

Walker's 2017 State of Denial Address

Written by Gordon Hintz Press, Rep. 54th Assembly District

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When Gov. Scott Walker delivers his State of the State address tonight, will he again gloss over the State's multiple problems like transportation funding, the shortage of corrections officers in our prisons, the veterans' home at King, poor economic growth, and bad fiscal management?

MADISON – Governor Walker will deliver the 2017 State of the State address tonight. This annual event is an opportunity to address the citizens of Wisconsin directly, highlighting our successes, challenges, and offering a vision going forward to meet those challenges. As Governor Walker begins his 7th year in office, it has become clear that he is unwilling or unable to address the bigger challenges facing Wisconsin now and in the future. The Governor has become a weak leader at a time when we need bold leadership.

Below are examples of the failure of leadership and poor results under Governor Walker's tenure.

Transportation: Unable and unwilling to fix our transportation funding

The Governor has had 6 years of unilateral power in state government to address the transportation infrastructure funding shortfall. But under his lack of leadership, the problem has only been made worse. Governor Walker has borrowed a record level of money, our roads have declined, and projects continue to be delayed. Now he is again refusing to lead the state and make the tough decisions necessary for our state.

As a result, the Secretary of Transportation resigned from his post last month.

Corrections: Unaccountable on the wide scale problems in state prisons

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Since Act 10 passed, there has been a shortage of corrections officers in Wisconsin's prisons. As a result there has been record levels of forced overtime leading to unsafe work conditions. There has also been an increase in the number of attacks by inmates on staff. Yet the Governor recently admitted he has never even visited a single state prison the entire time he has been Governor .

There is also currently a criminal investigation into allegations of abuse and sexual assault at the Lincoln Hills juvenile facility. The Governor's office was made aware in February of 2012 that there were problems yet took little action until the end of 2015.

Amid these ongoing troubles at his agency, Governor Walker's Corrections Secretary, Ed Wall, stepped down from his post this year.

Veterans: Unaccountable on taking care of our veterans.

Under Governor Walker's watch, the veterans' home at King has been plagued with complaints of resident neglect, staffing shortages and deteriorating facilities, as well as a recent reports of intentional attempts to hide and withhold information from public and regulatory oversight.

Problems at the veterans' home continue to come to light at the same time that Governor Walker's Veterans Affairs Secretary continues to siphon off surplus revenue generated by the veterans' homes in order to fill budget holes elsewhere. At the same time, the DVA has spent less money on direct grant programs for veterans, with the DVA's spending on assistance to needy veterans dropping by 61%.

In November, Governor Walker's Veterans Affairs Secretary announced he would also step down from his post.

Poor Economic Growth: Lagging Behind Our Neighbors

Wisconsin's economy ranks 8th in job creation out of ten Midwest states over the last five years and is dead last in the nation when it comes to start-up activity. Wisconsin has suffered 20 consecutive quarters – or five full years – of below-average job growth. Governor Walker's December release of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics preliminary jobs estimates for November of 2016 show that Wisconsin has lost 4,500 private sector jobs since March 2016. This includes a loss of 3,600 manufacturing jobs. The total estimated job loss since March 2016 is 2,700.

Bad Fiscal Management: Self-Inflicted Problems

While other states have been investing budget surpluses into education and the future, Wisconsin has been cutting funding. Tax cuts for millionaires have resulted in \$1 billion in lost state aid to K-12 schools. The Governor has borrowed money the last two years in order to keep the budget balanced. The combination of slow economic growth and regressive tax cuts that led Republicans to make budget cuts during the last budget are again threatening to undermine Republican promises to investing more in K12 education.

November tax collections came in 2.3% below the amount collected in November of 2015. Tax collections are only up 1.2% for the current FY2017 so far, well below budgeted revenue of 3.7% growth. The revised ending balance for FY2017 of \$104.8 million will be the smallest in 7 years, providing little funding to carry over into the next budget.