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Regional Priority:

Economic Development and Tax Reform

♥ *Thank you*

- **The over \$600 million in tax cuts in the 2025-27 budget that benefited citizens and enhanced the state's competitiveness and ability to attract and retain talent.** This included expansion of the 4.4% tax bracket, exclusions for retired individuals, and elimination of the utility sales tax.
Still needed: Address the impact of the increasing number of referendums on the property tax burden, but also the constraints and challenges local governments face in responding to increased demands on essential services resulting from inflation and growth.
- **Permanent status and funding for the Office of Outdoor Recreation in the Department of Tourism.** With the growing economic impact of outdoor recreation for Wisconsin's economy, the \$368,000 and two staff positions continue the progress already achieved. With significant outdoor assets, the Chippewa Valley directly benefits from the tools and support provided by this office.

★ *Action Requested*

- **Continue to address housing supply and affordability and modernize Tax Increment Financing (TIF).** Wisconsin's housing shortage across all levels is closely related to the workforce crisis, as well as having a detrimental effect on affordability. The state has an important role in ensuring that its regulations and statutes encourage infill development, creation of missing middle housing types, compact growth, efficiency of public resources, and the ability to build the types of housing demanded by the marketplace. As the current legislative session nears conclusion, passage of the following active proposals would provide significant benefits in this area:
 - **AB194/SB180:** Improves WHEDA housing programs by updating rules for three programs originally funded in the 2023-25 budget. Administered by the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA), they include the Infrastructure Access, Restore Main Street, and Vacancy-to-Vitality programs. The proposed revisions will help to more fully deploy funding and make use of the programs more realistic.
 - **AB451/SB480:** Allows municipalities to designate Residential Tax Increment Districts (TIDs).
 - **AB182/SB178:** Makes improvements to the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program.
 - **AB453/SB472:** Establishes state mandates related to ensuring residential zoning is consistent with local comprehensive plans, and provides further opportunities for municipalities to extend TIDs for affordable housing.
 - **AB454/SB476:** Establishes a workforce home loan program.

Regional Priority:

Workforce Development

♥ *Thank You*

- **Budget compromise on childcare.** Thank you for the agreement that included \$360 million to support childcare providers, expanded capacity, piloted a new 4-year-old readiness program, increased reimbursement rates for providers serving infants and toddlers, and adjusted staffing rules to allow more flexibility. There has been an urgent need for innovation on the part of the state to address the funding, business model, and regulatory oversight of early childhood care and education in ways that will effectively deal with availability, affordability, and accountability for quality and safety. This is a start.
- **\$6 million in Youth Apprenticeship grants.** A critical, valuable program, it saw its fourth consecutive year of record enrollment in 2024-2025, with over 11,000 students participating, driving the need for increased funding,
- **\$5 million to WEDC for talent attraction initiatives.** It establishes the Talent Recruitment Grant Program, a new initiative designed to support local efforts to attract new residents to Wisconsin with grants up to \$500,000 per project.

★ *Action Requested*

- **Approve legislation to provide tax credits for employer-paid childcare assistance.** Continue to address the childcare issue by authorizing refundable business development tax credits for an amount equal to up to 15 percent of the business's investment in establishing an employee child care program for employees. *Support AB283/SB291*

Regional Priority:

Healthcare

Climbing out of a crisis

The 2024 closures of all HSHS Hospitals and Prevea clinics in our area created an unprecedented healthcare crisis for our region... affecting patients, healthcare professionals and their families, and the entire local economy. All segments of our community came together to identify and understand the numerous complex issues that had to be addressed. Robust, collaborative efforts have resulted in the addition of new providers and expansions by existing organizations to meet area needs.

Continued innovation and initiatives needed

The work is not done. State government continues to have a role to fund and facilitate initiatives to encourage innovation and provide critical healthcare services. The Chippewa Valley has also demonstrated its readiness and attractiveness as a site for healthcare innovation.

♥ *Thank you*

State investments in the 2025-27 budget to fill mental health and recovery gaps, including:

- \$10 million for a new Rogers Behavioral Health campus in Chippewa Falls, helping with the long-term need for mental health beds in the region.
- \$1 million in funding for Lutheran Social Services to help reopen the former Libertas treatment facility in Chippewa Falls, a facility that closed in 2024 and left a serious gap in recovery services.

