



Chamber Legislative Agenda

Approved by the Board of Directors - 07/24/07

Budget and Fiscal Policy

Philosophy Statement

Governmental budgets must be balanced.

To accomplish balanced budgets, reduced government spending and fiscal responsibility must be exercised.

Tax policy at all levels should be fair, understandable, and applied equitably.

Tax policy should favor savings and investment.

State government must recognize that tax policy has a significant effect on economic development, and should strive to improve Wisconsin's business tax climate.

Tax policy should be neutral as it relates to marital status.

Specific Positions:

1. Limit growth in state and local government to no more than the growth of the Consumer Price Index. The Chamber supports the creation of a zero-based budgeting system to accomplish the limited growth.
2. Tax relief for today must be carefully balanced against the need for budget stability in the long term.
3. A multi-year budgeting process should be established in order to have a clear picture of the out-year costs of current programs.
4. Non-budget items must not be part of the proposed state budget.
5. Tax advantaged opportunities for individuals to set aside money for retirement, medical expenses and education should be expanded.
6. Support the principle of "use value assessment" in determining agricultural land values for property tax purposes.
7. AMT should be passed to correct its indexing provision.

Economic Development

Philosophy Statement

Economic Development is essential for the future growth of the greater La Crosse area and must be an area wide priority.

Area economic development efforts must be achieved as a partnership of federal, state and local governments, local area agencies, area financial institutions, and area citizens and business people.

Specific Positions:

1. Support a state tax policy that will help create tomorrow's jobs through technology, education and workforce development.
2. Support Wisconsin state programs designed to increase the export of our products to the rest of the world.
3. Support the phase out of personal property tax on business equipment to help make Wisconsin more competitive in the economic development arena.
4. To benefit agriculture and manufacturing, we support the maintenance and improvement of all transportation infrastructure and waterways to allow the most efficient transportation of goods and services.
5. Support free trade issues including the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA).
6. Limit the application of joint and several liabilities in product liability cases, so that a manufacturer is only responsible for their proportionate share of any damage award.

Education

Philosophy Statement

Education is a necessity for which each generation is responsible to the next.

Public education must provide equal, accessible, yet fiscally responsible opportunities to prepare students to be lifetime learners, productive workers, responsible family members and active citizens of their community, state and nation.

Preserve, reinforce and further expand the core missions of higher education, which include education, training, research and providing services to the community.

The role of the Chamber is to provide quality information about these issues and to promote a better understanding of the responsibilities and opportunities of the business community in education.

Specific Positions:

1. Any revision of the funding formula for Wisconsin public education must seek to achieve Wisconsin's goal of equal educational opportunities for all public school students.
2. Given the increased role schools are asked to play in our communities, alternative funding sources and resources should be developed, including other governmental agencies, private or non-profit options, and new combinations created through public/private partnerships.
3. The future requires nothing less than Wisconsin's ongoing and unwavering support for public post-secondary education. Adequate funding for these institutions should be provided to assure the quality and accessibility of quality higher education. Fiscal responsibility and full accountability must be required of the institutions.
4. Encourage employment training by establishing tax incentives to encourage the expansion of employer-sponsored education opportunities for prospective and current employees.
5. Eliminate unnecessary barriers and burdensome requirements that limit the development of charter schools statewide.
6. Support participation, cooperation and collaboration within Wisconsin's PK-12 and post-secondary educational system by citizens, educators and community organizations.
7. We encourage cooperation among various entities within the state's higher education system to encourage mobility and transferability for students within the state's higher educational systems.
8. Support research grants for regional education institutions in subjects that would benefit economic growth and skill levels in areas of regional expertise and demand.

Employment

Philosophy Statement

The role of government should be to encourage employment and never be an obstacle to growth of the economy.

Specific Positions:

1. Chamber members need to attract and keep a qualified workforce. To help achieve that:
 - public (and private) educational institutions must be responsive to the needs of the business community, especially in preparing their student for work, and
 - the public workforce investment system, such as the Job Center, must be responsive to the needs of the business community in providing an effective labor exchange, screening and preparing job seekers to meet current and future workplace expectations, and
 - real time labor market information on wages, employment trends, commuting patterns and employment demographics must be made available for businesses planning future growth.
2. The Chamber advocates a restrained federal, state, and local employment regulatory environment. Regulatory agencies must be supportive and less punitive in order to maintain and create jobs in Wisconsin.
3. Consideration should be given to supporting tax incentives for Wisconsin businesses hiring new graduates with associate, bachelor or graduate degrees from Wisconsin post-secondary institutions.
4. Support tax incentives for Wisconsin businesses for training and retraining workers to keep them competent, productive, competitive and keep jobs in Wisconsin.

Energy

Philosophy Statement

All residents and businesses in the greater La Crosse area should enjoy an adequate energy supply which is competitively priced and produced by energy suppliers operating in an efficient and environmentally responsible manner, using domestically available resources to the greatest extent practical.

Specific Positions:

1. Support the energy industry and government working together on regulatory reforms which lower the costs of energy to industry, businesses, and all consumers while maintaining reliable, long-term energy supplies to our region.
2. Support the development of domestic energy resources, including economically feasible renewable, to help meet our energy needs and reduce our reliance on foreign energy supplies.
3. Support development of new plant sites, transmission and generation systems that ensure an adequate energy supply for economic development and residential building.
4. Reform the current utility regulatory framework to eliminate unnecessary requirements that create regulatory and economic uncertainty, and delay needed capacity enhancements and drive up cost.
5. The lack of federal involvement in the solution to shipping rates for coal used in the production of electricity is having a negative impact to the cost of doing business and living in western Wisconsin. Congress needs to address the inequities that exist.

