2022 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

MINNESOTA GOVERNOR TIM WALZ

SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 2022
6:00 P.M.

Reported By: Lori Morrow, RDR, RMR, RPR, CRR, CBC
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE: You may be seated.

Members of the Joint Convention and guests, I present to you the Governor of the State of Minnesota, the Honorable Tim Walz.

GOVERNOR WALZ: Thank you. Good evening.

Madam 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, Chief Judge Segal. My fellow Constitutional Officers. Governor and Mrs. Dayton, welcome back. You are welcome any time these last two years. Distinguished Tribal Leaders, Chief Executive Melanie Benjamin of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, and President Johnny Johnson of the Prairie Island Indian Community. To the Escorts in the Minnesota State Patrol and the Minnesota National Guard. Father Ivan, blessed Easter and know that the State of Minnesota stands united with the people of Ukraine. Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, and Minnesota's Second Gentleman Tom Weber. Hi, Siobhan; I did not forget, and Siobhan. Minnesota's First Lady, Gwen Walz.

To the many guests and my fellow Minnesotans, this is my fourth State of the State address but only the second one in this important chamber. And I think and I hope all of you felt as you
walked in here tonight, and I know I did, the sense of history that goes with this and the sense that we're in this together, you can feel strongly. So I'm incredibly grateful.

It's, I think, what Minnesotans are feeling, the sense of once again gathering together with friends and relatives and co-workers and doing the important things of life, whether it's proms or graduations, sporting events, or important business. The last two years have been incredibly challenging, so not being in here for those two years, I know that many of you are deeply disappointed you did not get to come on a Sunday night and listen to me talk, but I promise you over the next three to four hours I'll make it up to you.

They think I'm kidding. No.

I will have to say, we know the State of the State speech is an opportunity to reflect, but it's also an opportunity of where we're going in the future. I don't need to say it. Every euphemism has been made. The last two years have been incredibly challenging. But in those challenges, both the people of Minnesota and these two bodies figured out a way in some of the most challenging circumstances the state has ever faced. As one of only, for a long time the only one, one of
only two divided legislatures, we figured out how to get
good things done for Minnesota together, not
individually. Very difficult to do that, and it's not
supposed to be that way. It's supposed to be getting
them done together. So I think it's important, if we're
reflecting, we should reflect on our successes together,
too; our budget reserves have hit record highs, and our
COVID infections and hospitalizations have hit record
lows, together.

Nationally, we have the fifth lowest
unemployment rate among states, the third highest job
growth, and one of the highest labor participation
rates. The leadership that's in front of me tonight,
working together, reduced the price of insulin to save
lives, increased education funding for every student,
and passed the largest jobs bill in state history. You
did it together. We picked the energy up over here, and
we did it by cutting taxes for the middle class all at
the same time. We were able to pass the first middle
class tax cut in 20 years all while delivering for
Minnesota. We've proven that compromises can work,
we've proven that we can balance budgets, and we've
proven that we can invest in the future. And because of
that, I'm here tonight to tell you the state of our
state is strong and moving forward.
And to be clear, moving forward doesn't mean giving up on the tough issues. It doesn't mean glossing over things that we need to take care of. What it means is working together like we have so many times to solve those problems. It's not enough to point out a problem. It's not enough to come up with a cute slogan. We need to come up with solutions, and then we need to get results for the people of Minnesota. That's what moving forward looks like.

You all do the same things that I do. You have countless conversations, whether it's this morning in church or whether it's at a coffee shop or whether it's someone stopping you on the streets. And Minnesotans are hopeful and resilient people. They are also pretty innovative. We know that the solutions are out there. We know that people are talking about these things. And the one thing that Minnesotans know, that if we invest in our people, we can't get it wrong. That's the opportunity that we have in front of us, so I would ask all of us let's make that commitment to try and do the things that we're hearing from our constituents. We're hearing ideas from them, and we have the capacity to make that happen. I want to be clear. We may not agree on everything. And if we're being totally honest, some of us won't agree on
anything. That is the reality. That is a democracy. That's the way some of this is. But we owe it to the people of Minnesota to try and find common ground, to try and put some of those differences aside to move at least some things forward. I know it's frustrating. The fierce sense of urgency on big issues means that you want to go big, but I think in a divided legislature like this and the expertise we have in this room, there is a wide variety of solutions that can be implemented to solving that problem. And the way I see it, we could focus our energy in three areas. We could start thinking right now about investing in the future, what we need, that future workforce, what future generations are going to need to make Minnesota the best state in the nation to live, start a business, and enjoy the things that we have. But we also know coming out of the pandemic, nationally, globally, and here in Minnesota, there's urgent issues that we can't put off and need to address now. And then we've got unfinished business, things that we need to solve right now. And I want to discuss that, this issue of unfinished business. We know where people are at. We know that globally we're seeing higher prices, inflationary prices, but we know it's impacting families. I've made the suggestion, and I want to work with you on this. We should use some of
this historic surplus, a big piece of it, to put money back in the pockets of working Minnesotans and those that are trying to make the bills work for them.