★ *Action Requested*

- **Facilitate coordination of EMS services to address service availability, response resources.** EMS services in the Chippewa Valley continue to struggle with a declining number of "volunteers" available to take calls as well as a lack of career EMTs and Paramedics to adequately fill full-time rosters. There are potential solutions in consolidating or regionalizing services. However, local governments need the flexibility to fund these services without the restrictions that current levy limits impose. As areas are forced to move from volunteer services to a paid full-time staffed

response there will be a need to create entities across municipal boundaries and provide support for training and equipment and local governments will need the ability to provide these resources.

Support bipartisan bills AB197/SB181

- **Enact “Next of kin” legislation to streamline process for family members to determine next steps for care for hospitalized family members who are unable to make their own decisions.** In those frequent cases where the individual has not designated a power of attorney of some form, delays from court processes can keep individuals in the hospital unnecessarily for weeks. Proposed legislation creates a pilot program, and maintains and adds patient protections. *Support bipartisan bills AB598/SB578*

Regional Priority:

Higher Education

♥ *Thank you*

- **Continued funding support of the Universities of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Technical College System** during the 2025-27 biennium. With a focus on student success, Chippewa Valley Technical College, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, and the University of Wisconsin-Stout play key roles in developing a highly skilled workforce and are essential for fueling the economy. As we look to the future, we emphasize the importance of growing investment to ensure that every student has access to the resources they need to succeed.
 - CVTC and the Wisconsin Technical College System provide critical workforce and community-based programming, preparing a skilled workforce, strengthening regional economies, and supporting economic mobility for individuals and families across the state. They are deeply committed to aligning education and training with the evolving needs of Wisconsin employers.
 - For UW-Stout, supporting polytechnic learning experiences - internships, cooperative work experiences, and industry-sponsored projects supervised by faculty and staff; and preparing students for the workforce by providing three times as many labs as classrooms, engaging with professional equipment and technology, and offering essential student counseling services.
 - For UW-Eau Claire, providing community-engaged learning opportunities by growing connections between Career Counselors and businesses; establishing a new Healthcare Education Network to coordinate research, scholarships, pre-medical and pre-professional support, and learning opportunities for students across high-demand healthcare career fields.
- **Approval of bonding authority for the UW-Stout Recreation Complex Renovation.** Stout will renovate and expand its Recreation Center with \$31.7 million funded entirely with donor support and student-approved fees, without the use of taxpayer dollars. In addition to providing enhanced student health and wellness, the renovation of the facility will benefit other partners including area youth and private industry.

★ *Action requested*

- **Ensure adequate funding to continue the growth of dual credit programs in Wisconsin high schools** through partnerships with technical colleges such as CVTC and with the Universities of Wisconsin. These programs have saved parents millions of dollars in tuition and provided accelerated opportunities for high school students to achieve college credit and even degrees, providing additional benefits in reducing workforce challenges. In 2023, for example, 6,434 students from 55 area school districts earned credits, a tuition savings of \$3.8 million.
- **Increase funding opportunities for Chippewa Valley Technical College and other Wisconsin Technical College System colleges to support community critical programming.** CVTC and colleges within the Wisconsin Technical College system are laser-focused on mission to provide the necessary education and training to support a strong economy and economic mobility for our citizens. The conservative WTCS budget request for the current biennium was not included in the State budget. This funding for technical colleges across the state, including Chippewa Valley Technical College, is critical for the continuation of programming essential to Wisconsin communities for quality of life, economic sustainability and growth potential. Many of these high-cost program offerings have experienced rising costs for supplies and delivery while statute-authorized determination of tuition rates have not kept up to

balance operational costs of the College. These programs include emergency medical services (EMS), welding, nursing and other healthcare offerings, truck driving, etc. In addition, as employee retention continues to be a challenge for many institutions, our ability to provide cost of living increases for our faculty and staff have been impacted.

