
State of the State Address
Gov. Tommy G. Thompson
Assembly Chambers
January 20, 1998

Speaker Jensen, President Risser, Members of the Legislature, Constitutional Officers, Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court, tribal leaders, members of the Cabinet, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It all began 150 years ago. An event that must have seemed so inconsequential at the time.

Europe was in turmoil as the thirst for democracy sparked revolution in Paris, Vienna, Prague and Berlin.

Yet, an ocean away, those very democratic principles gave birth to a small state in a very young nation. While Europe burned and bled in the throes of revolution, a melting pot of nationalities, race and religions came together to forge a future world leader.

A state those European nations – with all their history, experience and tradition – would one day come to for leadership in welfare reform, education, trade and agriculture.

1848 was a year that would revolutionize the world.for that year, the state of Wisconsin was born.

This year, we proudly mark our 150th birthday. Let the celebration begin!

Our Sesquicentennial provides us with a unique opportunity to connect with our past while reaching toward the future. A time for families to return to their roots and communities to celebrate their heritage.

We welcome to the chamber tonight, a family-owned business that shares our state's birthday and exemplifies the enduring strength of Wisconsin's people.

Bentley and Sons is one of 11 existing Wisconsin businesses founded in 1848. Joining us tonight are Tom Bentley, his wife Virginia and his grandson Todd who is a business major at the university. If Todd goes into the family of business, he would be its sixth generation. We wish all these companies an even more prosperous next 150 years.

But more importantly, our Sesquicentennial is a time to look forward at the great potential that remains untapped in this young state called Wisconsin.

So it is with great honor and even greater hope that I come before you this evening to deliver the annual State of the State Address.

For, ladies and gentlemen, this is the state of the state: The most visionary, vibrant and vigorous state in America.

We are young. We are bold. We are strong.

And we are charging forever forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, as great as our state stands today our greatest days lie on the horizon. Tonight, I will unveil another aggressive and innovative agenda; the path to lead us toward that horizon.

There, we will find financial security in the cutting-edge jobs of tomorrow.

The world's best schools for our children.

A pristine environment.

And the safest, healthiest families in America.

This is the Wisconsin Dream, a dream rooted in the family -- inspired by youth and built by experience.

So in this Sesquicentennial year, we look to the past for wisdom and we look into the eyes of our children for inspiration.

In the youth of Wisconsin, we see our future. And we boldly pursue their dreams, for they are the Wisconsin of tomorrow.

Economy:

I am the Youth of Wisconsin. My dream is to have an exciting, adventurous job when I grow up.

Ladies and gentlemen, more people are working today than any time in our history. Six straight years of record employment.

We have the strongest work ethic in America, with the highest percentage of people working in the nation. Three out of every four people work in Wisconsin. More than any other state!

At 3.4 percent, our unemployment rate has been below the national average since Ronald Reagan was president – 11 straight years. In fact in November, we had 10,000 more job openings in the state than we had unemployed workers.

What's most exciting about our economy, however, is that it is raising the standard of living equally for all Wisconsinites.

While others just talk about economic growth for all, we're making it happen in Wisconsin.

We have the fourth smallest gap between the rich and poor in America, bucking a national trend that sees this gap widening. During the past decade, income grew at the same rate for low-, middle- and high-income families -- between 10 and 12 percent.

Our poverty rate is the fifth lowest in the nation, with the average income for our poorest families 45 percent higher than the national average.

In Wisconsin, the poor are getting richer.

No state in the nation is attacking poverty more aggressively than Wisconsin with W-2. W-2 is succeeding beyond our most optimistic projections, as even some of our harshest critics are seeing the value of expecting work in return for benefits.

The public housing complex used to be a place where families collected their welfare checks. Now, it's becoming a place where people come home after a hard day's work. Just take a look at the Hillside Terrace Public Housing complex in Milwaukee where the number of working families grew from 17 percent to 55 percent.

Tonight, we announce our most remarkable news yet in welfare reform. 1997 ended with only 18,655 families remaining on public assistance. An 80 percent reduction -- and our lowest welfare caseload since 1969 -- the last year the Beatles performed together.

W-2 works and so do our families.

But what's most exciting about W-2 is what the people tell us. Last week, I had lunch with a group of women who left welfare. Their stories and faces are an inspiration to every person in W-2.

One woman bragged about the new car she bought. And another was so proud to show me her pager -- something most of us would love to toss in the trash. But to this woman, the pager meant she was so important that her boss needed to know how to find her.

