
State of the State Address
Gov. Tommy G. Thompson
Assembly Chamber
Jan. 30, 1996 -- 7 p.m.

Speaker Prosser, President Rude, Members of the Legislature; Constitutional Officers, honorable justices of the Supreme Court, tribal chairmen, members of the Cabinet, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am proud to come before you tonight to talk about the accomplishments we have made together as a state and about the bold future we are building together.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the state of the state is exceptional.

As I travel across Wisconsin and talk with thousands of people, I am inspired by their abiding belief in an even better future.

I see hope in the eyes of children at Bruce Guadalupe school in Milwaukee's inner city.

I see confidence in the small entrepreneur who's just invested her life savings in a new venture, knowing she will succeed.

I see a sense of security in our mothers and fathers, who have chosen to raise their children in a state where values, character and hard work matter.

And there is reason for the hope that lies within us.

We have built a sense of confidence in the future. For we have proven as a state that if we work hard enough, if we make sacrifices, and if we believe in ourselves -- we can do anything.

We are breaking records that were thought to be unbreakable surpassing milestones thought unattainable. Consider the following:

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- Welfare caseloads are down 33 percent -- their lowest level in two decades...The American Dream is now within reach of 33,000 more families ...And tonight, we're on the brink of ending welfare altogether.
- Just a few years ago, wolves, eagles and elk were either long gone or dying off. Today, the wolves are back, the eagles are soaring and the elk are bugeling across their native Wisconsin....We've preserved more pristine land than any time in our history...And we've cut industrial pollution by 26 percent while our businesses have grown by more than 30 percent.
- The future is brighter for our family farmers: We're now assessing farms based on their use instead of their potential value and we're cutting property taxes by \$1.2 billion -- putting tens of thousands of dollars in the pocketbooks of our family farmers.
- We've begun a modern day industrial revolution. We have more manufacturing jobs today than at any time in our history -- 596,000 of them. That's more than we had in our industrial heyday of the late 70s when Allis Chalmers, Uniroyal and AMC were all operating at top capacity. It is a breathtaking achievement. An achievement most thought would never happen.
- And our sports teams are winning like never before.....As you can see, they're bringing home the championship trophies in abundance.

The University of Wisconsin men's soccer team, the UW-Platteville men's basketball team, the UW-La Crosse football team and the Brookfield East boy's soccer team dominated their competition and won national championships in 1995.

We're even daring to talk about another Super Bowl -- and with a straight face. After 23 years, the Green Bay Packers are once again champions -- the NFC Central Division Champions. And they came within 15 minutes of the Super Bowl.

But next year We get the Cowboys up at Lambeau Field -- in January. The windchill is minus 20. The turf is frozen hard as a rock. It's snowing and the wind is whistling across the field at 50 miles an hour. And then, we kick their big, fat egos all the way back to Dallas.

And after that, we'll bring the Lombardi Trophy back home to Wisconsin, where it belongs.

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Wisconsin is already winning, ladies and gentlemen. Wisconsin is Working -- better and stronger than at any time in our history.

What's our secret? An off the field incident affecting the Packers may explain it best.

Just days before the Packers biggest game in nearly three decades, Reggie White's church was burned to the ground in Knoxville, Tenn. It was a horrible tragedy and a dastardly act.

This wasn't our church. This didn't happen in one of our communities. But the next day, the people of Wisconsin were already raising money to help Reggie rebuild his church. As a state, we've raised more than \$210,000.

That's the Wisconsin Way.

We're motivated by a commitment to our neighbor. And dedicated to helping people lead better lives.

That's why we are fighting crime....reducing government....cutting taxes. And why we are strengthening our families....reforming education.....ending welfare.

We have a strength of character in Wisconsin that comes from our deep faith and our willingness to fight for the values we hold dear. Unfortunately today, our values and traditions are coming under continual assault.

Right now, I am being sued because I defended the beauty of our Capitol Rotunda with its Christmas tree and menora. And the same people are suing me in an attempt to throw out our Good Friday holiday.

