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Governor Tony Evers takes on healthcare, education and taxes in his first major speech since he delivered his inaugural address at the state Capitol.

MADISON - On Tuesday, January 22, 2019, newly elected Governor Tony Evers gave his 2019 State of the State Address in the Assembly Chambers of the Wisconsin State Capitol.

Below are excerpts from the Governor's address that best summarize the points he wished to emphasize:

… We are a state forged by the Wisconsin Idea--the notion that education informs our public policy and that knowledge should embrace the communities we're called to serve.

… Fixing our economy remains a priority. That’s why just last week I directed the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to create an innovation and entrepreneurship committee focusing on supporting our small businesses, seeding capital funds, and technology development. But there is more to an economy than counting job creation. And the state of our state is more than our unemployment rate.

… Connecting the dots means recognizing that what’s best for our kids is best for our state. The investment we make in our kids today will yield dividends for generations. That’s why our budget reaffirms our state’s commitment to our kids by returning to two-thirds funding for schools

across Wisconsin.

… An economy that works for all of us, healthier communities, more money for our kids and our schools, better roads and infrastructure--that is what the people of Wisconsin expect from us, and that is what the people of Wisconsin deserve.

... Given the challenges we face, I expect the Legislature will focus on these important priorities instead of being distracted by division and preventing us from working together to get things done. That means I expect legislation arriving on my desk will be passed with broad support and in the spirit of bipartisanship. That means instead of taking up an entirely new budget of its own, I expect the Legislature to take up the budget I crafted by and with the people of our state.

Here are Governor Evers' complete remarks as prepared for delivery:

Honorable Supreme Court Justices, tribal nation leaders, Constitutional Officers, Major General Dunbar and the members of the Wisconsin National Guard as well as active and retired members of our armed forces, Senate President Roth, Majority Leader Fitzgerald, Minority Leader Shilling, Speaker Vos, and Minority Leader Hintz, cabinet members, legislators, distinguished guests, and, most importantly, people of Wisconsin: welcome, and thank you for being here.

Before we get started, I also want to recognize someone else who's here with us tonight. He's a Wisconsin institution and embodies both the soul of our campus and the spirit of our state, marching band director and director of bands at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dr. Mike Leckrone.

This year marks The Professor's 50th and final year leading UW's marching band as he will be retiring at the end of this year. He's directed halftime shows for nearly half of Camp Randall's existence and has seen coaches and chancellors and band members come and go. But even more than the "stop at the top" or the 5th Quarter post-game routines, The Professor will be remembered for what a remarkable leader, teacher, and inspirer he's been, not just for his students, but for people across our state. So, tonight, we honor The Professor and thank him for his service.

I'd also like to introduce my former junior prom date, Kathy, who's up there in the gallery tonight. My daughter, Katie, is also here tonight, and my other kids are I'm sure watching from home with my grandkids who are going to be up way past their bedtime. Thank you for supporting me—I love you all.

I'm Tony Evers, and I'm incredibly honored to be here tonight as the 46th governor of the great state of Wisconsin to say the state of our state is that we've got work to do, and we're ready for bipartisan solutions.

You know, a few weeks ago, I stood just outside of here where I took the oath of office and delivered my inaugural address. And I remind you today, just as I did weeks ago, of the spirit of our service, of the power that we have, and the responsibility that we bear.

We are a state forged by the Wisconsin Idea--the notion that education informs our public policy and that knowledge should embrace the communities we're called to serve. But today, we are also a state among the worst to raise a black family, and we are a state that's spending more on corrections than our entire UW System.

We are a state that once cultivated new technology--from typewriters to automobiles, we've led the nation in innovation. But today, we are a state that's behind on broadband expansion, and we trail the country in start-ups and small business creation.

We are a state that was the birthplace of BadgerCare, and we've been a laboratory for democracy. But today, we are also a state where it's become cheaper to get healthcare by driving across the Mississippi River.

The realities we face are bigger than me or any political party. The magnitude of our challenges requires us to put people first because, as I've said, that is the promise of our service.

So, tonight, I'm asking you to join me in making good on that promise by moving forward,

together.

Fixing our economy remains a priority. That's why just last week I directed the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to create an innovation and entrepreneurship committee focusing on supporting our small businesses, seeding capital funds, and technology development.

But there is more to an economy than counting job creation. And the state of our state is more than just our unemployment rate.

The opportunity we have to offer is not just the number of jobs we create; it's counted, too, by the number of workers who will work forty hours each week and still won't make enough to keep their family out of poverty.

