

Source: Marquette University Libraries; Tommy G. Thompson Collection; Series 2: Gubernatorial Speeches.

Thank you, Joe (Leean), and good morning everyone.

I also want to thank County Executive Ament and Mayor Norquist for being here, our congressional delegation who are busy in Washington – Congressmen Barrett, Green, Kleczka, Petri and Ryan – and the kind folks at Sinai Samaritan and Aurora Health Care for their efforts and hospitality this morning.

We've been looking forward to this moment for quite some time. For today is when we make it official – BadgerCare is now open for business.

Wisconsin, I am proud to say is taking yet another bold step towards improving the quality of life for its residents by launching a groundbreaking program destined to be a national model.

BadgerCare will empower parents to provide health care for their children, building stronger and healthier families. Roughly 67,000 low-income working families will buy into this program, ensuring security, peace of mind, and healthier children and parents.

BadgerCare is the first of its kind program in the nation. An innovative, trailblazing initiative that reinforces the American adage that hard work does pay. And it signals to those just entering the workforce that the state is their strong partner in gaining self-sufficiency.

Once again, Wisconsin got there first and we're doing it better. But most importantly, today signals the beginning of even healthier children and working parents in our great state.

Prior to today, low-income families often sacrificed health insurance as something they simply couldn't afford. Each day these families go to work, pay their bills and play by the rules. To those hard working families – BadgerCare is for you.

The program's bold yet compassionate approach helps low-income families to secure a foothold on the American dream by turning the traditional government-sponsored health insurance programs on their head.

Programs, like Medicaid, typically cover only children, pregnant women, and some very needy older adults. And because of limitations, a low-income uninsured mother who is ill and with a sick child can take her child to see a doctor, but not herself.

BadgerCare changes all that.

The program is unique because it supports the whole family, not just a part. It covers parents as well as their children. BadgerCare is based on one simple yet fundamental principle – if we want healthy children who are better equipped for success, we need healthy parents who are better equipped to maintain a healthy home.

This is a dramatic and vital change for these families.

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I'm also pleased BadgerCare is in operation because it builds upon the philosophy of W2 ... Wisconsin Works.

BadgerCare solidifies Wisconsin's leadership in helping people move from welfare to work to self-sufficiency, by adding this vital element of health care. Now, qualified, uninsured working families will get the health care they need to help them climb the economic ladder from poverty toward a brighter future for them and their children.

To qualify, working families must have incomes of less than 185 percent of the federal poverty rate. That's \$30,500 for a family of four. There is no asset test, so farm families and other self-employed people may be eligible as well – this is truly an equal access program designed to open new doors to health care for those who need it most.

BadgerCare sends a strong message to them that the American dream is alive and well. It will follow in footsteps of W-2 as a model and precedent for a nationwide movement, providing hope and inspiration for people working to make ends meet.

Milwaukee's Sinai Samaritan Medical Center is this area's first full-service outreach location and the perfect place to launch this ambitious program.

We want to encourage all families who believe they are eligible to stop down here, talk to a representative, fill out the necessary paperwork and begin to provide the health care security to your family that has been elusive until now.

As we celebrate this historical moment, let us do so knowing that we have once again rose to the challenge of building Wisconsin stronger than any state in nation. And that we are empowering parents to invest in themselves, their children and future.

In doing so, we are helping to build Wisconsin families into the strongest, healthiest families in America.

Thank you.