If it means I have to go to court to defend the traditions that make us great, so be it. As long as I am governor, I will fight to defend and elevate the values that are the fabric of our state.

For it is these values and the commitment to our neighbors that keeps Wisconsin winning.

But there are still more battles to fight. More victories to claim.

The great architect Daniel Burnham once said: "Make no small plans. For they have not the power to move the minds of men."

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In Wisconsin, we make no small plans. We make grand plans...And we implement them.

Wisconsin Works.

Economy/Taxes

Our success begins with a strong economy -- Providing opportunities for our workers, families and children.

Wisconsin is in the midst of its longest sustained period of growth ever. We've created more than a half-million jobs. And 2.8 million people are working -- the most in our state's history. In fact, we have more people working today than the entire population of Arkansas!

As a result of our winning economy, our annual unemployment rate was 3.7 percent last year -- the lowest in 30 years. The last time our jobless rate was so low a gallon of gas cost 35 cents, Neil Armstrong had just walked on the moon and state Representative Scott Walker was in his terrible twos.

And who would have thought we'd ever see a headline like this one from the Wisconsin State Journal last month: "Worried about jobs? Not in Wisconsin."

1996 isn't even a month old and we're already doing more to top 1995.

Tonight, I'm proud to announce that even more jobs are coming to six of our communities with the help of our Department of Development:

- Wisconsin Rapids will get 370 more jobs at Advantage Learning Systems.
- Shawano312 new jobs at Aarowcast
- Oconto Falls 150 jobs at Cera-Mite Corporation.
- Boscobel ... 99 jobs at American National Can Corporation
- Bellevue.....200 jobs at Krueger International.
- And in Marinette....350 new jobs at Karl Schmidt Unisia.

That's nearly 1,500 new jobs for the people of Wisconsin! Thanks for believing in Wisconsin.

When it comes to creating jobs and growing our economy, Wisconsin works.

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New Government, New Century

We've created a new government for a new century: a government to serve the people, not the bureaucracy. It's a government that works.

We've created the polar opposite of Washington government. While Washington is doing less with more, Wisconsin is doing more with less.

There's no better example of this new government than the Lena story. Just a few weeks ago, the small village of Lena was devastated when the Stella Foods cheese factory caught fire. Stella employed 300 in a village of 590 and purchased milk from 350 farmers.

Within hours of the fire, we were there. I was on the phone with Lena and company officials throughout the day, as well as Rep. John Gard. Seven state agencies rushed to Lena's aid.

The State Patrol and emergency governmentThe Departments of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Development, Health and Social Services, and Labor....All working in unison to help Lena deal with its crisis.

This is what I mean by a government serving the people.

And we're doing more to help Lena. This past Friday, we offered Stella a strong economic assistance package to help them rebuild and keep Lena working.

Of course, the real heroes of this story are the people of Lena. They didn't sit around feeling sorry for themselves. They began rebuilding.....picking up the pieces.....neighbor helping neighbor.

And Stella displayed great corporate citizenship in the way it cared for its workers during a time of crisis.

The people of Lena capture the essence of the Wisconsin spirit.

Wisconsin Works

Property Taxes

People trust Wisconsin government because we keep our promises -- even on tough issues like property tax relief. We just delivered to the people of Wisconsin a Taxpayers Triple Crown of less taxes, less spending and less government.

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Since statehood, the people who have served in this building have tried unsuccessfully to cut property taxes, leading to creation of the sales tax and income tax.

That all began to change in 1993, when we finally enacted cost controls on local governments.

And this session, we accomplished what the skeptics deemed impossible: We reordered our budget priorities. We made tough spending cuts. We took the heat for doing what was right.

The result is two-thirds funding of public education in Wisconsin and \$1.2 billion of property tax relief for our families.

Now, I know some are trying to discount the magnitude of this achievement. But consider just how far we've come: For decades property taxes increased by double digits every year. But this December, school property taxes will drop an average of 25 percent.

And that's just the average. Look at La Crosse -- 31% school property tax cut. Green Bay 36% cut. Milwaukee -- 36% cut. Eau Claire -- 33% cut.