The strength of our success is not found solely in fiscal surplus; it's defined, too, by the number of our kids who will go to school hungry tomorrow.

The metric for our posterity is not just what we keep in the coffers for a rainy day; it's measured, too, by the quality of the natural resources we're leaving behind for our kids and their kids after them.

The state of our state is the work of Lisa, who is also in the gallery tonight. Lisa is the Founder and President of the Foundation for Black Women's Wellness. The Foundation serves more than 1,000 women and girls working to eliminate health disparities affecting Black women, their families, and their communities. Thank you, Lisa!

The state of our state is also the story of Jen, who grew up in Cashton. Because of the Affordable Care Act, Jen has access to comprehensive, patient-centered care that is tailored to her needs. Being able to afford services and insurance has allowed Jen to take control of her health from preventative to reproductive to behavioral healthcare. Jen is also here in the gallery tonight. Thanks, Jen!

The state of our state is the story of Jose who came to Abbotsford, Wisconsin, from Mexico with his parents when he was twelve years old. Jose learned English through Abbotsford's English as a second language program and gained a sense of community when he signed up to play baseball in high school. Jose decided to stay here in Wisconsin. He still lives in Abbotsford where he's raising his sons, Marco and Nickolas, and coaches their baseball team, the Broncos. And he's become a naturalized citizen. Jose and his son Marco are up in the gallery tonight. Thanks for being here, Jose and Marco.

The state of our state is the story of students like Alex from Boyceville Middle School. Alex's teacher describes her as having the drive and passion that make her excited to come to work every day. Alex has worked hard to turn things around at school and is now passing all of her classes, has no missed assignments, and has gone above and beyond to help other students, too. And it's also the story of students like Diamond from Parker High School in Janesville where the school nurse describes her as the strongest young lady she has the pleasure of knowing. Diamond's family has had some tough times, but Diamond has persevered, is excelling in school, and has dreams of becoming a pediatrician or pediatric nurse. Diamond is here in the gallery and tonight I'm excited to announce Alex and Diamond are the first-ever recipients of the Star Student Award in Wisconsin.

When I stood before you just a few weeks ago to deliver my inaugural address, I said it was time to get to work. And we have.

But the real work—the hardest work—is yet to be done.

Last month, Mandela and I traveled across the state listening to Wisconsinites talk about their values and their vision for our future. We talked about policies and solutions that connect the dots.

And I keep saying that--connecting the dots--and I've been asked several times what I mean by that--it's about seeing a forest through the trees.

It's about seeing the connection between how lack of access to affordable housing affects kids

in the classroom. It's about seeing the connection between drug and alcohol addiction and our burgeoning criminal justice system. It's about seeing the connection between a budding entrepreneur who wants to start their own business and how the rising costs of health insurance might push that dream out of reach.

The budget that I'll be introducing in the coming weeks is about connecting those dots. And to no one's surprise, it begins—as it always has for me—with education.

Connecting the dots means recognizing that what's best for our kids is best for our state. The investment we make in our kids today will yield dividends for generations. That's why our budget reaffirms our state's commitment to our kids by returning to two-thirds funding for schools across Wisconsin.

I was pleased to learn that the Speaker has encouraged his members to support this provision in our budget, and I hope that I can count on your support going forward.

In addition to two-thirds funding, we're also going to make sure that we have resources to support our kids with special needs. For the past decade, we've not only cut funding for public schools, we've failed to fully fund services for special education. This has forced local school districts and taxpayers to squeeze resources from other areas to provide these critical services. Our budget will provide an unprecedented $600 million-dollar increase in special education funding. That means our school districts will have enough to allocate the resources they do have to other areas of high need.

And we're not just going to increase support for our kids with special needs. We're going to get to work on closing the achievement gap for low-income students and students of color. Our state's achievement gap is among the highest in the nation in reading and math scores. As State Superintendent, I submitted proposals that would've helped address our state's achievement gap. Unfortunately, most of these proposals never made it through the Legislative process. I believe this is the year they will. And my Urban Initiatives programs will also empower minority students in our state's highest-need districts by expanding early childhood education and summer school grant programs.

It is urgent that we increase support for our low-income students and students of color. The

longer we wait to invest in closing our achievement gap, the wider the gap will get, and the more it will cost us in the long-run.