Then there was Tina Miller, a mother of three who had been on and off AFDC for 12 years. Tina and her mom first went to Maximus to attain their GEDs, but she eventually got a clerical job with the company. She has since been promoted twice and is now a financial employment planner helping other women in W-2 succeed in the workforce.

Tina said, and I quote, "Now that I receive a paycheck, it is twice as much as I have ever received during the time I was on AFDC."

To the men and women in W-2, the message from your peers and myself is simple: You can do it.

If you ever have doubts, just give Tina Miller a call.

And to ensure these women and other working families have the highest quality child care, we propose providing an annual site visit for every certified child care provider, including provisional providers such as relatives. And we want to provide caregivers with smoke detectors, first aid kits, health information and children's books.

As our families are working in Wisconsin, we must never forget that they can spend their money much more wisely than government can.

Ladies and gentlemen, that's why we cut property taxes for the second straight year. And that's why we based the lottery credit on the parcels of property owned, saving farmers millions in taxes. With us tonight is Jerry Bradley of Sun Prairie, a fifth generation farmer whose family filed the deed for their land in 1848. Jerry saw a \$1,200 reduction in his property taxes last month.

Working together in this chamber, we cut income taxes by 1 percent... indexed them for inflation to save families \$25 million a year... eliminated the state income tax for families earning under \$18,000...and did away with the ridiculous marriage penalty.

And thanks to our booming economy, we have a surplus that will help us provide another \$180 million in tax cuts tonight.

Together, we're providing real tax relief touching the everyday lives of real families. And we're fostering further economic growth in our state.

The cutting-edge jobs of tomorrow are being spawned right here in Wisconsin, as high-technology jobs are the fastest growing in the state, up 27 percent last year.

Nowhere is this growth more evident than in West Central Wisconsin, where high technology companies now dominate the local economy.

Time Magazine recently profiled Chippewa Falls in a story on the revival of small cities in America. Time said it singled out this titanic little city because:

"The city was once a lumber capital and now it's into microchips. What we liked about Chippewa Falls was its affordable housing, Leinenkugels beer, good winter sports and a mix of work and recreation."

Please welcome to the chambers Chippewa Falls Mayor Virginia Smith along with its economic development leaders Jim Schuh, Mike Jordan and John Regetz.

To keep the momentum going in this region, we are investing tonight a \$500,000 grant from the Wisconsin Development Fund toward construction of the Chippewa Valley Technical College Manufacturing and Technology Center. The facility will provide space for employee training, product planning and distance education courses. A strong new tool for growing and attracting technology companies.

However, the growth of high-tech jobs stretches beyond the Chippewa Valley. Madison and southeastern Wisconsin remain a flurry of economic activity.

So it makes sense to connect and foster this growth industry in Wisconsin. I am proposing that we designate Interstate 90-94 from the Minnesota border to Milwaukee as the Wisconsin Technology Corridor.

When visitors and business leaders drive through our state on this highway, they will know they are traveling through a state committed to creating the jobs of tomorrow.

To further attract and grow high-tech companies, we must stop taxing the jobs of the future. We must stop taxing business computers as recommended by my Blue Ribbon Commission on Jobs for the 21st Century chaired by Katherine Lyall.

This tax cut, which received overwhelming bipartisan support in this chamber, will literally translate into thousands of high-paying jobs in Wisconsin. And we will do it without shifting the tax burden to homeowners.

In Wisconsin, we can't afford to ignore the great potential of our tourism industry. Therefore, we propose an additional \$1.5 million for tourism marketing efforts so we can fully capitalize on the growing drawing power of America's State.

For our farmers, we must open new doors in the global marketplace. Agriculture exports reached a record \$2 billion last year, supporting 40,000 jobs, but we are capable of doing much more.

Our strategic marketing plan seeks to double the amount of agricultural exports by the year 2002. And we begin with our greatest commodity -- the product that put Wisconsin on the map and spawned the latest fashion craze in headwear: cheese.

Our Dairy 20/20 early planning grants will help farmers study increasing their herd size, partnering with another farmer, or modernizing their equipment for maximum profitability.

And there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon in our long and hard-fought battle for reform in the milk marketing order system. We won the federal lawsuit prohibiting Washington from using the distance milk is produced from Eau Claire as a basis for milk prices. Now we need Washington to end its appeal and implement reform as ordered.

