

Governor Walz State of the State Remarks as Prepared

April 19, 2023

[ST. PAUL, MN] – Governor Tim Walz delivered his State of the State Address tonight in the Minnesota House Chamber. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery.

Thank you and good evening.

Madame Speaker and Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives.

Mr. President and Members of the Minnesota Senate.

Madam Chief Justice, Distinguished Members of the Minnesota Supreme Court, and Chief Judge Segal.

My fellow Constitutional Officers.

Members of my Staff, Cabinet, and Administration.

Governor Dayton, and Mrs. Ana Dayton, welcome back and thank you for your continued service to our state.

Distinguished Tribal Leaders, Chairwoman Cathy Chavers and President Robert Larsen.

Escorts in the Minnesota State Patrol and the Minnesota National Guard.

Chaplain Colonel Buddy Winn, State Chaplain of the Minnesota National Guard.

Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, and Minnesota's Second Gentleman, Tom Weber.

Minnesota's First Lady, Gwen Walz.

Guests, and my fellow Minnesotans.

Before we get started, I want to send all of our best wishes to Senate Majority Leader Kari Dziedzic.

Senator Dziedzic has long been a leader in Minnesota, but she's recently become a role model for unexpected reasons.

Like so many of our neighbors and loved ones, Senator Dziedzic is battling cancer. But she hasn't let her fight with cancer stop her from fighting for all Minnesotans. In-between treatments,

Senator Dziedzic is calling into meetings, negotiating, and working hard to deliver for the people of Minnesota.

Senator Dziedzic, we know you are watching tonight, and we are in awe of your strength, your courage, and your commitment to public service. Thank you, and we look forward to seeing you soon!

Half a century ago, a Governor came to Saint Paul with a mandate for change.

Despite fierce opposition, he eventually won popular support for an agenda rooted in the belief that Minnesota could – and should – be the best place in America to raise a family.

His plan reshaped our state's finances, invested hundreds of millions of dollars in our schools, lowered costs for working families, and put Minnesota on the path to a brighter and more sustainable future for all.

The national press called it the “Minnesota Miracle.” But it wasn't a miracle – not really. It was just patience and hard work – the quiet building of political will behind a vision shared by an overwhelming majority of Minnesotans.

Last fall, the people of Minnesota sent me back to Saint Paul for another four years to serve the state that I love so much. But they didn't send me alone.

Minnesotans elected the most diverse legislature in our history, one that's united around a shared vision of making our state, once again, the best place in America to raise a family.

That's why, the day I took the oath of office for the second time, I declared that the era of gridlock was over.

For four years, despite enormous headwinds and complicated politics, we did manage to get a lot done for the people of Minnesota. But now we have a new mandate for action – a chance to set aside old fights in favor of doing something truly historic for our children and grandchildren.

This is a moment we have been building towards for a long time. And we won't let it go to waste.

We started out this session by cutting taxes by \$100 million to make it a little bit easier for families to pay their bills and businesses to pay their workers. And that's just the beginning of the work we've done to strengthen the economy in every corner of the state.

Thanks to a unanimous vote of this legislature, we unlocked millions in infrastructure funding to help rebuild and repair our roads and highways.

We passed financial assistance to help struggling families to stay in their homes, and emergency funding for food shelves so those families can keep putting dinner on the table.

We got assistance for workers on the Iron Range, to help miners when Northshore Mining went idle.

We established a carbon-free electricity standard that will transition us to 100 percent clean energy by 2040 and help our state to win the race to create new jobs and industries.

And just last month, I had the honor of signing into law a bill that will provide free school breakfast and lunch for all Minnesota students, because it's a heck of a lot easier to learn when you've got something in your stomach.

Minnesotans: Three months into our second term, I'm proud to report that the state of our state is strong, and it's getting stronger with every investment we make in our people and the futures they're working so hard to build.

But make no mistake: Minnesota's strength isn't just in our economy, or our schools, or our natural resources. Our strength also comes from our values.

The forces of hatred and bigotry are on the march in states across this country and around the world. But let me say it now, and let me say it clearly: That march stops at Minnesota's borders.