And I'll note, in the spirit of compromise, I believe one of the quickest, surest, and most fiscally responsible ways is to return that money right now if I'll do that. But I've said it many times, and I'll say in this body, we can cut taxes for middle class folks and folks trying to get into this middle class, too, at the same time. But I want to be clear about this. We can cut taxes for the middle class without cutting taxes for massive corporations and the wealthiest people in Minnesota. They don't need a tax cut. We've signed a tax cut together. We've made it work, but I think we should be very clear on this. Cutting taxes for the wealthiest amongst us will not guarantee opportunities in Minnesota for the wider variety of folks, and it certainly won't grow our economy from the middle out. So I ask us on this pressing issue, folks need a little extra in their pocket right now. We're sitting on this surplus. Let's come together in a compromise and see if we can maybe get some immediate relief and talk about this issue of tax cuts for the middle class. We can do this. We can do this. This unites a lot of us around an issue.
So I want to say before, though, we do that, there are two issues, and I know it is the elephant in the room and the donkey in the room, if you will. We've been waiting since last May where we made a determination that there were countless frontline workers who put more on the line than anyone else. They were out there during the pandemic doing the things to keep our state running and keeping us safe, and we made a joint effort together, passed and signed into law relief to send them hero checks. We need to get that done right now. We need to get that done. And we feel strongly about this. We need to help Minnesotans economically. But this issue of frontline workers, there's people behind this. There are people behind every decision we do. We are joined tonight by someone I think many of you know, Mary Turner. She's an RN nurse. In fact, she worked the night shift last night in the emergency room. Mary and her colleagues have spent the last two years, the early part of the pandemic not only with no vaccines but without adequate personal protective equipment. They went to work every single day to ensure that us and our loved ones had the very best care possible. And the results of what they did was Minnesota's death rates that came from this when someone is admitted to the hospital is one of the lowest
in the nation. Those are the folks that we said let's give them a little extra help. It's not winning the lottery. It's not a bonus. It's a thank you on behalf of the people of Minnesota that they serve. And we need to get this done.

Mary, thank you.

I also want to add, though, there are an awful lot of small business owners who put their livelihoods on the line, created jobs in our communities, and grew our economy who suffered during the pandemic. And I can tell you this. The unemployment insurance trust fund is one of the best anti-poverty programs that we had, and it was paid for by those businesses to support those workers at a time of need. It kept the rent paid. It kept food on the table. And we have a responsibility and the capacity to replenish the unemployment insurance trust fund both for those small businesses and for those workers who made it into the future. I ask us, let's do this now. Let's do this now.

Once again, I would add, it's a debate. It's a fair debate. That's how a democracy is supposed to work. It's a little bit messy, and there are different ideas. But behind us debating are real people. With the hero checks, it was Mary. With the
unemployment fund, it's in restaurants like Sammy's in North Minneapolis or Jules' in St. Cloud. I have two small business owners here tonight, Sammy McDowell and Donella Westphal. They went out of their way. They created jobs. They created their restaurants. They hired people. They took care of their workers. They kept the public safe. And they are doing everything they can to rebuild. They are simply asking us let's get a compromise, let's get this fixed. Now is not the time for Sammy or Donella to have a tax increase, and we can make sure today that that doesn't happen.

So thank you, both.

And in this debate, and I will name it, too, I said there's an elephant and a donkey in the room, and there's us in the room as the executive branch. I understand that today progress is being made on this very issue. And if that is the case, what I would ask is, we're here, we have the opportunity. Speaker Hortman, republican leadership in the Senate, we should get together. We're prepared. Let's work tonight. Let's finish this thing. We have a couple things that fit together, a couple things that serve Minnesotans. We have the resources to do it, and we could move Minnesota forward in a bipartisan manner. So I would ask if we're getting close to a compromise on
this, let's finish this deal, and let's finish it now. So let's take care of that. We have the opportunity to get some money back in people's pockets. We can compromise on how we do that. We can take care of that frontline hero pay and show Minnesotans and make sure we're retaining and attracting those really talented healthcare workers. We can do that, and we can take care of the trust fund issue. And that still leaves us about $6 billion to move on with the issues that we need to deal with. That's just this biennium. So I ask, we know that we were left with issues coming out of the pandemic that need to be addressed. I don't think, as I hear some people say, we can just put it off. We can't put some of these things off. We can't put off things that Minnesotans need that are important.

