



GREEN BAY AREA
CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

Legislative Agenda 2011-12

Adopted by Chamber Board 1-27-11

In these days of economic uncertainty, building a strong economy ought to be a public policy priority at all levels. A strong economy is necessary to improve our standard of living, provide economic security for all, and combat social problems like unemployment, poverty and crime. A strong economy provides the tax base needed to support education, protect the environment, build infrastructure and sustain the needy. The Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce supports a wide variety of initiatives that build stronger local, state and national economies. The best of these measures encourage business, large and small, to create jobs, help attract and retain capable employees and promote more effective and efficient provision of government services. We support:

Affordable Health Care

The rising cost of health care is a significant factor in the ability of businesses to compete in the world marketplace and attract the best workforce. Cost containment efforts should be focused on engaging consumers in making healthy lifestyle decisions and smart health care purchasing decisions, giving them the cost and quality information they need to make these decisions, allowing small businesses to band together to purchase health insurance, reducing inappropriate treatment, improving clinical quality and quality of outcomes, increasing benefit flexibility and choices, minimizing cost shifting, reforming medical malpractice liability, offering workplace wellness tax credits and other employer incentives, expanding the use of health information technology and making health plans more affordable and available for those without employer coverage. We oppose government-sponsored universal or single-payer health plans, and we oppose mandated health insurance benefits and coverage mandates because they increase the **cost** of insurance.

- State
 - Align state tax deductibility for health savings account contributions with federal tax code
 - Extend liability caps to long term care providers
 - Limit expansion of Badger Care and reform it to provide recipients with medical savings accounts and require participation in health evaluations and wellness programs
 - Make sure the state health insurance exchange supports these health care reform principles
- Federal
 - Repeal provisions of national health care reform that do not conform with these principles
 - Permit small business health insurance buying pools that are exempt from state mandates
 - Reform medical malpractice liability to limit legal fees and cap non-economic and punitive damages
 - Reduce Medicare and medical assistance reimbursement shortfalls

Limiting Taxation and Government Spending

Government should be held to the highest standard of responsibility in the use of taxpayer dollars. Spending caps or controls on state and local government units of all types can be useful so long as they promote efficiency, minimize cost shifting, give credit for spending below caps, and treat bonding (including TIF) appropriately. We oppose un-funded mandates imposed by one level of government on another and we support elimination of inappropriate existing un-funded mandates. Reduction of tax rates and simplification of tax systems contribute to the global competitiveness of business. Greater reliance should be placed on user fees and less reliance should be placed on property, income, interest, dividend and capital gains taxes.

- State
 - Balance the state budget under generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). Deal with the state's budget deficit through a spending freeze at current levels, and for areas that must increase due to prior commitments, pay for the increases with cuts elsewhere. Reach a balanced budget by making additional cuts or delaying scheduled tax relief. Pursue privatization of routine functions when cost-effective. Scale back eligibility for state entitlement programs to federal requirements. Pursue corrections reform measures that have been successful in other states in order to redirect state tax dollars.
 - Oppose business tax increases including: expansion or increase of the personal or corporate income tax; expansion or increase of the sales tax or elimination of existing sales tax exemptions
 - Repeal recent tax increases that inhibit economic development including: combined reporting, new top income tax bracket, domestic production activities tax, and reduction of capital gains tax exclusion from the federal standard
 - Limit state spending increases to inflation plus population growth or to personal income growth
 - End non-routine inter-fund transfers from segregated funds and borrowing for routine operational costs in order to balance the budget
 - Establish local spending caps (inflation plus new construction or growth in enrollment) that don't jeopardize the educational components of our local economic development initiatives
 - Continue to make efforts to finance the state budget stabilization fund
 - Eliminate the remaining categories of business equipment still subject to the state personal property tax



- Expand tax credits for research and development, technology grant and loan programs, and incentives for reinvestment of capital gains
- Reform the state school aids and shared revenue formulas to improve fairness among districts, to promote regional tax base sharing and to encourage government cooperation and consolidation of services
- Keep Wisconsin's tax code in conformity with the federal tax code
- The Revenue department must provide specific written guidance and answers to tax questions upon request. Taxpayers must be able to rely on past audit practices for guidance. The burden of proof on negligence penalties must lie with the government.
- Federal
 - Repeal the alternative minimum tax; continue to reduce the capital gains and dividend tax and eliminate the estate tax
 - Simplify the tax code whenever possible
 - Ensure the future of Social Security and Medicare with as little impact on taxes and benefits as possible, recognizing that the current structure of these programs may need to be changed