Working with me, the new majority in the Legislature broke a 148-year cycle of annual, oppressive property tax increases.

We promised relief. We delivered relief.

Of course, our job is not over. It never will be.

Maintaining 2/3rds funding of our schools will continue to be the greatest fiscal challenge we face. The next budget won't be easy, nor will the one after that.

But the State Assembly today made a major downpayment on continued property tax relief by passing a bipartisan bill, authored by Rep. Mike Powers, creating a property tax relief account endowed by a \$210 million surplus.

A surplus made possible solely because state government is spending less and managing better.

Taxpayers can spend their money more wisely than government can.. any day. And taxpayers will spend it on what truly matters in their lives: An education for their children....A bigger home...A more comfortable retirement.

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A few months ago, taxpayers were being told a budget deficit was looming and we could never maintain our commitment to lower property taxes.

Today we have a surplus. There is no deficit. The budget will be balanced. We will keep our promise to fund 2/3rds the cost of education.

Wisconsin Works because we keep our promises. We deliver for the people of this state.

(Children and Families)

I want to take a few minutes to talk about what we all cherish -- our children and families. We know that the stronger our families, the stronger our communities, the stronger our state.

That is why we are working to strengthen our families -- as well as build new ones -- through several initiatives

We have thousands of parents waiting to adopt and thousands of children waiting to be adopted. We must do a better job of matching the children with the parents.

Adoption should be easier and more affordable.

Tonight, we have children in our Milwaukee foster care system dreaming of a new home with loving parents...Tomorrow, we're putting together a team of adoption experts to make the dreams of 100 more children come true this year. We're going to find them a new home and a loving family.

And a bipartisan bill proposed by Rep. Sheryl Albers will make adoption more affordable by providing a tax benefit for certain adoption expenses.

Unfortunately, there are parents who are not providing their children a loving home.

We are working with Sen. Huelsman and Rep. Krug on bipartisan legislation to strengthen the children's code so we can better protect these children. Nothing makes me more angry as governor and as a parent than to know our laws don't require termination of parental rights even when a parent has abandoned a newborn in a garbage dumpster.

We must do a better job of protecting our children from abuse and neglect.

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Studies show that about 40 percent of American children will go to sleep tonight in homes without a father present. As a result, these children are more likely to be poor, drop out of school and become teen parents.

Our new Fatherhood Initiative will help dads become more involved in caring for their children. On a one-on-one basis, this program will teach fathers parenting skills....nutrition...appropriate play for appropriate ages...and how to bond with their children.

We're also continuing to make sure fathers meet their financial responsibilities. It is a national disgrace that \$34 billion in child support goes unpaid to mothers and children in this country. Even though Wisconsin is one of the best states at collecting child support, we're getting even tougher on the scofflaws who abandon their children and expect taxpayers to pay for them.

This spring, we'll release our first Ten Most Wanted poster featuring parents who owe the most child support. This is one poster nobody wants to be on.

Wisconsin works by making sure our children are properly cared for.

(Crime)

We owe it to our families to provide safe neighborhoods where they can live and play without fear. Our zero tolerance for violent crime in Wisconsin is working. We're winning many battles, although we're still waging the war on crime.

FBI statistics show that we have the six safest cities in the entire United States: Wausau, Eau Claire, Appleton, Oshkosh, Neenah and Sheboygan. And Madison is the third safest among the nation's 100 largest cities.

We can never be too bold when it comes to fighting crime. Tonight, I am offering a nine-point Family Security Package to further protect our children and families.

1. We will have a new victim information system at the Department of Corrections. This Victim Security Card puts the status of criminals in the hands of their victims.....Court dates. Sentencing. Prison Location. Release Date... The victim will know it all. And will never have to wonder when the criminal gets out or where he or she is. We need to start worrying more about protecting our families than about the confidentiality of convicted criminals.

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2. We're also making it easier for law enforcement agencies throughout the state to keep tabs on criminals. At the request of the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association and Sen. Gary Drzewiecki, we are making available the Mobil Data Terminal System. This new technology will connect officers in the field to a common information system, giving them instant access to criminal data.