And I want to just be clear. The pandemic did not impact all of us equally. It impacted communities differently, and it left us challenges that we know we have to come together on. Every single Minnesotan has a story to tell in this. Lieutenant Governor lost a beloved older brother, a marine, seemed invincible, strong, one of the first people to die in this. This body lost a beloved member. All of us have stories. All of us have the impacts of this. And I know this. The pandemic has caused rifts between all of
us. It has caused rifts that seem almost
insurmountable.

My pledge to you is to try and listen, to
try and work together and try and heal those rifts,
because the goal of everyone in this body and the goal
of everyone who is a public servant is the health and
safety of our fellow Minnesotans. Now, we might not
have the same idea how to get there, but we have to
continue to follow the science and follow what we know
can get us there to make those differences. And I'm
going to point out, I know it's hard. I want to
acknowledge.

My friend Sheletta Brundidge is here
tonight. Some of you know Sheletta. She served as a
role model in her community. She's a well-known media
personality. She is someone that people listen to
because she's earned that right. And I want to say
Sheletta spent the first year on the radio telling
people not to get a COVID-19 vaccine. She had read and
heard things that worried her. And as a black woman,
she's got a valid historical concern when it comes to
this. On his 15th birthday, Sheletta's son, Andrew,
said all he wanted for his birthday was for his mom to
be safe and asked her to do a little more work. And she
went and talked to her doctor. She went and talked to
folks at different institutions, and she decided to get
the COVID-19 vaccine.

I want to acknowledge to folks that things
that have divided us and these very difficult issues
about people's personal health decisions and how they do
things going forward are a challenge, but I think we can
work through them with grace and dignity and try and get
as much good information out as we can. Sheletta has
since gone on her radio show and talked to people about
the importance of getting the COVID-19 vaccine and save
lives. And I say thank you.

And for all of us, and I include myself in
every one of these discussions, trying to listen and
learn, and to try and be patient with one another as we
understand what it looks like going forward. I
especially ask us to be patient and supportive of those
who continue to be the caregivers of this state. The
pandemic made it very clear that we cannot function in
this state without amazing people who care for our
children, who care for our seniors, and who care for our
most vulnerable, and those that keep us safe in our
communities. I think we all will agree on how important
they were, but we need to acknowledge that even prior to
the pandemic but especially during the pandemic, the
workforce issues around these jobs have been
exacerbated. And we have the capacity, the private sector has the capacity, our non-profits have the capacity, and our budget shows that we can address these very issues.

I want to talk, first of all, just a little bit about child care. Now, many of us are a little bit older, but it doesn't take that long to remember. One of the most important decisions you make as a parent is trying to get into that quality child care or trying to figure out what's best for your child or trying to make it work with your schedule. Maybe you're on a swing shift and how to make that work as a family. Child care in this country, in this state was in crisis long before the pandemic. But during the pandemic, it was those child care workers were the first ones on the front lines to ensure that our children had a safe place to go, and their parents, if you remember, early on when we kept those open to make sure that police and firefighters and nurses and doctors had a place to take their children safely so that they could do the work to keep the rest of us going.

Now, I want to thank all of you, Minnesota, clearly protecting our child care industry better than any other state in the nation, but both parents and the number of especially women who had to
leave the workforce over this issue and the number of
providers who can't make the economic numbers work
behind this. We have a responsibility. Business is
asking us to work on this. And we have a lot of
bipartisan support to build the workforce behind the
workforce that makes things go. When people are
thinking about where they're going to have a business or
thinking about where they are going to live, to have
Minnesota be known as we were during the pandemic and
come out of it, a state that is committed to child care
and early education, is a hiring bonus to get people
here and to create lives that they want to live.

So I thank all of you for the work you
did.