Government Efficiency and Cooperation

We believe that unbiased, performance-based evaluations of local government programs will show that cooperation between local governments in procurement, staffing and offering services on a regional basis will promote efficiency and benefit taxpayers. State government can assist such efforts by eliminating roadblocks to local government cooperation and consolidation of services and by providing incentives that promote it. We support appointment of a state commission to review statutes, the state constitution, government processes and funding formulas that create hurdles to cooperation and consolidation, such as powers of constitutional officers, revenue sharing formulas, township government, and county home rule powers.

- Consolidate provision of police, fire, assessment, public works, communications & other services
- Ensure the cooperative implementation of county and local comprehensive plans. For example, decisions about infrastructure (highways, sewer extensions, etc.) must be coordinated across municipal boundaries.
- Reorganize and consolidate government units and taxing districts to gain greater efficiency

Incentives for Economic Development

We support creation of a process to evaluate and publish the effectiveness, business impact and cost versus benefit of permitting decisions, regulatory activity and proposed legislation prior to a required hearing on a proposal. Agencies should periodically determine whether they can repeal regulations that no longer serve a useful purpose. In addition to providing a positive regulatory climate and limiting the tax burden on business, government can do much to aid and direct economic development by establishing and supporting venture and seed capital funds, by consolidating and improving the effectiveness of the state's business development incentive programs under a public/private Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and by providing financial support to the most effective local economic development programs. Wisconsin must continue to support regional economic development cooperation through programs like New North. Other efforts deserving of continued support are: the local Business Assistance Center, Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Program (WMEP), Job Advantage Training Grant Program, targeted development of local industry clusters, further development of gaming as an important basis for local tourism and use of a portion of gaming compact dollars for equity investment and venture capital funds. Repeal state prevailing wage legislation because it increases the cost of public works and other capital improvement projects. Local governments should provide leadership and incentives for redevelopment of suburban commercial areas like the Ashwaubenon Development District and Military Avenue. Local governments must ensure that impact fees, building permit fees, inspection and connection fees reflect the actual cost of providing such services. Local and state officials must work to secure our fair share of federal funding, especially infrastructure funds and defense procurement.

Legal Reform

Excessive litigation in a system where liability is no longer predictable and liability insurance premiums are soaring is costing billions of unnecessary dollars. Comprehensive reform of the legal system is needed including: a statute of limitations or repose, proof of causation, limiting the "risk contribution theory," curbs on legal fees, curtailment of venue shopping, limiting liability to a company's proportionate share of joint and several damage awards, limiting punitive and other non-economic damages to cases where intent to harm can be proven, limiting seller liability for products manufactured by others, and state adoption of the minimum federal standard on expert witness testimony.

International Trade

Comprehensive and fair free-trade agreements should be negotiated throughout the Western hemisphere, with the European Union, and bilaterally with selected other countries. We should ally ourselves with business associations in Europe to fight the EU's

increasingly anti-business regulations and legislation. We must monitor China’s progress toward meeting its World Trade Organization (WTO) obligations and encourage it to raise the value of its currency compared to the dollar. We must fight intellectual property theft and counterfeit manufactured goods as threats to the US economy. We support extension of the President’s Trade Promotion Authority.

Education

A world-class educational and workforce development system is essential to compete in the global economy. Measurement of education outcomes, improvement of accountability, encouragement of innovation and rewards for excellence are all important components of any effort to improve. At the same time, Wisconsin must move toward greater equity in the distribution of local school aids while maximizing the benefit to local taxpayers. Evaluate the cost/benefit of four-year-old kindergarten. Higher education systems in Wisconsin must continue to improve transferability of credits and expand cooperative program and degree offerings; they must be given the flexibility to adapt academic offerings, and adopt market-based tuition, financial aid and administrative policies that will result in more efficient use of tax dollars. At the same time, we support more equitable allocation of state higher education dollars to this region in order to sharply improve educational attainment in the New North, which has fallen well below state averages. Workforce retraining and all types of adult education, graduate and continuing education programs must be strengthened.