Eau Claire, Kenosha and southwestern Wisconsin are proud examples of communities who turned economic setbacks into triumphant comebacks. We must now help Ashland and Marinette do the same in the wake of paper industry consolidations.

We can put the full resources of the state at their disposal, including local economic development planning grants, revolving loans, and \$1.5 million in tax credits through a Community Development Zone Designation.

And we should create a \$2 million rapid response fund so our state agencies have greater flexibility to go into these communities, give workers the help they need and immediately begin attracting new businesses.

The investments we make in growing our economy will go for naught, however, if we don't generate sufficient energy for our state.

The uncertain power supply last summer was inexcusable. Tonight we unveil a sweeping energy reliability plan.

My recommendations will give Wisconsin the tools we need to both generate and access more power at a cheap cost.

We eliminate cumbersome and outdated reporting requirements, streamline the approval process for construction of transmission lines, and encourage construction of new generating plants to ensure an ample supply of electricity.

Our plan is comprehensive and aggressive. It protects the environment and the consumer. And it keeps Wisconsin's economy charging forward.

Nothing is ever going to turn the lights out on Wisconsin!

While reliable energy is certainly important, our biggest economic challenge is finding people for our jobs. And this requires even greater emphasis on education.

I believe in parents. More than anyone else, parents know what's best for their children and what they need to be successful.

So I want to make sure a lack of money doesn't hinder the education plans our parents make for their sons and daughters.

We pump more money into public schools than just about any state in the nation. It's time we pumped a little money into the family budget for education.

Tonight, we seek to enrich our economy by making it more affordable for parents to educate their children, whether the child is in kindergarten or a senior at the University of Wisconsin.

Our Family Education Tax Package gives parents \$100 million in tax breaks to spend on the educational expenses of their children. Families would be eligible for up to a \$1,500 tax break per child in kindergarten to 12th grade -- low-income families would get a refundable tax credit, while middle-income families would receive a tax deduction.

If your struggling student needs a tutor; we're going to help pay for one.

If your children need a home computer; it'll be more affordable.

And if your son or daughter wants to be a Badger, money won't stand in the way.

Our plan will give families a \$3,000 per child tax deduction for tuition and expenses at any state university, technical college, private college or Minnesota reciprocity school -- a deduction equivalent to an entire year's tuition at most UW campuses.

Wisconsin has the 10th-lowest tuition in the Big Ten. We're pumping more money into financial aid. And now, this tax break will make a college education more affordable than ever in Wisconsin.

This tax package is for our parents, who work so hard to give their children the very best.

Keep our families moving forever forward toward a world-class education. Cut their taxes.

Education:

I am the Youth of Wisconsin. My dream is to go to a great school that makes learning fun and challenging so I can make my dreams come true.

The greatest challenge before our state tonight is to make sure every child in this state – whether rich or poor, suburban or urban – receives the best education in the world.

That's why we are building the world's most challenging schoolhouse of tomorrow, wiring it with the most ambitious technology capabilities in America through TEACH Wisconsin.

As we do so, we must remain dedicated to the fundamentals of education such as reading. This means literally taking a few baby steps.

New science tells us that it is never too early to begin developing the minds of our children. We should begin reading to them at birth, if not before.

Let's help families get off on the right foot toward a world-class education by giving them their child's very first book. My wife Sue Ann suggested we proposed tonight a Wisconsin First Book

program, which would send the family of every newborn a Golden Book, welcoming our newest Badger and encouraging the parents to begin reading to their baby.

Educators say good reading habits start at home; now let's start them at the hospital.

Give the gift of reading to our new families.

Learning must be a continual process for our children. Our high standard of excellence applies to all our schools, not just our high schools. We must make every grade count.

Performance in the classroom – not age -- should determine whether a student moves to the next grade in school. We must worry more about our children keeping up with their friends in the classroom than on the playground.

So tonight, I propose requiring students to meet local standards on 4th- and 8th- grade tests in order to move on to the next grade. If they fail to meet these standards, we must give our students the necessary help until they succeed. But they won't be promoted until they do.

The days of social promotion must end. From now on, we only promote success in Wisconsin.

As we work to prepare world-class students, we must make sure we're preparing world-class teachers as well.

We all saw the recent national report giving the quality of our teaching a D-, the lowest in the nation. I think this grade is just plain absurd. We have some of the best teachers in the world.