There's a lot of experts in here on this
issue. And I would like to talk about home healthcare
workers a little bit just because I think this is one of
the hardest and most important jobs in the state. These
personal care assistants, as many in this body know, are
the folks that help our family, our friends, our
neighbors with disabilities live fulfilling and
independent lives. I've had the privilege of seeing
that firsthand, how important, how fulfilling, and just
how caring this profession is. A couple years ago, I
had the opportunity to spend a day with Deb Howze, a
personal care attendant. She cared for my friend Jay, who is a veteran and has MS. And I spent that day watching the care, the hard work, the labor that goes into making this happen, all of that to give Jay the highest quality of life with independent living and respect. These are the heroes that make Minnesota a caring state, and we have a responsibility to make sure we take care of them.

So, Deb, thank you.

And there's a whole lot of folks sitting out here that I hope Minnesota knows, understand this very clearly, and you need to get credit for what you did. Last year, we finally gave Deb and other personal care assistants a raise. This year, we're giving another one. This budget surplus gives us an opportunity to help correct that profession to make sure not only people like Deb can stay in it but that we're attracting the best and brightest into it where they can make a living wage.

So I congratulate all of you.

I think these are the stories maybe Minnesotans don't hear. You all did this. You're the experts in this. You worked on it. There are folks in here who spent decades working on this issue. There are folks that know the regulations inside and out. And
what we know is if we make some of these changes, we strengthen that healthcare workforce. I would argue we need to start thinking about that broadly. We know that there's professions, and all businesses are experiencing a workforce shortage. We can't afford to leave anyone on the sidelines. And here in Minnesota, we know how to do that. We saw wonderful public/private partnerships, and our universities and community colleges came together around this issue. When we saw the latest Omicron and Delta surge this last November until March, we had the severe shortage across the spectrum of care providers. But one of the ways we could move more people in quicker that were qualified was changing and going about recruiting for the Certified Nursing Assistant Program. And we created a program here in Minnesota with a goal to train, certify, and place 1,000 CNAs. These are the people that are in our long-term care facilities, they are in our veterans' homes caring for our heros, and they are the ones keeping the hospitals functioning. And we set that goal for 90 days to try and get 1,000 of them in. We went out and recruited people. You all helped. And the money that we used from the Recovery Act was able to do some inventive things, getting just bus fare for some folks who got off the sidelines, got their training, got their
certificate, and are now in a new profession making a
living and caring for Minnesotans. We not only got that
1,000, we got about 1,400. That program worked. Now,
the funding is coming to an end. I would ask us all, I
think this is one of those areas, we have a budget in
front of us, let's fund that program, and then let's use
your creativity to continue to figure out how we build
that broader workforce. That's what Minnesotans are
expecting us to do. Now we have those folks in those
facilities doing the work that we know they need to do.
So thank you all for that.
And as we start talking about tackling
these problems that the pandemic created, I do think
it's important to pause to acknowledge, and we've talked
about it, we've learned, we've listened. We got some
right; we get some wrong. But through it all, there are
people that were asked to do this work day in and day
out. And when we had shortages of those people in
long-term care facilities, we had to set up a, Minnesota
is the only one, Critical Care Coordinating Center, the
C4. When I go to meet with other states, and many of
you do the same thing, too, it seems like it would be a
really common thing that would happen, a one-stop place
that you could find and place a hospital bed anywhere in
the state and that we can move people where we needed
them, and we could do the same thing with staff. We had
many, many nights, sometimes dozens of long-term care
facilities that COVID outbreaks decimated the entire
staff and there was going to be no one there in the
morning to care for those residents. It was at that
time that we asked the folks at the Minnesota Department
of Health under Commissioner Jan Malcolm's leadership to
step up and create a plan. And I want to say as we sit
here tonight, still around the clock these employees are
looking, working, and trying to figure out where will
COVID come from next, and how do we make sure we're
ahead of it before it happens. So I want to give a
heartfelt thank you to all of those folks, especially
those state employees, who made that coordinating care,
bringing the hospitals together, and bringing a unified
approach to how we did this. I want to say thank you to
them.

And while they coordinated it though,
somebody had to do the work. And in that case, it was
the women and men of the Minnesota National Guard. I
want to say thank you to General Shawn Manke and the
entire Minnesota National Guards. These last two years
you've stepped up in ways that we could have never
imagined. You've gone into long-term care facilities.
You've gone into our veterans' homes. You've been at
testing and vaccination sites. And throughout that pandemic, you were there every step of the way to help Minnesotans in their time of need. Just today, under Chapter 12 authority, I've authorized 100 National Guard to provide emergency support for flooding operations in Northwestern Minnesota. They will leave their homes, they'll pack up their gear, they'll go to the armory, they'll receive their mission, and they will protect homes; they will protect lives. And they will do it in the most professional manner. And then they will return back, and they will get their guard training, and they might be asked by the United States Government to provide security for this nation. No one does this better, and the people of Minnesota owe an incredible debt of gratitude to the people of the Minnesota National Guard.

