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WisconsinEye Public Affairs Network

TO: Assembly Speaker Rep. Robin Vos
Assembly Minority Leader Rep. Greta Neubauer
Senate Majority Leader Sen. Devin LeMahieu
Senate Minority Leader Sen. Dianne Hesselbein

Update / February 16, 2026

THANK YOU

WisconsinEye is very appreciative of the bipartisan legislative action that provided \$50,000 to restore State Capitol coverage for the month of February.

- Your February funding support allowed the network to extensively cover State Capitol hearings, news conferences, and floor sessions. Many positive comments were received from news outlets, legislators and staff, as well as citizen viewers grateful for restoration of coverage.
- We have not been bashful in extending gratitude directed to elected officials. We pointedly communicated the bipartisan JClo funding action with prospective donors. This sent a positive, tangible signal that state elected officials are committed to working with WisconsinEye in the continuation of network operations and State Capitol programming.

MARCH AND BEYOND

We need your direction regarding a repeat allocation of \$50,000 in order to provide uninterrupted State Capitol programming for March.

- This will continue to build donor confidence that is vital to maintaining WisconsinEye operations through 2026 and beyond, most importantly, while the legislature is in session.
- The need for continued support from the state through CY 2026 is something we have raised in conversation with your offices. It is a critical component that ensures WisconsinEye's existence until such time as earnings would be received from a State of Wisconsin Investment Board (SWIB) invested account.

CONFIDENT, NOT PRESUMPTUOUS ... AND COMPLIANT

Signals within the Capitol clearly indicate that our state elected officials very much care about government transparency and citizen access and that they want WisconsinEye to continue operations.

- Our approach all along has been to accurately convey the operational needs of the network moving forward on the heels of a very different and extremely competitive philanthropic landscape post pandemic. Specifically, traditional philanthropic donors have been hit hard since Covid and the pool of funds is not what it used to be.
- We do not presume any specific outcomes yet remain hopeful that the strength of our 18+ year record of excellent public service will earn a strong bipartisan funding solution and partnership.
- WisconsinEye has complied with all requests for information (financial, viewership, governance, operations, programming, etc.) in addition to filing in February our 2025 annual report to the legislature (WisconsinEye has filed such reports each year since 2018). We have welcomed these opportunities to tell our story and share the impacts of our work.

FUNDING MIX

WisconsinEye is looking ahead to a funding mix that continues to solicit private donations – in combination with a level of continued state support.

- Prior to the pandemic, from network-build through mid-December of 2025, WisconsinEye raised nearly all financial support (95%) from private philanthropic sources, totaling over \$26 million dollars.
- We are so grateful for this incredible support of our mission, as well as for the \$1.2 million in state funding spread over 18 years of continuous State Capitol coverage.
- The challenge before all of us now, if WisconsinEye is to exist, is to pivot into a funding mix that has the state invested at a higher level – yet at a level that still requires the network to succeed in continued private fundraising.

ASSEMBLY & SENATE BILLS

The 96-0 bipartisan Assembly vote elevated positive conversations with prospective donors.

- The vote signaled three things: (1) elected officials want WisconsinEye to succeed, (2) it is a strong bipartisan declaration, (3) it creates a platform for long-term financial stability.

- Donors view this approach with confidence, knowing that while WisconsinEye must continue to raise private dollars, that requirement becomes an achievable goal to meet because it is coupled with a solid state commitment of financial partnership.

The Senate bill calls for a Request For Proposal (RFP) to serve the functions currently performed by WisconsinEye. WisconsinEye is happy to respond to an RFP, however, an RFP process (issuance, submission, evaluation of proposals, negotiations and awarding of a contract) will take considerable time. There is also the question from what appropriation an eventual contract might be funded. Further, WisconsinEye has funding to carry operations through February. An outstanding question is whether WisconsinEye would be in a position to maintain operations for any time period through which an RFP process might require.

WHAT'S NEXT

- We look forward to continued conversations with you and your teams to create – together – a winning plan for state policy makers, the citizens of Wisconsin, and WisconsinEye.
- WisconsinEye hopes to continue live coverage and archiving through March, dependent upon state support as in February.
- We endeavor to achieve necessary bridge funding for the remainder of 2026 with a mix of private donations supported by a continuation of state monthly support.
- We very much wish to achieve a bipartisan long-term funding solution that encourages donor support.

We look forward to your thoughts related to our continuing conversations and are available to discuss any and all possible avenues of continued operations at your convenience.