Finally, we're going to propose a five-fold increase in mental health programs for K-12 students across our state. But funding mental health programming in our schools is not enough; so tonight, we renew our commitment to making sure everybody has access to quality, affordable healthcare.

We've already started working to make sure healthcare in Wisconsin is affordable and accessible. We signed executive orders creating a Healthy Communities Initiative and calling upon the Department of Health Services to prioritize these goals. We also called upon our state agencies to connect the dots and work together on how we can protect healthcare coverage for people in our state.

But our work can't stop there. That's why our budget will also seek to expand Medicaid in Wisconsin. According to the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, this will enable an additional 76,000 Wisconsinites to have access to affordable healthcare. This would also save Wisconsin taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, allowing us to reallocate those cost savings to other critical programs.

We have a real opportunity here, folks. At the end of the day, Mr. Majority Leader and Mr. Speaker, healthcare should not be a partisan issue--Republican states like Kentucky, Nebraska, and Idaho have expanded Medicaid, and so have Democratic states like Washington, California, and Minnesota. We should be able to get it done here, too.

The people of Wisconsin voted for a change this November and asked us to stop playing politics with their health care. That's why I'm announcing tonight that I have fulfilled a promise I made to the people of Wisconsin by directing Attorney General Kaul to withdraw from a lawsuit that would gut coverage for the 2.4 million Wisconsinites who have pre-existing conditions. I've said all along that I believe the best way to maintain protections for healthcare here in Wisconsin is to stop trying to dismantle those protections at the federal level.

In addition, we're also going to address Wisconsin's transportation funding crisis.

I appointed Secretary-designee Craig Thompson because I know that he will work on both sides of the aisle for a solution that works for Wisconsin. I fully expect that he will be approved with consent of the Senate.

I've said all along that I believe we have to bring people together to work on this issue, and I believe Secretary-designee Thompson can get it done. In the coming days, we'll be announcing a task force of stakeholders to get to work on proposing a bipartisan policy solution to be included in The People's Budget. The task force will solicit feedback from key partners from all regions of the state, all sectors of the economy, and users of all different modes of transportation.

And while I know that caucus members in both houses support different approaches to solving our transportation funding crisis, it's going to take sacrifices and compromises to find a long-term, comprehensive solution that works for everyone.

But roads and bridges are only a small part of the infrastructure challenges facing our state. That's why I'm also declaring 2019 is the Year of Clean Drinking Water in Wisconsin.

According to the Department of Health Services, 1.7 million Wisconsinites depend on private wells for water, and 47% of these wells do not meet acceptable health standards. Meanwhile, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, we have an estimated 176,000 lead service lines across our state. Removing lead service lines could cost over $2 billion. But Pew Charitable Trusts estimates that for every $1 we spend on replacing lead drinking water lines, we will see a 133% return on our investment in higher lifetime earnings and better health outcomes.

That's why, in the coming weeks, I'll be signing an executive order to designate a person at the Department of Health Services to take charge on addressing Wisconsin's lead crisis and to help secure federal funding for prevention and treatment programs.

Finally, we're going to cut taxes by ten percent for everyone making up to $100,000 and families making up to $150,000. But we're not going to do it by spending money we don't have or that

might not be there in two years. I don't make promises I can't keep, and I'm not going to propose things that we can't pay for. So instead, we're going to fund tax relief for hard-working families by capping a corporate tax credit, 80% of which goes to filers making more than $1 million a year.

An economy that works for all of us, healthier communities, more money for our kids and our schools, better roads and infrastructure--that is what the people of Wisconsin expect from us, and that is what the people of Wisconsin deserve.

Given the challenges we face, I expect the Legislature will focus on these important priorities instead of being distracted by division and preventing us from working together to get things done.

You know, in the Governor's conference room inscribed on the ceiling is a phrase that reads, "The will of the people is the law of the land."

The will of the people is the law of the land.

That means I expect legislation arriving on my desk will be passed with broad support and in the spirit of bipartisanship.

That means instead of taking up an entirely new budget of its own, I expect the Legislature to take up the budget I crafted by and with the people of our state.

I'll tell you today as I told you a few weeks ago that I have never been more hopeful about our state and our kids' future. I have no doubt that there will be issues on which we disagree. I have no doubt that there will be times when we will be frustrated by the deliberative process of democracy. But we will engage civilly. We will have discourse and dialogue, but it will not devolve into disrespect. And we will govern with a humble appreciation that the will of the people--our people--is the law of the land.

Now, let's get back to work. Thank you, and On, Wisconsin!