With that, General, I salute you.

And right alongside those Minnesota warriors and our patriots, right alongside them every step of the way was the women and men of the Minnesota State Patrol under the leadership of Colonel Matt Langer. Along with our DNR conservation officers, you've worked across this state to keep our communities safe, and you've taken on unprecedented challenges. Also Minnesota is incredibly indebted to you.
Thank you, Colonel.

All of you came here to make a difference in your communities, and you bring a wealth of life experiences. And I think we all know these issues are tough, and they are tough nationally; they are tough in Minnesota. Public safety is a complex, evolving issue in 2022. It's been exacerbated by the workforce challenge and the pandemic. And whether it's traffic deaths, crime, wildfires, severe weather, our law enforcement agencies across the state have stepped up to keep us safe in some of the most difficult conditions. Our top priority and my top priority is always the health and safety of Minnesotans. And I've been traveling across the state. And no community is exactly the same. But listening to local mayors, elected officials, listening to public safety officials, listening to community leaders, and I'm talking about it, and we all make the debates here. I'm proposing in the budget that we have in front of you $300 million investment in these communities. In some of those communities, it's going to make sure that they can hire the law enforcement officers they need. In other communities, it's going to be to modernize their 9-1-1 system, which is not just a phone system. It's a way of making sure that those trained professionals who operate
that send out the right responses, if it's a mental health crisis, if it's a fire, or if it's a situation that requires law enforcement. Some communities are talking about buying unmarked vehicles to transport domestic violence survivors and children so they are not in the back of a police car as they move from that dangerous situation. And some are talking about getting new equipment and new ways of doing things.

Our local officials know we have a surplus that allows them to do that, and we also have the capacity to work with those community groups that are showing a huge reduction not just in those crimes, but a reduction in the number of youth that are going in wrong directions. So this has a capacity. Public safety can be there. We can make this happen. But we need to agree that we can define the problem, we can set up some goals, we can work together to get there. This is not one of those issues that it's enough to point out the problem. We need concrete solutions with measurable results that keep Minnesotans safe and make sure that justice is served. We can do that. We can do that.

And I'll note, if we really are serious about getting tough on crime, then we need to get tough on the causes of crime, because that's where it begins. That means moving back upstream, tackling economic
inequality issues, talking about housing, talking about

gun violence, and then talking about issues like mental

health and addiction. This issue of addiction,

especially around opioids and fentanyl, is devastating

our country and our state. There are few families that
don't know of or been touched by this. In this very

body, we have two individuals, Senator Eaton and

Representative Baker, who turned personal tragedy that

is almost unimaginable into becoming national leaders

with real solutions that are making a difference in

saving lives. We should be listening to them. We

should be investing in those things that make a

difference. And Minnesotans are crying out that we
tackle this issue. The solutions are in this room.

They're in Minnesota. And it unites us all together.

Not only are we going to reduce tragedies in families,

we are going to reduce crime, because these sales are

driving the crime. They are driving the things that are

happening. That is a common goal that all of us have in

here. We have the resources to help make that happen,

and we can start impacting lives in a real way. So I

ask us -- we listen to you. We are trying to learn from

you. At the state level, we're getting ready to hire a

director of the work that will be done here, but it's

going to be these bodies that create the systemic
changes. It's going to be these bodies that come up with the real long-term solutions. If we do that, we will save lives, reduce crime, and make Minnesota the state we know it can be. And the leadership is here. This is one of the most bipartisan and hopeful things we can do together, and I would argue no state has the expertise. This was led, the idea of mental health parity, of being a part of this issue, was with Paul Wellstone and Jim Ramstad. It has never known partisanship. But Minnesota was the state that pushed on this issue. Minnesota was the state that set up some of the earliest treatment courts. Minnesota was the state that knows we must do better around this issue. So I ask all of you, whether it's taking care of the people who take care of our kids, whether it's taking care of the people who take care of our seniors, our most vulnerable, whether it's taking care of public safety and the folks who do this work, and reducing crime, we can do all those things. We can do that this session, and then we can do what many of you came here to do. Think about that brighter future. It's Minnesota, for goodness sakes. Let's get to where the puck is going to be, not where it is. That's what we can do next. That's what all of you came here to do. And the big ideas are out there.
So I would say for most of us, what those big ideas look like starts with education. Education is what brought many of us here to Minnesota, myself included. I know it's a disappointment to some of you, but it did bring me here. My wife, Gwen, and I, we've devoted a lifetime to this. We taught together for many years. We taught at Mankato West. And Gwen is still involved in education. And I know many of you have done that, but all of us are touched by it, our own education, our children's education. We all want to have the best opportunities, the best resources, and the best outcomes for our students. And I can tell you we have the capacity now. We've done it. We passed one of the largest increases in spending in the last budget cycle in Minnesota history. And you did it in a bipartisan manner to make a difference for our students. We've got more to be done.