3. We are forwarding legislation to make it illegal to harbor a runaway. A runaway child is the worst nightmare of any parent, and we must do what we can to keep these children safe.
4. Gangs are becoming a growing problem across our state. We struck a blow against gang crime recently when we toughened our laws so gang members can no longer hide behind their birthdays and be coddled by a weak juvenile justice system.

Tonight, we are giving our local law enforcement agencies even more help. We are creating an Office of Gang Intervention in the Division of Youth Services, helping coordinate information on gang activity in the state as well as efforts to combat gang crime.

5. Statistics show that 50 percent of violent sexual offenders commit more sex crimes once released from prison untreated. That's why we joined together to pass a groundbreaking sexual predator law, which we've already used to keep 87 predators off our streets after their sentences expired. By keeping these predators institutionalized, we've prevented an untold number of sexual attacks on law-abiding citizens. Tonight, I am proposing construction of a new sexual predator facility ...because we plan to use this law a lot more in the future.
6. Prisons work. They keep violent people from harming good people. It's that simple. So tonight I am committing to build a SuperMax prison. If we don't get federal funding, we must build it ourselves. And once this plain, stark and austere facility is built, that's where Wisconsin's most vicious criminals will go. The SuperMax will be a criminal's worst nightmare.
7. We're putting prisoners to work, both inside our prison walls and alongside our roadways. Next month, I will announce the first three companies that will come into our prisons and put inmates to work in activities no other workers want. No more sitting around. Prisoners are going to start working. And they're going to help pay their keep.

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8. And to the extent possible under the constitution, we are banning pornographic materials from our prisons and removing all movies. Prisoners won't have time for these things anyway. They'll be too busy working.
9. Finally, our law enforcement officers are doing a courageous job of capturing criminals. And once imprisoned, they should stay that way. To that end, we have followed up on an idea by Speaker Prosser and Senator Zien.

We have talked with Texas corrections officials. They have room for our prisoners. They have agreed to take them. And we're working out the details.

If keeping criminals off our streets means sending our prisoners to Texas -- bye, bye.....they're going South.

When it comes to keeping our neighborhoods safe for families and protecting our law-abiding citizens, Wisconsin works.

Education Reform

Along with making our children safer, we're working to make sure they receive an education that will help them succeed as adults.

Wisconsin has one of the finest public education systems in the country. In most of our school districts, we have top-flight educators and parents who care about their children's learning.

And we've accomplished proud achievements in our schools:

- Our pioneering school-to-work program is making education relevant to more of our students and preparing them for the workforce. In fact, Milwaukee Public Schools just credited the school-to-work program for three straight years of decline in its dropout rate. And statewide, our dropout rate is the lowest in 10 years.

But we must do more to make this program work in all our communities. Therefore, I am naming former Superintendent of Public Instruction Bert Grover as Special Assistant to the Governor for School-To-Work. Dr. Grover will make sure school-to-work becomes an even more effective part of every school in the state.

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- Another success is our charter school law, which is giving every school district in the state the opportunity to explore new ways of teaching and learning.
- And our school choice initiatives are giving low-income parents in Milwaukee the opportunity to make sure their children receive the best education possible.

But we must ask ourselves: Is being good ... good enough?

Is it good enough to rank high against other states when we're sending our students out to compete in the global marketplace?

Is it good enough to have the nation's highest college entrance test scores and one of the best university systems in the nation when 70% of our students won't graduate from a four-year college or university?

Is it good enough to have strong suburban schools when many of our urban schools are facing unprecedented challenges to learning?

It may be good enough for some, but it's not good enough for Wisconsin.

So tonight I am setting forth a bold new set of initiatives in our ongoing effort to build a worldclass system of education in Wisconsin. A system based on choice, academic achievement and technology.

We begin by giving students and parents even more choices in education; choice must be at the core of any reform.

Most of the jobs that will be created in Wisconsin in the next 10 years will be technical in nature. Our employers already have an acute and growing need for workers with strong technical skills.

