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Governor Walker Column: Working and Winning for Wisconsin

Madison – Governor Scott Walker released the following column today titled, “Working and Winning for Wisconsin.” This column is for your consideration to publish.

Working and Winning for Wisconsin
By Scott Walker

The state of our state is strong.

[More people were employed in Wisconsin last year than at any point in the history of our great state.](#) Unemployment levels are the [lowest in more than 15 years](#). And [the percentage of people working in Wisconsin is one of the highest of any state in the country](#).

This begs the question, “Are the people of Wisconsin better off than we were six years ago?” The answer is a resounding yes.

It may seem hard to believe now, but [during the four years before we took office, Wisconsin had lost more than 133,000 jobs and the unemployment rate peaked at 9.2%](#).

Today, we've [more than recovered the jobs that departed during the recession, wages are up](#), and [more than 50,000 new businesses have been created](#). In fact, our biggest challenge is not creating jobs, but finding people to fill them. We went from a focus on "jobs, jobs, jobs" to talking about "workforce, workforce, workforce." This is my top priority for 2017 and beyond.

We are working and winning in Wisconsin.

In addition to a growing economy, I am pleased to note that our finances are stable. We [finished the fiscal year, yet again, with a surplus](#). Our [rainy day fund is 165 times bigger](#) now than it was when we first took office, and Wisconsin has the [fourth lowest overall long-term debt obligation of any state in the country](#).

Getting our finances under control allows us to reduce the burden on the hard-working taxpayers. Since taking office, [we've cut taxes by more than \\$4.7 billion](#). That means a [cumulative income tax reduction of \\$1,159 for a typical family](#).

We also cut property taxes. Since December of 2010, the [cumulative reduction is \\$426 for a median-valued home](#). In the decade before we took office, [property taxes went up 27 percent](#). If that trend had continued, [the](#)

difference is a savings of \$1,700. That's real money.

Just as I promised when running for re-election, property and income taxes will be lower in 2018 than they were in 2010.

Throughout the past year, I held listening sessions in every county to hear about where citizens would like the state to be in 20 years. Several major issues came out of these listening sessions. Student success, accountable government, and rewarding work were consistent themes. These areas will be the focus of our state budget.

As promised, we will provide a significant increase in funding for public education. We will also help rural schools that have unique challenges such as transportation costs, broadband access, and declining enrollment.

College affordability was also a major issue at our listening sessions. Over the past four years, we froze in-state tuition for all undergraduates at University of Wisconsin (UW) campuses. Compared to the previous trend, a typical student saves more than \$6,300 over four years. We will go even further as we will actually cut tuition. It will be paid for in the state budget and we will add more resources to the UW System.

Access to high speed and reliable internet service is something we hear about repeatedly throughout the state. That's why I am proposing the state invest \$35.5 million more to expand our broadband access grant program and for our efforts to help upgrade technology and train teachers from small and rural school districts. That would bring our total investment to \$52 million to help connect everyone in the state.

On transportation, we will provide local governments with the largest increase in transportation aids since the 1990s. They can use these funds to fix roads and bridges and potholes in their communities. We will also provide more money for state highway rehabilitation than ever before.

We can do all of this without a gas tax or vehicle registration fee increase. I will keep the promise I made to the voters in the last election. Whether you agree with me or not, I hope you can respect that I will keep my word. We did not get elected by the people of Wisconsin to raise taxes.

As mentioned, more people are working than ever before in our state. Our schools continue to be some of the best in the country. The UW just went up in another ranking. Our improvement in the tax climate is one of the best in the nation. Health care systems in our state are ranked in the top three in the country. And our farmers continue to grow and produce some of the best food on the planet. Heck, we just won the gold medal for the best cheese in the world.

Let's face it. There is plenty to celebrate in Wisconsin.

The state of our state is strong. Wisconsin's future is bright. But we're not done yet. There is more work for us to do. Together, we can move Wisconsin forward.

Scott Walker is the governor of Wisconsin.

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