Now I'm going to have to tell you. I am here tonight with two teachers who inspire me. Val and Lin Whipple are here. They happen to also be my in-laws. Lifelong teachers and coaches.

So I want to say thank you.

As Lin knows, behind every governor is an astonished mother-in-law, so. You know in this room, the experts are in this room, too; education begins at
birth, and it goes through lifetimes.

    Minnesota should be the best state in the country to raise a family. And we're working to make that a reality. We're making sure that our early childhood education is the best in the country by investing in everything from quality child care to pre-K and early education scholarships. We're making sure that every child has that quality start and every parent has a safe place and knows that their child is being taken care of. We put a budget in front of you that continues to focus on that workforce, that continues to focus on those early starts. And with the capacity we're in, I remind everyone, without raising taxes, we have the capacity right now to expand pre-K to 23,000 more children, which is going to change lives for generations to come. It's children, and once we get them on that healthy start, once we get them on that path for success, we need to make sure that we're continuing to do our best. I'm proud of what we did last year in our education budget, but there's more to do. We have an opportunity with this budget, fiscally, responsibly to finally for the first time fully fund our schools the way we need to.

    And while I talked about the teachers, every one of us knows there are so many things that make
for a healthy school. There are so many things that
give that child that start as we talked about it,
whether it's stable housing or, in the case of what
we're knowing now, mental health care. Minnesota does
so many things right, but we're on the sidelines on this
issue of our counselors and our mental health
professionals in our schools. We have the capacity to
finally start to get there. We shouldn't be 49th or
50th for the number of those professionals that are in
there. We should be near the top, because the return on
the investment of tackling the issues that our children
are facing moves us so far ahead. So we have the
capacity to make sure every child gets that.

And what I want to ask you is let's also
think about this, and many of you have worked hard on
this. Outside of school, let's make sure there's enough
children's in-patient beds for children in crisis so
that they're not in an emergency room or they're not
being shipped to Iowa to try and care for this. Let's
create that infrastructure, people.

And I'll just say, as we're thinking about
all those things, I put a proposal in front of you. And
all of us in this chamber are incredibly proud. We feed
the world. We're the home of Norman Borlaug in the
Green Revolution. Our producers do an incredible job,
and because of that, we have the most abundant, safest, and affordable food supply in the world. But we still have people go to bed hungry, and we still have children do that. One of the ways that we can tackle this is, and we have the capacity to do that, every child who walks through the door of that school deserves to have a breakfast and a lunch. And I can tell you this. It is long past time. Let's get rid of the different-colored lunch tickets and the shaming around this, and let's just provide meals for our children. We can do that. We can do that so we get them off to a healthy start. We get our kids in a safe place. We provide the resources necessary. We demand results and outcomes because we all know the statistics. We rank us first in the nation until we start desegregating the data to our children of color. We have a moral responsibility to fix that, the same way we do in healthcare disparities, the same way we do in home ownership disparities. But the real reason, too, that goes along with that, we're going to have to create that workforce of the future, and no one can be left on the sidelines. So as we start thinking about paths to that future workforce, we need to prepare it today, and that path looks different for all children. Some may go with a four-year degree. Some may go in that direction. Others, we know now, and
there are schools out there and legislators on both
sides of the aisle advocating for this career training
that makes a difference and an impact in students'
lives. There's no reason that we should be the state
that manufactures the microchips that's in short supply.
It started here. We still are one of this country's
major manufacturers of microchips. We have the
opportunity to have modern manufacturing, modern
opportunity, and use our skilled trade professionals who
are here to make a difference. That's how we have to
start thinking about it. Get them on a good start. You
know that. Invest what we can, demand outcomes, and
then create pathways to the future. That makes us
competitive. That creates lives of joy.