Basing an entire grade for "quality of teaching" on a prescribed set of licensing standards would be like giving Mark Twain a D- on an English paper because he wrote it with the wrong color ink. Results must count for something.

While we reject the simplicity of this criticism, we must take the call for higher standards to heart and do all we can to help prepare our teachers.

Tonight, we give our teachers a chance to show the nation that they are indeed the best by helping them become certified by The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Currently, only one teacher in our state is nationally certified.

To help develop the best and the brightest for our classrooms, I am proposing that the state help pay for the cost of taking the national certification test. And when they pass it, we'll give them a \$3,000 bonus.

And we're asking teachers to help us raise the bar of excellence for our classrooms by participating in a peer review and mentoring program. If we have a struggling math teacher, let's pair her with the school's best math teacher so she can improve her skills. The state will provide grants for training assistance. Teachers helping teachers raise quality in the classroom. It just makes sense.

We can't talk about education in Wisconsin, however, without taking some time to focus on Milwaukee. Nowhere is change more desperately needed than in our largest city. In recent years, we've developed some innovative programs to help raise the quality of Milwaukee's schools.

But change is not coming swift enough. Graduation rates are dropping, and the dropout rate soared to nearly 14 percent. We lost 3,400 kids last year in Milwaukee schools – that's equivalent to the entire Stoughton School District.

When welfare threatened to consume a new generation of children, we pursued aggressive reforms but eventually scrapped the broken system and built a better one.

We must be prepared to do the same for Milwaukee Public Schools. The state of Wisconsin pays for 85 percent of the cost to educate the children of Milwaukee and we will not tolerate failure any longer.

MPS recently hired Dr. Alan Brown as its new superintendent and he deserves a chance to reverse this downward spiral. But it must be very clear that more of the status quo is completely unacceptable.

Tonight, we demand results from Milwaukee Public Schools. MPS must meet four standards of improvement by June 1, 2000.

MPS must improve its graduation rate to 90 percent.

It must raise its attendance rate to 91 percent.

It must cut its dropout rate to 9 percent.

And it must raise its third-grade reading performance to 90 percent of the statewide average.

If MPS fails to meet all four standards, it will be dissolved. Operation of the district will be turned over to a three-member commission appointed by the mayor of Milwaukee, the state superintendent of Public Instruction and me. The school district will be turned immediately into a full charter, giving the commission ultimate flexibility in rebuilding the schools of Milwaukee.

We also should immediately give MPS and Superintendent Brown some important tools to help them meet these standards.

Restore the ability for MPS to close failing schools and allow the superintendent to reassign staff without regard to seniority.

Restore permission for MPS to convert private schools to charter schools.

Provide \$2.5 million for MPS to create after-school programs so our students remain engaged in their education and stay out of trouble.

And forgive the student loans of minority teachers who commit to educating the children of Milwaukee.

We must also stop wasting money busing our students from one part of Milwaukee to the other. We must immediately put 10 percent of our busing money toward building more neighborhood grade schools in Milwaukee.

Three years from now, I expect the nation to be touting Milwaukee as the model for revitalizing urban education in America.

There is nothing – nothing – more important to me as governor than making sure each and every child in this state gets the world-class education they deserve. We should pledge tonight that we will not lose one more generation of children in Milwaukee to poor schools.

It's time for MPS to stand and deliver or step aside.

Environment:

I am the youth of Wisconsin. My dream is to live in the most beautiful place in the world. A place with clean water to drink, green hills to hike and bountiful lakes to fish.

My friends, we live in the most beautiful state in America.

God is surely looking down upon our great state with pride at how we have cared for and nurtured the bountiful resources he bestowed upon us.

Just look at the remarkable comebacks by our wildlife. Our elk have now given birth to 11 calves and the timber wolf is no longer endangered.

With 600 nesting pairs of bald eagles, we're now sending our eaglets to other states to help with the national recovery effort. Four eaglets were sent to the National Arboretum in Washington where federal officials hope they will soar above the Nation's Capitol, just a few miles away.

Just think how long our eagles will be able to stay afloat from all the hot air that rises from that building.

We have more trees in which our eagles can nest as well. The first statewide forest survey in 14 years showed that nearly one-half of Wisconsin's total land area is forest – 15.3 million acres -- a greater percentage than when the first inventory was taken in 1936.

