and finding real solutions to real problems Wisconsinites are facing every day. While we must continue to stay within our means, we have a duty to do what's best for our kids and future generations. We must continue to do the right thing for Wisconsin if we want to protect the future we've worked hard to build together. Wisconsinites, I'm so proud of our work to deliver a budget that balances these important obligations.

And that's important. With so much happening in Washington that's reckless and partisan, in Wisconsin, we must continue our work to be reasonable and pragmatic. The needless chaos caused by the federal government in recent weeks has already made preparing a state budget that much more difficult.

We prepared for the worst: popular programs that kids, families, schools, veterans, seniors, and communities rely upon every day being drastically cut; resources and investments that Wisconsin is counting on and budgeted for, suddenly stalled or gutted; trade wars with Wisconsin's largest export partners hurting our ag industries and our economy; costs for working families skyrocketing to the point they can't make ends meet.

It's why, even though I'm proposing historic investments in several areas statewide, it would not have been wise or responsible to spend every last cent available in this budget. We made difficult decisions and saved where we could, leaving a balance of about \$500 million in our state's checking account. With irresponsible decisions in Washington every day hurting people in Wisconsin, we will need to have state resources readily available to respond to basic and emergency situations alike. So, as the Legislature deliberates my proposal, I urge you to take seriously the disastrous consequences federal decisions will have on Wisconsinites and our state—and plan accordingly.

There's a lot of work to do, folks. But I know we can get good things done for Wisconsin in this budget if everyone here focuses on doing what's best for our kids, delivering real solutions for real problems Wisconsinites face every day, and doing the right thing.

So, let's get to work, folks, and let's make it happen.

Thank you, and On, Wisconsin!

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

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