And I'll tell you this, too. We need to
think about this. COVID upset everything around, who
can work from home, who can't. The income disparity
grew during that time. But the one thing that's clear
amongst people, the workforce shortage is demanding
folks to think and act differently about what it means
to have a career and be a joyful, healthy work
environment. So I would make the case to all of you, if
we're going to recruit and retain that quality workforce
after we've trained them, we'd better make sure that
we're able to keep them here. And what I know is no one
should have to make a decision between a paycheck and
taking a child to the doctor. No one should make a
difference.

Don't ask me. Ask 190 other nations and
every Fortune 500 company. They invest in paid family
leave. Large corporations do because it retains a
quality workforce and it increases productivity. That's
what this is about. The bill we put in front of you
offers 12 weeks of paid family leave to care for that
child. We know those first months how important they
are, and we know that people when they have this return
to those employers and stay longer. And we also have
the ability to approve 48 hours if you're sick or you
need to go to the doctor. These are just not only
morally the right thing to do; they are economically the
things that's going to grow our economy, keep our
workforce here, and make this state a destination of
where you want to live. So as we're creating this
workforce of the future, let's create that workplace of
the future. Let's follow the lead of some of our most
successful private partners who are making this happen
right now. We can just make sure no small businesses
are left behind. We can make sure that employees have
the opportunity to go where they want and employers and
entrepreneurs can start the businesses they want to.
Pass this paid family leave bill, and let's make a difference.

Again, we're not going to agree on everything, but I do think at the core of this we are getting close on this. I believe with all my heart everyone in this building loves this state with the same passion as any of the rest of us, and I also believe that everybody in this building wants what's best for our children. We just have a different idea how to do that sometimes. And we also know that that workforce, how do we get there, how do we listen, how do we be creative, how do we go with one another. And I will make the case, if we're going to do that and we're going to build a state where we have the best qualified workforce, we have folks ready to go, we have quality education systems, we need to build that future and move Minnesota forward and also protect our incredible natural resources. What I'm saying is we're going to be challenged, and many of you know we're already challenged. There are many in this room I know feel it may be too late, tackling this issue around climate, the issue about making sure that what is hitting, and it doesn't hit us all equally, the damage being done by climate, the amount of costs that it is to our infrastructure, to our health, and to our people. And
if we have this incredible workforce and we have this incredibly healthy state, we will have the folks who can be at the heart of, and in many cases our agricultural producers are leading the way sequestering carbon and moving in new, sustainable manners. So I would ask all of us as we think about this. We are blessed with incredible natural resources, certainly with our people, but certainly on our land. This is not an issue that forces us to choose an ideological position. It is simply happening, and there are solutions out there, free market solutions, it's why many businesses are adapting these, that can start moving us to a sustainable future and can start protecting the environment that we need. That's the Minnesota that we need. Protect our clean air, protect our water, protect our opportunity for our children to live the lives that many of us got to live so that that's there tomorrow. We can do that. We need to do that. And our children are telling us we must do it. Let's get this done.

We can do it. Let's prepare the workforce. Let's tackle the issues. Let's try and find common ground. It's not going to be in total. We're not going to be in total alignment. But I do know that those core values are there, and I do know that there's good ideas coming out.
So I know this is a pretty ambitious agenda, because Minnesotans are ambitious. And I know this is things that's going to make us talk about things that are uncomfortable. And I know there's a temptation to continue to get into our own corners or to try and demonize. You talk to folks, too. You move just a little further out of your bubble, and Minnesotans just say can't you guys get along and figure out how to fix some of these things? Can't you figure out how to reach a compromise on that? I would make the case that I think this body is better prepared than any other one in the United States. You've proven it. You've made it happen.