Environment

Philosophy Statement

To provide the greater La Crosse area with an improving level of environmental quality that satisfies the needs of the present and promises a better future.

Improving environmental quality is a continuing process, dependent on planning, cooperation, and the active participation of citizens, business interests and government.

Specific Positions:

1. Encourage federal, state and local government agencies to develop balanced environmental regulations which are realistic, affordable and which do not place Wisconsin's economy at a competitive disadvantage.
2. Encourage the preservation of natural aesthetic characteristics of the area bluff lands through responsible stewardship and cooperative planning.
3. Promote balance between natural, recreational, and commercial uses of the Mississippi River and its tributaries, so that they are clean, fishable, swimmable, navigable, and accessible.
4. Encourage the cleanup and redevelopment of blighted urban areas.
5. Support the establishment of specific, enforceable, time limits for the issuance of environmental permits.

Government Reform, Cooperation & Planning

Philosophy Statement

That governmental planning be accomplished in a spirit of cooperation between entities with the common interests of safety, quality of life, environment, economic diversity, and the minimization of internal disruption as guiding principles.

Strive for the ideal, while at the same time being realistic in the accomplishment and time horizon for the achievement of goals.

Specific Positions:

1. We call for elected officials to investigate the financial and efficiency benefits of creating a sewer and water district to serve the Coulee Region area. Specific areas to be considered would include consolidating ownership and management of sewer and water services and facilities and the potential benefits of such an arrangement.
2. We encourage our elected officials to investigate the financial and efficiency benefits of creating a metro council or council of governments which could cover such items as purchasing, a common police department, fire department, and regional airport to serve the Coulee Region. The group needs to meet on a regular announced basis giving the public an opportunity to participate.
3. Support the reduction in size of the County board. This reduction will add accountability to it elected members.
4. Maximize the utilization of existing information, previous studies, and agencies and entities already in place.
5. We encourage cooperation and additional boundary agreements between local units of government, which could lead to greater development of the region.
6. Support coordination of local area master plans so as to create a smooth transition along local municipal boundaries.

Health Care

Philosophy Statement

Health Care Reform: Health care reform efforts should involve all sectors including providers, consumers, government, employers and insurers. Provide sustainable, responsible solutions that promote healthy lifestyles, and provide incentives to improve health outcomes and reduce the costs of providing care.

Value: Providers of health care services must strive to provide the highest value with demonstrated outcomes. Market factors will help determine the level and variety of services available in our area.

Accessibility and Affordability: Timely, accessible and affordable healthcare services, with the freedom of provider selection, should be available to all the people of our area.

Personal Responsibility: The public must be educated and accept personal responsibility for adopting prevention and wellness strategies, as well as making wise consumer choices in obtaining health care services.

Specific Positions:

1. Support government program reimbursement to address the inequitable payment formulas that harm rural and non-urban communities and results in cost shifting to employers. Adequate reimbursement for medical and dental services are a critical need for Wisconsin to recruit and retain the best medical, dental and healthcare services.
2. Support administrative simplification and cost-reduction by eliminating over-regulation and non-value added mandates. Sufficiently fund legislated mandates.
3. Support transparency and cost effective methods of achieving quality outcomes for care. Also, provide legal protection for transparency, peer review and quality improvement efforts.
4. Promote the development of health care cooperatives and other coverage financing models that will help businesses pool their health care purchasing power and increase personal accountability.
5. Urge federal and state government to review the increased need for services and support for people with disabilities because of longer life expectancy and the people intensive nature needed for care of this population.
6. Support existing medical malpractice systems in the state including Wisconsin's existing tort reform legislation and funding levels for the patient compensation fund.
7. Support health care reform efforts that involve all sectors including providers, consumers, government, employers and insurers. Provide sustainable, responsible solutions that promote healthy lifestyles, as well as, reform of operations and incentives in order to simultaneously improve health and reduce cost.

Transportation

Philosophy Statement

Efficient transportation is an essential and basic component of the infrastructure of our area.

It is essential to maintain a strong business climate, to assure safe travel of people and goods within, to, and through our area, and to preserve our quality of life.

Transportation improvements should be planned with a comprehensive vision to improve and enhance the greater La Crosse area.

Specific Positions:

1. Support the coordination of regional land use planning and transportation planning. We also encourage area governments to consider consumer needs in making cooperative decisions that enhance transportation alternatives throughout the entire area.
2. The Chamber recognizes the importance of rail travel and supports the current High-Speed-Rail Study that was conducted by the states of Wisconsin and Minnesota, which designates a high speed rail link from Minneapolis, through La Crosse, to the Milwaukee/Chicago areas. Federal funding needs to be committed for High Speed Rail to become a reality.
3. We are in support of addressing critical north/south transportation needs through the greater La Crosse area. We further support the creation of a development plan to enhance the growth of the region, including neighborhoods throughout La Crosse, support mass transit improvements as a necessary part of this process, and support preservation and enhancements to the La Crosse River Valley Marsh as outlined in the La Crosse River Valley Land Use Plan.
4. Support a unified approach to maintaining and improving the Mississippi River and its potential for commercial and recreational transportation, including establishment of a single harbor commission or Port Authority.
5. Support congressional action to improve rail competition, removing obsolete anti-trust protection for railroads, eliminating competitive barriers, and making it easier for consumers to bring action to the Surface Transportation Board (STB).