Improved Environmental Regulation

Protecting our environment is important for the health of our population and economy. Environmental laws and regulations must be based on peer-reviewed science, must be prioritized so that the most significant environmental problems and threats receive the most attention, and must be balanced with implementation costs and economic impacts. In general, state regulations should align with and should not exceed federal environmental regulations. Companies should be encouraged to do voluntary compliance audits by limiting penalties for those who find and correct deficiencies on their own initiative.

- Local
 - Continue to promote voluntary emission reductions by business and the public to reduce ozone and particulates
 - Green Bay Metropolitan Sewerage District (GBMSD) should adopt updated and achievable pre-treatment requirements for heavy metals that do not negatively impact local industry or the community
 - Oppose county-level variances on WDNR environmental rules
 - Municipalities should undertake ownership of and liability for storm water retention ponds
- State
 - Improve equity in water quality standards and pollution control enforcement between point dischargers and others, such as agricultural lands and municipal facilities
 - Delay implementation of new phosphorus and nitrogen regulations until other states in our region have enacted similar limits on point source dischargers
- Federal
 - Prevent degradation of the Great Lakes ecosystem by invasive species
 - Oppose regulatory efforts to control greenhouse gas emissions without legislative authority

Downtown Redevelopment

A vibrant downtown is important for the health of our regional economy and for our ability to recruit top talent to local firms. Redevelopment efforts should focus on the waterfront and on return to the original street grid system. We support expansion of the KI Convention Center (in conjunction with plans to expand expo and meeting space elsewhere in the community), and continued efforts to gain the highest and best use of the former mall site and the Larsen Green site.

Reform of Labor and Workplace Laws and Regulations

Wage and benefit mandates and inflexible employment and collective bargaining regulations drive up costs for businesses and taxpayers and affect our ability to compete in international markets. State and federal administration and enforcement of employment regulations should be consistent whenever possible in order to improve compliance. Cooperative labor/management policy making through the Unemployment Insurance and Workers Compensation Advisory Councils is working well in Wisconsin and should be continued.

- Local
 - Local governments should not enact ordinances regulating labor and the workplace as these are state and federal matters.



- State
 - Align public employee benefits, especially health and pension contributions and the sick-leave pay-out, to bring them into line with those offered in the private sector
 - Modify arbitration rules to require arbitrators to consider accepting benefit concessions, and to consider local economic conditions when making awards; alter current restrictions on repudiation of past practices
 - Conform state Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), minimum wage and wage & hour laws to federal standards
- Federal
 - Reform immigration laws, enacting a guest worker program
 - Allow businesses to recoup attorneys fees and court costs when they prevail in court against government agencies
 - Fight expansion of the family medical leave act
 -

Good Transportation

All parts of our transportation infrastructure must be properly maintained and expanded as necessary, including airports, seaports, rail systems, mass transit and highways. To this end, taxes and fees collected for transportation improvements must not be diverted for other uses.

- State
 - Support Interstate designation for US Hwy 41 to and through Green Bay
 - Restore gas tax indexing provided there are structural mechanisms to preserve the integrity of the transportation fund
 - Use state gas tax and vehicle registration funds exclusively for transportation
 - Oppose increases in vehicle registration and license fees without corresponding decreases in the income tax
 - Support formation of Regional Transit Authorities with the power to levy new or expanded taxes only following approval in a public referendum

Appropriate Energy, Telecommunications and Technology Regulation

An adequate supply of cost-effective energy should be obtained through use of diversified fuel sources—taking advantage of existing technologies, developing new technologies and encouraging conservation to provide for the energy needs of the future. Legislative and regulatory barriers that hinder growth and investment in telecommunications, e-commerce, biotechnology and genetic engineering must not be created. The private sector should be encouraged to compete aggressively and enforce responsible privacy policies.

- Encourage true competition among telecommunications companies in urban and suburban areas where there are multiple alternative providers
- Support expansion of broadband communications in rural areas
- Update state telecommunications regulation to promote investment in Wisconsin
- Oppose mandating ethanol content in gasoline and reduce or eliminate subsidies for ethanol production
- End the nuclear energy moratorium
- Promote cost-effective as well as environmentally conscious energy production