

Shilling wants to strengthen the middle class, boost family wages and invest in the future of Wisconsin.

MADISON, WI – Senate Democratic Leader **Jennifer Shilling** (D-La Crosse) welcomed new and returning members to the legislature today at the inauguration ceremony for the 103rd Session of the State Legislature. In her inauguration day remarks, Sen. Shilling laid out her vision for the future and policy goals to strengthen the middle class, boost family wages and invest in the future of Wisconsin.



“As we seek to balance Wisconsin’s budget deficit and build a brighter future, my Senate Democratic colleagues and I are committed to focusing on the important issues at hand,” said Sen. Shilling. “We will put forward thoughtful proposals to improve workplace flexibility, increase economic freedom and invest in pro-growth policies to strengthen the middle class. We recognize that these aren’t Democratic or Republican issues. They’re Wisconsin issues and we must find ways to work together on these key priorities.”

Sen. Shilling’s full remarks to the Senate are below:

Mr. President, friends and colleagues. I am honored to join you here today as we begin a new legislative session and address the challenges facing our state.

I would like to welcome our new and returning members as well as their families. I especially want to recognize my husband Chris and two boys, Nate and Zach, who are here with me today. Thank you for your unconditional love, support and encouragement. I also want to welcome everyone watching from home on WisconsinEye as well as our guests here in the Senate chamber.

While today marks the start of a new session, it also provides our legislature with a clean slate and the opportunity to chart a new course for our state. We all know that Wisconsin is a unique, vibrant and hardworking state full of amazing people and unparalleled potential, but we need a clearer plan to invest in our future and ensure long-term economic success.

While the rest of the nation has seen strong job gains, our state has consistently ranked below the national average for job creation, we've struggled with declining wages and our aging infrastructure is preventing many businesses from expanding. Wisconsin communities, businesses and residents are already bracing for another round of difficult budget cuts and sacrifices because of fiscal policies that favor the wealthy over working families.

It doesn't have to be this way though. Just across the border in Minnesota, their progressive policies are attracting businesses, growing their middle class, and resulting in major budget surpluses. Just last month, their budget office forecasted a $1.4 billion surplus and they have a $1.9 billion reserve fund. Rather than looking to cut and borrow, they are investing and growing.

As we seek to balance Wisconsin's budget deficit and build a brighter future, my Senate Democratic colleagues and I are committed to focusing on the important issues at hand. We will put forward thoughtful proposals to improve workplace flexibility, increase economic freedom and invest in pro-growth policies to strengthen the middle class. We recognize that these aren't Democratic or Republican issues. They're Wisconsin issues and we must find ways to work together on these key priorities.

In this new session, it is important to recognize the shortcomings of past policies and look for new ways to deliver on legislative promises. Without adequately investing in our future, Wisconsin will continue to lag our neighboring states in job growth and prosperity. We know that a quality education is the foundation for lifelong success, yet state cuts, local funding challenges and the massive increase of student loan debt have become significant burdens for families. By making targeted investments in our schools, we can improve education outcomes at all levels from pre-K programs to our technical colleges and universities.

Senate Democrats will also look for ways to help businesses improve workplace productivity, reduce employee turnover and provide greater workplace flexibility. We want to focus on increasing access to affordable childcare, reducing health care costs and improving retirement

security to eliminate the barriers that prevent employers and employees from succeeding in a competitive global marketplace.

We also recognize that our government has a responsibility to strengthen communities and private enterprise by maintaining a strong public infrastructure. From repairing aging roads and bridges to encouraging broadband access in urban and rural areas, we need to ensure that our infrastructure is an asset, not a liability, to businesses growth and expansion.

Each of the members in this chamber represents a unique district and geographic area of our state, but we are united in our desire to do what's best for everyone. Rather than focusing on policies that will divide communities, I hope that we will seize this opportunity to set a new tone and find commonsense solutions to the challenges we face. As the Senate Democratic Leader, I look forward to working with Gov. Walker, my legislative colleagues, community leaders and local advocates to strengthen relationships and move Wisconsin forward. By working together, I know that we can provide greater economic opportunity, prosperity and freedom for all to enjoy. Thank you.

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Tony Palese contributed to this story.