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Tuesday, February 24, 2026

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'I CAN'T TAKE ANYBODY ELSE'



COLE KINDIGER PHOTOS, RIVER VALLEY MEDIA GROUP

A hallway in Bethany St. Joseph's Onalaska Care Center. Despite a nationwide nursing shortage, the facility hasn't been seriously impacted, according to officials. They credit company-supported programs meant to attract and retain employees.

Elder care facilities grapple with nursing shortage

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Amid a yearslong, nationwide nursing shortage, long-term care facilities have been hit the hardest.

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed care providers out at a moment when staffing numbers already were threatened by low wages, demanding work and aging staff.

Facilities in the River Valley Region, at the mercy of national trends, have been implementing new solutions as their ability to provide care is at stake.

'We always have openings'

According to an analysis published by the Health Resources and Services Administration, federal authorities project a national shortage of 63,720 full-time registered nurses in 2030.

And although national labor data for long-term care facilities aren't reported by the HRSA, the problem among such centers appears to be much worse.

In a 2022 survey of long-term care facilities, 98% of nursing homes reported difficulty hiring staff — and the most-cited

reason was a lack of candidates.

Officials at River Valley Region long-term care facilities tended to agree that staffing was one of the biggest challenges they faced, and one that is unlikely to get any easier.

"Each of our campuses reviews vacancies every single week, and if you go out to the county's website, you will see that we always, 100% of the time ... have (medical assistant) and (registered nurse) openings," said Wanda Plachecki, director of long-term care and assisted living at La Crosse County.

'Hard, hard work'

Part of the reason for the shortage, facility officials said, is the job can be unforgiving.

"Working in long-term health care is hard, hard work," said Kristi Petersen, director of senior services at Gunderson St. Elizabeth's in Wabasha. "When we speak of a nursing assistant ... it's a 24/7 hour profession."

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An empty hallway in an unused wing of Bethany St. Joseph's Onalaska Care Center.

LEGISLATURE

Vos: Tax relief is 'likely' next

Assembly speaker expects special session

USA TODAY NETWORK

It's "very likely" lawmakers will return to pass a tax relief package in a special session, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos said Friday.

"I feel like we're making some progress, but it's very likely, in my opinion, that we'll have to have a special session or something outside the norm once we finally get a deal — which hopefully won't take a long time," the Rochester Republican said in an interview with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and CBS 58.

"But you know, it all depends on the earnestness of the people involved," Vos said.

Vos, Democratic Gov. Tony Evers and Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, went back to the drawing board in recent days in their effort to address Wisconsin's surging property tax bills by dipping into the state's projected \$2.5 billion surplus.

Evers said during his Feb. 17 State of the State address that he wouldn't accept a proposal put forward by Republican leaders that would lower property taxes and provide income tax rebates. The GOP proposal came in response to the governor previously having laid out what he would support in such a deal.

The GOP proposal ultimately failed to gain traction with the governor largely because it did not include a key demand: routing hundreds of millions in funding for a revenue stream for schools known as general school aids, which would also lower property tax rates.

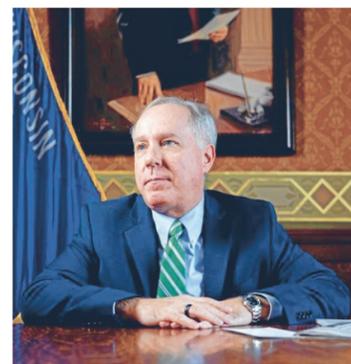
Any plan "must balance these important obligations a heck of a lot better than the plan Republican leaders sent me this week," he said.

The Assembly planned to complete its work for the year by the end of the week, with Vos hoping the deadline would propel leaders toward an agreement. Evers, in his Feb. 17 speech, asked lawmakers to stay in session until a plan was passed.

Without that deadline, what's the incentive for lawmakers to negotiate a deal?

"That's my problem," Vos said. "I have used that very, I think, effectively over time, that sometimes having a deadline makes people who don't really

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, speaks during a year-end interview in his office at the Wisconsin State Capitol on Dec. 30 in Madison.

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