The growth of our forest accentuates our landmark efforts to preserve more land for public enjoyment. Most recently we bought 2,000 acres along the Menominee River, 1,400-acres of the Bill Cross Rapids and the 8,700-acre Willow Flowage, one of the largest buys in state history.

We have now preserved 200,000 acres of land since 1987, roughly equivalent to one-quarter the size of Rhode Island.

And together this past year, we passed the most far-reaching environmental initiatives in a generation.

We have worked too hard together to build this record of environmental stewardship to allow anything to threaten what we've accomplished. Many people are concerned about the proposed Crandon mine. I am the first person in this room who does not want a mine that in any way is going to harm or damage our environment – especially our great rivers.

That is why we must move beyond the rhetoric to the cold, hard facts... In the spirit of the Wisconsin Idea, UW-Madison professor Anders W. Andren will chair an independent council of five scientists from his university, UW-Milwaukee and Marquette University. These scientists bring impeccable credentials to the project as well as a sense of duty to the people of Wisconsin.

They will review the proposed mine, inside and out; evaluate every worst-case scenario; and use the very best science to determine whether this mine can be operated without harming our environment.

If this independent body determines that the mine is not safe; it will not be built – period.

Our heritage is of a people who know how to cultivate the resources without destroying our environment.

As we move forward, we can take great pride in knowing that our children and grandchildren will reap the benefits of our environmental stewardship.

Health Care

I am the youth of Wisconsin. My dream is for every member of my family to be healthy and safe so they live long lives.

There is nothing we, the people of Wisconsin, value more than each other. Our families are the fabric of this great state, and when a family member becomes sick or dies too young, that fabric is weakened.

Therefore, we place a high priority on the health of our families in Wisconsin. And keeping our families healthy means keeping them safe from crime.

Already one of the lowest in the nation, our crime rate dropped another 5 percent last year. And it seems that criminals may be finally heeding our zero tolerance message.

Ladies and gentlemen, the number of convicts entering our prisons went down last year. Our first decline in a decade! We saw a 2.5 percent drop in our male institutions and 4.7 percent in our female.

In Wisconsin, we fight crime equally hard on the front end and the back end.

Our education reforms, economic programs, central city initiatives, and anti-drug investments all aim to steer youth away from crime. And by the dropping crime rates, we can see these investments paying off.

We also work harder than any other state at making sure a criminal's first trip to prison is his last. That's why we're putting prisoners to work, to develop their skills and make them pay their way in society. We now have approval for work programs in six of our prisons – an important step toward reducing recidivism.

At our women's prison in Taycheedah, inmates are rebuilding used computers so they can be used in our schools. Three hundred computers have been sent to schools so far, but we have another 2,000 waiting to be repaired.

So we want to expand this computer recycling program to three other prisons, giving more inmates the opportunity to learn a highly valuable skill and providing more valuable computers to our schools as we expand our investments in technology.

And we must restore confidence in our criminal justice system by finally passing truth in sentencing. I introduced this reform last year with bipartisan support and can't believe it hasn't reached my desk yet.

The public is cynical of a system where a criminal is sentenced to 20 years in prison but is out in five. Truth in sentencing is plain old common sense. It abolishes parole, eliminates mandatory release and replaces time off for good behavior with more time in for bad behavior. It gives our elected judges sole authority to determine when a criminal will get out of prison.

It is beyond me why anyone would oppose such a common sense reform to a complicated justice system that is breeding cynicism in the people.

So enough with the silly excuses and political gamesmanship. Get truth in sentencing passed!

If truth in sentencing is not on my desk by the end of this legislative session, I will call you back into session in April until you get the job done.

As we provide for the health of our families, we must look forever forward at the health needs of our people.

This is why we created a landmark women's health initiative, expanded the Community Options Program for our seniors by another 2,000 slots, and developed BadgerCare for uninsured working families.

Badger Care will help 50,000 working families -- especially mothers raising their children alone -- access the state's top-notch health care system.

Yet, as our population ages, a growing concern for many families is how they will be able to afford the care of their parents while they provide for the education and growth of their own children.

Perhaps our greatest health care challenge right now is long-term care, as scientific advances help people live longer and our baby boomers move into retirement.

Between 1960 and 1990, the number of people age 85 and older grew 10 times faster each year than the population as a whole. And by the year 2010, we expect this segment of seniors to grow another 60 percent.

As you can see, our state's elderly and disabled population is growing faster than our available resources.

