



## **Democratic State of the State Response**

*By Assembly Democratic Leader Peter Barca (D-Kenosha)*

In Wisconsin, we should assess the state of our state based on how real people in every corner of our state are faring. So tonight we ask you, the people of Wisconsin: Are you better off now than you were before the recession? Is our state better off?

The nation is recovering and most states have surpluses. That's good news for America.

But Wisconsin lags behind in job creation and economic recovery. That is tragic in a state that is accustomed to leading the nation.

Our state's rich history is rooted in our world-class education system. Wisconsin is a remarkable place in large part because we have had opportunities in education that have been the envy of the nation. For generations our public schools, universities and technical colleges have trained the best employees and workers. That is where so many of our state's best ideas and strongest businesses have been born.

But we cannot expect that incredible tradition to continue when Republicans target schools and vocational colleges for huge, historic cuts because of a deficit and then refuse to reinvest in them in a time of surplus. That is short-sighted.

The surplus came, partially, from historic cuts to public schools and job training at technical colleges. The surplus was, in part, created by raising taxes on the people who could least afford it. The surplus was taken from local communities that provide public safety and other basic services.

And now Gov. Walker proposes irresponsibly spending much of the surplus on election-year gimmicks that will bring his growing structural deficit above \$800 million. The last thing most Wisconsinites want is to once again return to the conditions Gov. Walker used to justify dividing our state and causing massive disruption in people's lives.

And here is the result: The laws passed in this Capitol during three years under Gov. Walker and Republicans have not created jobs. Wisconsin has fallen from 11th to 37th in job creation.

Republicans cut 30 percent of state funding to technical colleges, one of the most valuable institutions in our state, especially in a time of high unemployment and workers seeking job training for a new career. Tech schools are a Wisconsin original – the first one opened here in Wisconsin in 1911.

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Republicans made historic cuts to public schools while forcing taxpayers to pay the tuition for families that in most cases were already attending private schools.

Irresponsibly, Republicans chose to kick people off their health care – even though it cost Wisconsin taxpayers millions more.

Make no mistake, Democrats were upset when the Republicans raised taxes on struggling families and seniors who want to stay in their homes. Then in a time of surplus, Republicans raised property taxes. So we believe a substantial part of the surplus should be used to relieve property taxes – taxes Gov. Walker raised in his current budget.

So many of the laws Republicans have passed come from outside the state, written by extreme groups like ALEC and primarily benefit the special interests and wealthy elite while breaking the rungs that allow people to climb the ladder of opportunity.

A good-paying job, access to healthcare, quality public education and job training are vital opportunities for everyone seeking to improve their lives. Gov. Walker and the Republicans have spent a lot of time talking about jobs and job training. But it is all misleading talk, no action.

Democrats want 2014 to be a year of action for the middle class in Wisconsin.

We want action that focuses on real people's needs, priorities and long-term economic security. We want fair funding for our schools, access to affordable health care at a lower cost to taxpayers and economic development that creates family-supporting jobs and closes the growing wage gap.

Democrats will push to make this a year of action for Wisconsin's middle class because the success of our great state is not based on helping the well-connected that can afford lobbyists in the Capitol.

The people of Wisconsin are resilient and strong. Wisconsin can return to leading the nation. Together we can restore and protect economic opportunities for the middle class and help people all across our great state of Wisconsin.

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