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Gov. Tony Evers delivers his 2024 State of the State address in the Wisconsin State Capitol building on Jan. 23, 2024. Photo by [Gavin Escott](#) | The Daily Cardinal

STATE NEWS

Four takeaways from Evers' 2024 State of the State address

In his sixth State of the State address, Gov. Tony Evers urged Republican lawmakers to establish a bipartisan plan to tackle the workforce shortage while unveiling a new birth control program to cut costs for BadgerPlus Members.

By [Margaret Scheuerman](#)

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Gov. Tony Evers gave his sixth State of the State address Tuesday night, declaring 2024 the "Year of the Worker," highlighting workforce struggles, environmental threats and reproductive action.

"We began this biennium in the best fiscal position in our state's history. We set out to prepare a breakthrough budget — a rare opportunity to define our posterity," Evers said during his address. "And together, we did."

During his remarks, Evers revealed new efforts to expand birth control but primarily focused on topics from previous years including PFAS and mental health initiatives. The Assembly chamber erupted in frequent applause from Democratic lawmakers during his remarks, though Republicans were steadily silent.

Here are four takeaways from Evers' address:

2024: The Year of the Worker

Evers deemed 2024 "the year of the worker," urging Republican legislators to work toward a bipartisan workforce plan for childcare, paid family leave and higher education investments.

"Asking more kids to work in the workforce isn't a workforce plan," Evers said.

Wisconsin's unemployment rate is at an all-time low, and in 2023 the state's labor force participation rate consistently remained above the national average, something Evers applauded in his remarks. The state's current unemployment rate sits at 2.4%, a significant decline from the 3% low [prior](#) to his 2018 election.

"Wisconsinites work hard, and they are working," he said.

Still, Evers said he would like to find ways to support workforce challenges in the state without legislative action and praised a past effort to direct \$150 million in emergency aid to childcare providers.

Additionally, he revealed an executive order to create a new Healthcare Workforce Task Force to find long-term solutions and provide recommendations to tackle Wisconsin's healthcare crisis.

Evers said there would be a deficit of 20,000 nurses by 2040 and announced a registered nurse apprenticeship program to address a demand for 32,000 nurses between 2020 and 2030. He also touted a new apprenticeship pilot program with the Department of Public Instruction to provide more mentorship for educators.

"I will work with any legislator, any partner, any stakeholder who's willing to engage in meaningful conversations on these issues to do the right thing for Wisconsin," Evers said when pushing for legislative reform on workforce issues.

Evers vows to champion reproductive rights, contraceptive access

Evers [announced](#) he will direct the Department of Health Services to eliminate out-of-pocket costs for BadgerCare Plus recipients seeking emergency and daily contraception.

"Every Wisconsinite should be able to access the healthcare they need when they need it. And, yes, that includes contraception," he said.

BadgerCare Plus helps to aid in payments for health care services, at times even allowing some members to get services at no cost.

Under the directive, people on BadgerCare Plus would soon be able to enter any pharmacy carrying the new FDA-approved non-prescription oral [contraception](#) and use money from a new DHS standing order to process their insurance coverage, leaving them with no out-of-pocket costs.

He encouraged the Republican-controlled Legislature to pass a Senate bill that would grant the DHS the ability to increase postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12 months.

Evers also made sure to emphasize the importance of reproductive freedom, stating he will "veto any bill that takes away your reproductive freedom or makes reproductive healthcare any less accessible in Wisconsin than it is today. Period."

This statement made Tuesday night followed a [Monday hearing](#) on a Republican-led bill to approve a 14-week abortion ban with no exceptions for cases of rape or incest through a binding statewide referendum. Assembly lawmakers passed the resolution Thursday 53-46, with some Republicans joining Democrats in opposition.

PFAS investments expand

PFAS, a group of man-made chemicals commonly found in water-resistant products, have been increasingly found in Wisconsin's water [supply](#) in recent years.

Evers spoke on his statewide program, aiming to remove the polluting chemicals from the state water supply and pressing Republican legislators to [release](#) an investment he made this past July.

Previously, he directed \$10 million into a new [statewide program](#) to help get contaminants out of water supplies. Evers said there is still a \$125 million investment to decrease PFAS "sitting in Madison because Republicans refuse to release it."

"PFAS are a real threat to our kids, families and communities. These human-made chemicals can be toxic to humans and wildlife — and they've been used in everyday products for more than half a century," he said.

Mental health remains a priority

Evers [declared 2023](#) the "year of mental health." This year, Evers plans to continue increasing mental health awareness throughout schools in hopes of removing stigmas.

"One year after declaring the year of mental health, I'll tell you tonight, as governor and as a grandfather, my concerns have not changed, and my fears have not waned. Much work remains," Evers said.

He pointed to a program in Merrill High School called Raise Your Voice, a grassroots mental health organization initiated by the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI).

A small group of families founded [NAMI](#) in the late 1970s. It has since worked to raise awareness for mental health and provide support to those struggling with mental health challenges. The organization does so through issue-specific [education programs](#), and hosting support groups.

"Our state's mental health challenges are significant. Let's do more — and urgently — to make a difference on this issue in 2024. We have to. And I'm optimistic we will because our kids are leading the way" he said.

Vos said this is "typical Evers"



[Gavin Escott](#)

Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, speaks to reporters after Gov. Tony Evers delivered the 2024 State of the State address in the Wisconsin State Capitol building on Jan. 23, 2024.

After Evers' address, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, gave a rebuttal centered on abortion and redistricting legislation.

Vos emphasized a proposal [to enact](#) a 14-week abortion ban via a statewide referendum. This proposal did not initially offer exceptions for rape or incest, but an amendment from bill authors this week added the exceptions following public concerns.

The bill as it stands now would still decrease the abortion allowance time by 6 weeks.

"We want to ask the people of Wisconsin and let them be the ones to make the decision, not a bunch of politicians in Madison thinking that they know better," Vos said.

Vos also said Tuesday night he would be willing to work with Evers in hopes of preventing the Wisconsin Supreme Court from creating [maps](#) that would further hurt Republican legislators.

"Adopting his maps, stopping the lawsuit seems like something to me we could agree on, but I'm waiting on Gov. Evers to get back to us," Vos said when asked about his views on working with Evers to draw new maps.

Evers has promised to veto any maps proposal that differs from his own.

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