I know the people of Wisconsin are concerned about how they will care for their parents in old age. We want to give our parents the same loving care they gave us as children, but how do we afford it? And where do we get it?

The current long-term system is intimidating, complex and sterile. There are 40 ways to access the system, people don't know how to get the appropriate care because it's so complicated, and the concerns of families are often ignored.

The greatest hope of our families is for a compassionate system of high quality choices so they can give their parents the very best care possible.

Tonight, we unveil a revolutionary new program to meet the needs of our aging and ease the worries of their children. We call it Family Care -- an idea whose ambition and scope is even greater than W-2.

Family Care will touch the lives of more than 1 million Wisconsin citizens – 10 times as many families who were on welfare when we began reforming that system.

It will combine our long-term care programs into one system to provide the maximum range of care options for seniors and disabled. It is built upon consumer choice and one-stop shopping for services.

Family Care will develop for every person a plan of supportive care tailored to meet his or her specific needs and desires. Families will turn to one place for professional help in determining the best services for their loved ones and choosing the best service providers. This comprehensive service will be provided with full input from the family.

Financial support will follow people to the best place for them, whether it's in their own home, an assisted living apartment or a nursing home. By making the system more efficient, we make it more affordable as well. Family Care will not strain the family budget.

To help keep living at home a viable and affordable option, we seek tonight to expand the Community Options Program by another \$10 million. We have already quadrupled the number of COP slots under my administration and we're doing even more.

Family Care gives families security, peace of mind and hope for the future. It will set the standard for the nation, providing people like Dorothy Spaulding with the high quality care we expect in Wisconsin.

Dorothy has been in a wheelchair for 20 years and joined the COP program after her husband passed away nine years ago.

COP helped Dorothy remain active in her community, participating in church activities and pursuing her art interests. And holidays are still celebrated at grandma's house, something that wouldn't have been possible without the COP program.

Dorothy Spaulding is joined tonight by two daughters, her granddaughter and two great-granddaughters. Four generations of women who symbolize why we must build today the long-term care system of tomorrow. Thank you Dorothy and best wishes.

Our health care plans must meet the needs of the disabled as well. You have heard me say often that every person in this state is capable of contributing something to society.

Yet only 1 percent of our disabled leave public assistance for the workforce even though most are very much able to contribute.

The reason: Fear of losing their health and long-term care benefits.

Tonight, we remove this barrier to work by proposing a demonstration project in five communities that guarantees Medicaid and Medicare coverage to the disabled regardless of their earnings in the private sector.

And we expand our innovative Wheelchair Recycling program, which repairs used or broken wheelchairs and distributes them to those in need.

We are wasting too much talent by allowing legitimate fears over health care to keep the disabled out of the workforce. Give the disabled their freedom by protecting their health.

No one has been a greater inspiration to me in our effort to improve women's health than my wife, Sue Ann. As husband to this remarkable woman and father of two beautiful daughters, I share Sue Ann's vision.

But no one can articulate this vision for the women of Wisconsin better than Sue, herself. Ladies and gentlemen, my wife and your friend, Sue Ann.

Mrs. Sue Ann Thompson's Remarks:

Thank you Tom. And I want to thank the lawmakers in this chamber for the wonderful support you gave our efforts to improve women's health during the past year.

The Women's Health Campaign you and Tom created made an array of important services available to many Wisconsin women for the first time.

You gave low-income and uninsured women access to health care and free mammograms.

You created a women's health awareness campaign and invested in research and prevention.

You fought back against the scourge of domestic violence.

And you created a Women's Health Office in this state, with a women's health officer to coordinate efforts to improve the quality of life for Wisconsin women. Tonight, I would like to introduce the first Wisconsin Women's Health Officer, Stacey Long, who is currently the women's health liaison at the Department of Health and Family Services.

But we must do more as a society for women's health, both in and out of government, for the health of our entire family is at stake.

A healthy family begins with a healthy woman. Think about it.

While men are invaluable partners, our families depend heavily on women to provide set doctors appointments and make sure our children get their appropriate immunizations.

In Wisconsin, more than 85 percent of the health care dollars and decisions are in the hands of women.

Therefore, women must be well-informed so that the right choices and decisions are made, not only for their own health, but also the health of their family. Our families depend greatly on the wives and mothers to be informed with the facts about good health and nutrition.

Tonight, I ask the women of Wisconsin to join me in raising the quality of care for all of us. To strengthen our efforts, we will hold the First Lady's Statewide Conference on Women's Health on April 14th at the Milwaukee Hilton.