★*Looking ahead*

- **Anticipated investments needed to be considered in the 2027-29 budget**
 - **UW-Stout Innovation Hub.** As UW-Stout's number one capital project, and the university will be seeking Board of Regents support as part of the 2027-29 Capital Plan. The new construction is necessary to address numerous failing building components that were recently and unexpectedly identified. As a result, UW-Stout has an existing building scheduled for demolition, leaving us without sufficient square footage to meet our mission. The estimated \$165M state-of-the-art new construction will address immediate programmatic and functional needs of Stout's high demand, workforce supported programs in engineering, computing, and design. The Innovation Hub will also minimize the total capital cost expenditure needed campus-wide by providing flexible space that will allow renovation to occur in lieu of new construction across other academic buildings.
 - **Hansen, Keith, Milnes & Chinnock (HKMC) Residence Hall Renovation.** The renovation of the HKMC residence hall is UW-Stout's number two capital priority and part of a comprehensive residence hall renewal plan. The \$55M renovation was #15 on the Universities of Wisconsin Administration 2025-27 Capital Plan and the university will be seeking bonding authority as part of the 2027-29 capital plan.

Built in the 1960s, the renovation will update the building infrastructure, exterior, and interior that have significantly deteriorated or failed. Due to the age of the building, replacement parts are scarcely available, requiring amenities to be taken offline – negatively impacting the student living experience. The residence hall cannot provide the privacy, flexibility, or amenities expected by today's students, and the poor physical and functional conditions of the facility negatively impact student recruitment and retention.

Regional Priority:

Transportation/infrastructure

♥ *Thank You*

- **WisDOT US 53 Safety Study in Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties.** Thank you for the recent approval by the Transportation Projects Commission of a major safety study of US 53 in Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties. This is a critical part of the Chippewa Valley's transportation infrastructure. As the local corridor has seen traffic volumes significantly exceeding the original freeway design, crash rates are especially high for those involving injuries and fatalities.

★ *Action Requested*

- **Transportation availability and choices.** A strong, balanced transportation system is critical to a vibrant economy, quality of life, and access to employment and economic opportunity. It's important to ensure the specific transportation needs of the Chippewa Valley are addressed through state planning activities and resource allocation, providing for a robust, balanced transportation system to attract and retain talent, as well as to provide for the effective movement of goods and people.
 - Adequate funding of local roads.
 - Good repair and adequate capacity on I-94 and its feeder highways, including future planning for additional lanes on the Eau Claire-Hudson corridor.
 - Expanded passenger rail service to include the Chippewa Valley.
 - Maintaining essential rail freight services.
 - Strengthening essential local transit services, especially for access to employment.
 - Maintaining air travel choices from the Chippewa Valley Regional Airport.
- **Release the funding appropriated for PFAS remediation.** Although the 2023-25 budget set aside \$125 million to help local governments and landowners clean up PFAS contamination, its release has been held up by disputes

between the administration and legislature over the DNR's authority and potential liability for landowners who didn't cause the contamination. In the meantime, many localities have committed significant funding to PFAS remediation. We appreciate the recently-announced compromise on the key issues and urge action to release the \$132 million now in the fund before the legislature adjourns.

Energy

Energy independence and reliability. The investor-owned utilities and electric cooperatives serving the Chippewa Valley have demonstrated responsible leadership in working towards renewable energy and reduced carbon emission goals, while at the same time meeting responsibilities to for cost-effectiveness and reliability.

★ *Action requested*

- **Do not pass currently-proposed community solar legislation.** Wisconsin's current energy policies strike an important balance between encouraging innovation and protecting customers from unintended cost impacts. As discussions continue around third-party community solar legislation, we encourage you to not support this legislation which would shift costs to non-participating customers and raise utility bills.

Through competitive procurement policies, the state's regulated utilities already provide solar projects at the lowest possible cost for all customers and at prices far below what this legislation would mandate. Locking in above-market credits through statute would undermine cost equity and drive up bills for families and businesses. Similar policies in Minnesota have led to higher costs for all non-participating customers - a path Wisconsin does not want to go down.

Furthermore, stand-alone solar does not adequately support system reliability or peak demand needs. Future policy should require pairing community-scale solar with battery storage and ensure utility oversight to keep the grid safe, resilient, and dependable. *Oppose AB 493/SB 599 as currently written.*