Tonight, I am proposing an ambitious pilot program to allow high school students who meet basic academic requirements to complete their junior and senior years at a technical college. These students will receive their high school diploma from that technical school.

We will give students the choice to immerse themselves in a technical college field of study and graduate with a marketable skill for the workplace or a head start on additional education.

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We're working with several technical college and K-12 districts on this innovation right now.

Along with giving parents more options, we must also demand that our schools are accountable for their performance and our students are held to high standards of academic achievement.

Every year in Wisconsin, we graduate about 48,000 high schoolers, without really knowing what they've learned. We put them in robes, hold grand graduation ceremonies, play

“Pomp and Circumstance.” Yet the only thing we are guaranteeing is that they completed at least a minimum number of high school courses. We know how long they sat in their seats, but we don’t know what went into their heads.

Tonight, we begin making a high school diploma in Wisconsin a ticket to opportunity instead of just a keepsake.

Beginning in the year 2000, every student in this state must pass a graduation exam in order to receive a high school diploma.

The standards for the graduation exam will be set by each school district, working together with parents, teachers and employers.

Now let me make something absolutely clear from the start: I’m not talking about outcome-based education or some politically correct cultural standards, such as measuring some kid’s cognitive diversity conflict management skills.

I am talking about solid, purely academic standards in core subject areas.

If you can’t read and write...If you can’t calculate...If you don’t know the difference between Elroy and Argentina. You’re not going to get a diploma in the state of Wisconsin. Period.

And if a school district is failing to teach those skills, the taxpayers and parents deserve to know about it.

It’s called accountability.

I am asking the Governor’s Task Force on Education and Learning, chaired by businessman and education pioneer Carl Weigel, to develop a process for communities to set local graduation standards.

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And I applaud the courage and vision of former Superintendent Howard Fuller and current Superintendent Bob Jasna for already setting a graduation standard for math achievement in the Milwaukee schools.

The Class of the Year 2000 will be setting the standard for a new century. We owe them, and those who follow, the guarantee of an education that will help them lead productive, happy lives in the next millenium.

Our partner in achieving higher academic performance in our schools is technology.

In the time since we joined together to pass a landmark telecommunications bill, technology has advanced further than anybody predicted.

Distance learning is erasing school district boundaries....Students in Bowler and Marion, for example, are taking advanced placement psychology from a teacher in Clintonville. UW-Eau Claire is teaching English composition to high school seniors at Altoona and Cadott. And 9,000 registered nurses from all across the state can now pursue bachelor's degrees from 5 UW schools -- without ever stepping foot on those campuses.

Tonight, I am asking the UW System to reach three goals that will allow high school students to take greater advantage of new technology:

First, make additional UW courses available for high school students over the Internet. Second, establish a network for students and faculty on all 26 campuses to share interactive video and computer-based instructional materials. And third, give all high school students access to the UW System libraries as well as the Library of Congress. This will give students access to all the great libraries of the world...And never again will a student be able to say to a teacher: "The book is not in the library."

I am also asking the Educational Technologies Board and the Wisconsin Advanced Telecommunications Foundation to make sure that at least half of all Wisconsin public high schools are on the Internet by this fall, with the remainder on line by the fall of 1997.

By working together, we will become the first state in the nation to have all its high schools, technical colleges and universities connected via the Internet.

Also, UW System President Katherine Lyall is spearheading an effort to form a Student Information System available to every student in Wisconsin...

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Finally, I'm proud to announce that high school students will be able to apply for admission to all UW and technical colleges over the Internet, beginning in 1997.

These are all bold initiatives. I have already discussed many of these ideas with Superintendent Benson and representatives of the teachers union, school boards and other education groups -- with the hope that we can pursue them together -- as partners.

We've never been afraid to set a new course in Wisconsin. Simply being good has never been good enough. That's why Wisconsin Works.

W-2

For nine years, we have been working to end welfare in Wisconsin. Tonight, we stand on the precipice of doing just that with our Wisconsin Works program, more commonly known as W-2.