At the conference, women's health experts will talk about heart disease, breast cancer, osteoporosis, mental health, nutrition and domestic violence. They will provide us with the latest research and the best tips on prevention. For in many cases, prevention is the only cure.

And a mammography van will be there to provide free breast cancer screenings.

My hope is that this conference will not only heighten awareness, but also lay the foundation for even greater strides in women's health care in Wisconsin.

Therefore, with the help of many others, I am in the process of setting up a non-profit organization called the Women's Health Foundation. We will be raising money to provide scholarships for individuals going into women's health care professions.

The unique health care needs of women must not be ignored. If our women aren't healthy, our families won't be healthy.

If I could, I would also like to make a request of women in our state. Please visit your doctor annually. If there is a history of cancer in your family, talk to your doctor about breast cancer and get a mammogram if recommended. It is important to have a base line mammography early and do a breast self exam monthly. Breast cancer is a horrible disease that is devastating not only to the individual but the entire family. Remember, our only cure is early detection.

We can't afford to lose one woman in this state. You are just too valuable.

Thank you very much and God bless. (End of Mrs. Thompson's remarks)

Summary

Tonight, we pursue the Wisconsin dream for our children and ourselves. Our future depends on helping our children grow to be the most successful, well-educated and healthy adults in the history of our state.

But meeting the dreams of the youth of Wisconsin can't happen if we don't work together.

Cooperation is most critical if we are to pass a meaningful campaign finance reform package and help restore public confidence in the electoral process. The biggest reason campaign finance

reform continues to fail across the country is that both parties use it to get a leg up on the opposition.

Therefore, common sense says the only way we're going to achieve real reform is if a proposal is developed by both parties with independent leadership. And we have just such a plan ready and waiting to go.

Professor Don Kettl, a national expert on campaign finances at the University of Wisconsin, developed this plan with equal input from Democrats and Republicans. Don is with us tonight.

This is the only bipartisan campaign finance reform plan in the state -- the only one.

The package of 54 reforms limits special interest spending, imposes spending caps, requires greater public reporting by candidates, improves public access to campaign records, and bolsters the authority of the State Elections Board.

I strongly urge the Legislature to promptly pass the Kettl Commission package so I can sign it into law before this important election season begins.

The Kettl Report is the compromise.

In the first State of the State Address 150 years ago, Governor Dewey talked about the hopes and dreams of the ordinary men and women who founded this great state. He said:

“Wisconsin possesses the natural elements, fostered by a judicious system of legislation, to become one of the most populous and prosperous states of the American Union. . . . The course of the state of Wisconsin must be onward, until she ranks among the first of the states of the great West.”

Governor Dewey would be proud tonight, for Wisconsin is not only the greatest state in the West, she is the greatest state in the nation.

During our first 150 years, Wisconsin was the first state to end welfare, insure the working poor, eliminate legal discrimination against minorities, and allow women to vote.

We created kindergarten, agricultural education, youth apprenticeships and private school choice;

We built the first automobile and held the first car race.

We invented the typewriter, the outboard motor, Vitamin D, the hamburger and the malt, the fountain pen, Jockey shorts, and the automatic clothes dryer to dry them in.

We're the birthplace of the circus, the hydroelectric power plant, and my personal favorite, the Republican Party.

And we are home to the first, second and defending Super Bowl Champions – the Green Bay Packers.

But there is something we will never do first. We will never be the first team to lose to the Denver Broncos in the Super Bowl.

Right Eugene?

Good luck Eugene. And please tell the team the entire State of Wisconsin is behind you come Sunday. The Packers are America's Team.

And we are America's State. This is our Sesquicentennial. And let us celebrate together.

Last year, in the spirit of bipartisanship, I brought you chocolate chip cookies. Obviously, the cookies weren't sweet enough. So this year, I brought a nice, creamy chocolate cake.

It's a birthday cake, reminding everyone that 1998 is our Sesquicentennial -- a year of celebration, pride, and above all, unity.

So before we leave this chamber tonight, let us sing happy birthday to our great state together. For we are much more than Republicans and Democrats – we are Wisconsinites.

Ladies and gentlemen, as Wisconsin celebrates her 150th birthday, she will do so with her eyes firmly focused on the horizon. For Wisconsin moves in only one direction.

Forever Forward. Let the celebration begin!