When I look around, and I look to myself, where can I do better? Where have I not reached out enough? Where have I disrespected the expertise that could have been there? And I take my lesson, be that many of us do, you watch people you admire, you watch how people respond, you watch how people deal with one another, and you try and take the best of that and incorporate it in. And this daunting division that's in front of us doesn't exist all the time everywhere. And you don't have to look very far to find incredible examples of how we want our state to work without the division even in some of the most difficult times.
Recently, many of you know the small town of Taopi was struck by a tornado. The newspaper headline the next day across the headline literally said, and it was totally accurate, half the town was gone in those moments. I drove down there, met with a local representative, who was already dirty up to the knees by helping people clean, was there comforting children and moving on. I surveyed that damage, met a couple people. First one I met was Mayor Mary Huntley. Now, like so many mayors who are here, and many of you who were mayors, that's a job of getting stuff done. They literally make things work. And the mayor woke up that morning of the tornado probably thinking about do we need to do the street repair, is the water main still good, how is the water treatment plant doing, how are we going to make this happen, and the things that happen in everyday life. The day ended with Mayor Huntley helping with others, moving the oldest citizen of Taopi, her mother, 94-year-old Ms. Huntley, and making sure that every single one of those citizens had a home to sleep in that was safe that night, had enough food to eat, and had clean water. She was doing all of this from the command post that was set up that drew responders from across the state. Everywhere I looked, Winona County, Dodge County, it didn't matter, they were all there.
The Adams American Legion was stuffed to the gills with donations from Minnesotans all across the state. And in that command post, in the mayor's kitchen, with a sense of optimism, she said, "We're down, but we're going to come back better than ever before."

Mayor Huntley is with us tonight. I would like to say thank you for that leadership.

She also told me there might have been an easier way to get her mother to come live with her, but now she is, so welcome.

And I don't know if everything happens by chance on the interconnectedness we all feel. On the way home from that visit, I got a call from my friend Chairman Kevin Jensvold of the Yellow Medicine people of the Upper Sioux, and he called and saw and heard we were down in Taopi, and he asked me if I knew, and he said, Taopi is named after a Dakota leader. The name Taopi means wounded in battle, but the man Taopi was known for his strength and resilience. I think I speak for all of us when I say to the people of our Taopi, while you're wounded, you will certainly heal. Your strength and resilience, Mayor, was on display. The gift that you gave to your people is a great example for all of us, and thank you for allowing me to be there. And there are even in the darkest nights, there's a sunrise the
next morning, and you're figuring it out. So thank you for being that example.

We're gritty. We're resilient. We're strong and diverse. We may argue, but I think we understand the blessings that have been given to us. No matter how divided it may feel at times, we're still connected. From Chairman Jensvold, people who have been on this land long before any of us, to Mayor Huntley in a small town thriving even in the midst of a disaster, to each of us in a divided legislature during some of the most divisive and hateful times we've seen in our politics, you've all figured out a way to find some solutions to some issues. [Indecipherable] made you happy as no one's bid any of us that. But Minnesotans are seeing the fruits of that. We're tackling some of these issues. And so what I would ask of all of us, my challenge, and I'm saying it to myself to make sure that I continue to do it, and when I don't, I'll publicly try and do the best I can, is let's try and lead by the example of these servant leaders, whether it's Sheletta Brundidge, whether it's Mayor Huntley, whether it's Kevin Jensvold, and the countless stories each and every one of you have and look at every single day. We can show our constituents that we can move together.

And I would ask this: Why don't we show
the rest of the country at this time that's really just
aching for a lack of chaos, a lack of civility [sic], a
lack of answers, why don't we show them that we possess
that capacity. We're not all going to leave real happy
about that because soon we're going to have to
compromise on issues we don't think that highly of. But
I'm not asking you to compromise on your deepest core
values. I'm asking us to tackle the things that we can
do right now to help those working families. Let's make
sure we've got our small businesses ready. Let's tackle
this issue of our workforce issues and our public
safety. And then let's try and put in place a 21st
Century workforce that solves these problems. I truly
believe it, and we've done it, that we can do this as
well as any place in the country. But not one of us is
going to do it alone. And by the nature of the voters,
we're divided. If we try and do the work we know we
were sent here to do, I don't believe there's anything
we can't conquer.

So I want to thank you all for being back
in this space. I want to thank each of you for being
the servant leaders that you are. And I want to thank
you for sitting here so patiently to listen. I know
you've missed this over the years, but it matters. It
matters, and I feel hopeful.
So may God bless each of you, and may God
bless Minnesota.
(The proceedings were adjourned at 6:58 4 p.m.)
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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

STATE OF MINNESOTA )

) ss.

COUNTY OF RAMSEY )

I, Lori Morrow, Stenographic Court Reporter and Notary Public in the State of Minnesota, do hereby certify that I reported the STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS OF MINNESOTA GOVERNOR TIM WALZ on April 24, 2022, in St. Paul, Minnesota and that the foregoing constitutes an accurate verbatim stenographic record taken by me.

WITNESS MY HAND AND SEAL this 24th day of April, 2022.

____________________________________
Lori Morrow, RDR, RMR, RPR, CRR, CBC
Notary Public, Hennepin County, Minnesota
My Commission Expires: January 31, 2025