With W-2, we're not just ending welfare as we know it. We're ending welfare. Period.

We are done experimenting. We're replacing the welfare check with a paycheck, creating an entirely new system for helping families in trouble.

Why? Because we care about the children and families trapped in an apathetic welfare system.

A state devoted to helping others lead better lives cannot tolerate a welfare system whose intentions may have been noble but whose results have been tragic.

Just consider some of the human tragedy of welfare: Studies have shown that

- A child on welfare is twice as likely to drop out of school.
- A child on welfare is twice as likely to become pregnant as a teenager....out-of-wedlock.
- And a child on welfare is twice as likely to end up on welfare as an adult.... And each new generation will be on welfare three times longer than the previous generation.

We've allowed welfare to ruin too many lives for too long.

No more!

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It is over!

It is finished!

As governor, I will not stand to lose one more generation to a morally bankrupt welfare system. I will not lose one more child because we didn't care enough to help.

Welfare must end now. And it must end in these chambers.

There is only one way to end welfare, for there is only one way a person can truly escape welfare and climb out of poverty.

And that is to work.

There is no shortcut. No simpler way. No alternative.

There's an old proverb that says very simply: "First work, then wages." And it is upon that principle that W-2 is predicated. No more something for nothing; from now on only work will pay.

When a family is down on its luck and turns to government for assistance, we're going to help them in a much more compassionate way.

We're going to give them a job.

Instead of having them fill out this cumbersome 18-page application for welfare, we're going to have them fill out this -- a one-page job application.

W-2 puts people to work and helps them stay there. Instead of cash, W-2 provides ample child care, health care, food stamps, housing assistance and training until families earn enough to make it on their own. In fact, we're more than tripling our spending on child care to ensure the children of these parents are properly cared for. And they will be covered by health insurance.

W-2 also demands personal responsibility, just like the real world. For example, participants will make co-payments for child care and health care services, just as families not on public assistance are required to make.

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And there couldn't be a better time to end welfare. Our economy is growing so fast that we have a surplus of jobs, with employers eagerly looking for workers. The Business Journal even reported recently that Milwaukee businesses were offering movie tickets, gifts and car loans as lures to potential employees.

The jobs are there.

And it is a job, as well as the pride of working, that lifts the poor out of poverty and sets them on the road toward achieving the American Dream.

Helping people lead better lives. That's what Wisconsin is all about. That's what W-2 is all about.

As lawmakers, you know perhaps better than anybody else how difficult it is to eliminate a program ...even when doing so is clearly in the best interests of the public.

Well today, you are in a position to do just that. You can end welfare.

Think about it. Don't underestimate the boldness of what we are undertaking.

You have the opportunity to make the greatest change in social policy in 50 years in this country. To help thousands of families lead better lives.

We will all be held morally accountable by history if we squander this opportunity.

Care enough to end welfare.

Summary

This legislative session will be remembered in history as ushering in the most monumental reforms of the century. No session in my memory has changed the course of this state -- and touched every life in this state -- the way the 1995-96 session has. We are charting a bold new course for success in the next millenium.

Tonight, we have set forth another ambitious agenda for the people of Wisconsin. And we pursue that agenda with the confidence that there is no idea too bold for action, no challenge too tough to meet.

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We are living in a day of promise. Unlike most Americans, we believe our children will be better off tomorrow than we are today. And we're working hard to make it happen.

We build our economy....put people to work....preserve our natural resources....show zero tolerance for crime....invest in education....and lift the poor out of poverty -- All, so we can provide our children and families with the highest possible quality of life.

And we instill in our children values such as hard work, responsibility and a strong faith in God so they have the confidence to pursue a better future for themselves and their children.

Wisconsin Works -- for today and for tomorrow

In 1894, the great Justice Oliver Wendall Holmes said, "I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving. We must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it. But we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor."

In Wisconsin, we sail. We sail toward our dreams. And sooner or later, no matter what storms we encounter, we arrive safe and sound -- and better for having made the journey.

Good night, and God Bless Wisconsin.