And let's do something a little un-Minnesotan: Let's talk about what we're really talking about.

I've seen some of these other governors on TV – they spend a lot of time on TV – and they're always talking about “freedom.” But it turns out what they mean is that government should be free to invade your bedroom, your children's locker room, and your doctor's office.

Here in Minnesota, when we talk about freedom, we mean your children should be free to go to school without worrying they'll be shot dead in the halls.

Now, I'm only the Governor of this great state, and it's not up to me how folks in places like Florida go about their business. But I have to tell you, I'm pretty glad we do things our way and not their way.

I mean: They're banning books from their schools. We're banishing hunger from ours.

And the differences don't end there.

They look at their most vulnerable people and they see scapegoats. We look at our most vulnerable people and we see neighbors. And that's why we're giving undocumented Minnesotans the opportunity to get a driver's license and live their lives with dignity.

They see people trying to vote as a threat to their power. We see it as a source of pride. And that's why we restored the right to vote for more than 55,000 of our fellow citizens.

They're afraid of facing up to our nation's entire history. I guess we're just made of stronger stuff. And that's why we now recognize Juneteenth as a state holiday.

They want to put bullies in charge of your health care. We want to put you in charge of your health care – and put bullies in their place. And that’s why we protected access to gender-affirming health care and established an iron-clad right to reproductive freedom.

Look, I get it. These politicians, they want to be seen as “fighters.” But what they don’t understand is that it’s not enough to be a fighter. You have to choose the right fights.

And if there’s one thing I hope folks in other states take away from what we’re doing here in Minnesota, it’s this: It’s amazing what you can accomplish when you stop complaining about corporations going “woke” and start giving a damn about the real lives of real people.

So I’m here today to say: Let’s keep choosing the right fights. Let’s keep going to bat on behalf of Minnesota families. And let’s keep making Minnesota the nation’s best place for our children to grow up.

That’s what this year’s budget is all about.

Our plan starts by focusing help on the families who need it most, in the form of a nation-leading Child Tax Credit that would put billions of dollars in the pockets of parents struggling to make ends meet. If we got this done and nothing else, we’d reduce child poverty in Minnesota by 25 percent.

Doing so isn’t just a moral imperative or the right thing to do. It’s a critical piece of our plan to improve our schools and grow our economy.

And it’s just the start of what we can do for Minnesota families.

Our plan would send a portion of the surplus right back to Minnesotans in the form of checks that can pay for everything from gas and groceries to summer camp and college tuition.

Meanwhile, let’s start making it a whole lot easier for parents to find and pay for great child care.

Our plan would give more than 150,000 Minnesota households thousands of dollars each to help pay those child care bills.

To make sure there are enough spots for everyone’s children, we’re going to make it easier to start a child care business – and we’re going to give the professionals who take care of our children a long-overdue raise.

Our plan also adds 25,000 public pre-K seats to make sure there’s a place for your child when they’re ready. And it invests in early learning scholarships for families who need them most, to make sure that you can make the best choice.

Anyone in this room who’s a parent knows that, for the first five years of your child’s life, nothing gives you more anxiety than balancing work and family – and making great child care accessible and affordable for everyone will make that a whole lot easier.

And, by the way, so will universal paid leave!

Of course, once your child gets to kindergarten, you've got something else to think about for the next 13 years.

No parent in Minnesota should have to settle for second-best when it comes to our public schools. And with rising costs putting financial pressure on educators and school boards across the state, it's high time we tied school funding to inflation to make sure nobody has to start cutting corners.

On top of that, our plan invests billions more in our education system, including a more than 10 percent increase to the general education funding formula over the next four years to support the heroic work of our great teachers. And it includes enough money to provide universal school meals so no child in Minnesota has to learn on an empty stomach.

That's not all. Our plan addresses the mental health needs of our kids, and allows for more school counselors and nurses and social workers to make sure that nobody who needs help falls through the cracks.

And we're launching a new plan to modernize state government to put families first, establishing a new agency focused exclusively on providing comprehensive support for parents who need help. Whether it's early learning or food assistance or anything else, you ought to have somewhere you can go to access all our resources in one place – and under our plan, you will.

