

Walker State of the State Out of Touch with Wisconsin Reality

Written by Peter Barca, Assembly Democratic Leader, District 64

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As the Governor begins his seventh year and delivers his rosy State of the State, the majority of Wisconsin believes we are on the wrong track.

MADISON – Six years ago, Gov. Walker spoke before an audience in the Assembly chamber and made a lot of promises. He said Wisconsin would lead the economic recovery. He said we would stop kicking the can down the road on funding transportation. He said we can't rely on short term fixes, and we can't borrow excessively anymore.

Yet here we are, as the Governor begins his seventh year and delivers the State of the State, we have a \$700 million budget deficit, an economy that is lagging significantly behind the rest of the nation, the 3rd worst roads and the most diminished middle class in the nation.

The primary driver for a better workforce would be supporting our world-class education system. K-12, technical colleges and the UW system are the pride of our state—despite relentless attacks and budget cuts administered by Gov. Walker and the Republican legislature. We need quality education and bold, vibrant worker training.



It's clear education is not a priority when the tech schools have lost \$203 million in state aid, last session alone the UW system was gutted by a quarter of a billion dollars, and k-12 schools have lost \$1 billion in state aid since 2011. The governor also discussed college affordability, how he froze tuition without properly funding the university, and yet there is no relief for the skyrocketing student loan debt most Wisconsin students graduate with, despite other states allowing for refinancing of debt, including Minnesota.

If we want to fill jobs and have skilled workers, funding education, worker training and making higher education accessible for all is the most basic thing we can do, and Democrats have

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drafted bills to take exactly those steps.

The governor indicated he will continue to kick the can down the pothole-filled road with no sustainable, long-term plan to fund transportation in sight. Instead, we continue to put more money on the credit card, delay projects that drive up costs, all the while commuters are paying the cost of deteriorating roads. Wisconsin drivers are now paying \$6 billion a year due to congestion-related delays, crashes and vehicle repairs.

Of course, with our roads and bridges suffering alongside our state's middle class, the governor does have one solution—get rid of prevailing wage. The Fiscal Bureau has already said this wouldn't save us money, and it would punish our road and bridge construction workers who are completing each mile of roadwork 43% more cost-effectively than the national average.

The governor has bragged about his tax policies, while neglecting to mention that his cuts have largely benefitted the wealthy of our state. Not to mention, many local schools have had to pass referendums to make up for state aid shortfall—this unfairly places the tax burden on the backs of Wisconsin families and small businesses who are struggling to make ends meet.

Democrats in the Assembly will continue to put forward bold ideas that have been proven effective in order to fund our schools, fix our roads and rebuild the middle class. This is why the majority of Wisconsin believes we are on the wrong track. They deserve better.