Of course, putting families first also means upholding the very first and most basic responsibility of government: keeping our communities safe.

That's why our plan includes more than half a billion dollars in public safety funding for cities and counties across our state, the largest investment in Minnesota history. Whether it's fighting the surge in car theft or taking on the epidemic of opioid abuse, our first responders and law enforcement agencies have enough to deal with – they should have every resource they need to get the job done.

But we can't talk about public safety without talking about guns. So let's have an honest talk about guns.

Now, I'll put my credibility up against anyone else when it comes to this issue. I'm a veteran. I'm a hunter. I was one of the best shots in Congress, and I have the trophies to prove it. I know guns as well as anyone else in this room.

But I'm sick and tired of talking about all that when we talk about gun safety. Because I'm not just a veteran, or a hunter, or a gun owner. I'm a dad. And for many years, I was a teacher. I know that there's no place for weapons of war in our schools, or in our churches, or in our banks, or anywhere else people are just trying to live their lives without fear.

In fact, let's be really honest: We all know it. We're just used to being bullied by the gun lobby. But, you know what? I got an A rating from the NRA my first term in Congress. Now I get straight F's. And I sleep just fine.

More to the point, I'm not going to stand by and let anyone make this about the Second Amendment when it's really about our first responsibility to our kids: keeping them safe. And I'm not going to let anyone hide behind thoughts and prayers when what we need is action now.

We've got a gun safety bill on the table. And we're going to get it passed. And I'm gonna sign it. We're going to have universal background checks. We're going to have a red flag law to keep guns out of the wrong hands.

And if anyone in America doubts that we can take meaningful action to protect our kids, I've got two words for you: Watch us.

There's lots more in our plan – an increase in local government aid, funding to replace lead pipes across the state and rebuild aging roads and bridges, tax credits for people to buy electric vehicles. We've got a real opportunity here to improve our infrastructure and grow our economy, and we're going to create a lot of new jobs in the process.

Oh, and by the way? Those are going to be good-paying union jobs, because Minnesota is a labor state and we're always going to be a labor state.

These are pragmatic, progressive ideas – things that may not make headlines but will make life easier, safer, and more fulfilling for people across our state.

We're gonna get them done. And we ought to be darn proud of it.

After all, we're not the only place in America where people want a shot to raise their kids with good schools, safe streets, clean water, and economic opportunity. And we're not the only place in America where people are organizing around that positive vision.

But when it comes to putting that vision into action – when it comes to showing people what comes after gridlock, what they can have instead of the gridlock, what we can do when we set aside the dumb fights and choose good ones instead – well, there's nowhere quite like Minnesota right now.

And that's a credit to everyone involved in our state's democracy. Starting with the folks in this room tonight, but also including the organizers and the activists, the people who show up not just on Election Day, but every day, fighting for equity and our environment and our labor unions and our small business owners and our farmers and our LGBTQ community and, of course, our kids.

Tonight, I want to thank you for your service to these valuable causes, and for your service to the civic life of our state. And I want to ask you to keep pushing, keep fighting, keep going – because the whole nation is looking to you for inspiration.

Together, we're not just showing the people of our state that we're capable of delivering on our promises. We're showing the American people just how much promise is contained in the progressive vision shared by so many.

We're drawing a roadmap for 49 other states by doing whatever it takes to be a state that works – for everyone.

And we're proving that not only can you campaign on compassion and foresight and decency, you can actually govern that way, too.

Fifty years after the Minnesota Miracle, we have another chance to be America's North Star.

An opportunity to carve out a corner of our country where no child is left hungry. No community is left behind. And nobody gets told they don't belong.

A place where government exists not to meddle in your life, but to make it easier.

We have the resources. We have the shared vision. And for the first time in half a century, we have the political will to get this done.

So let's not waste this opportunity.

Let's get to work building a state we're proud to raise our kids in. A state we're proud to start new businesses in. A state that we're proud to brag about.

And let's start today. Thank you and God bless the great state of Minnesota!

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