



# Chamber Legislative Agenda

Approved by the Board of Directors - June 23, 2009

**Key:(F=Federal issue; S=State issue; L=Local issue)**

# **Budget and Fiscal Policy**

## ***Philosophy Statement***

*Governmental budgets must be balanced.*

*To accomplish balanced budgets, government must reduce spending and exercise fiscal responsibility.*

*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, taking into account current economic conditions. The Chamber supports the creation of a zero-based budgeting system to accomplish limited growth.(S/L)
2. Balance tax relief for today against the need for budget stability in the long term.(F/S/L)
3. Establish a multi-year budgeting process in order to have a clear picture of the out-year costs of current programs. (F/S/L)
4. Eliminate non-budget items from the proposed state budget.(S)
5. Expand tax advantaged opportunities for individuals to set aside money for retirement, medical expenses and education. (F/S)
6. Support the principle of "use value assessment" in determining agricultural land values for property tax purposes. (S/L)
7. Support permanence of the Alternative Minimum Tax provision from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. (F)
8. Oppose the use of one-time federal payments to offset current operating deficits.(F/S)
9. Oppose the use of segregated funds, such as the transportation fund or the patient compensation fund, as a source of funding the general purpose revenue government budget. (F/S)
10. Oppose the expansion of sales tax on service activities (advertising, professional services and goods not currently taxed) because of the potential impact on local businesses. (S)

# **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.(S)
2. Support Wisconsin state programs designed to increase the export of our products to the rest of the world.(S)
3. Phase out the personal property tax on business equipment to help make Wisconsin more competitive in the economic development arena.(S)
4. Support and encourage the maintenance and improvement of all transportation infrastructure and waterways in order to allow the most efficient transportation of goods and services.(F/S/L)
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). (F)
6. Limit the application of joint and several liabilities in product liability cases, so that a manufacturer may only be responsible for their proportionate share of any damage award.(F/S)
7. Oppose state agency policies and regulations that may inhibit and/or discourage economic development in WI. (S/L)

# 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. Revise the funding formula for Wisconsin public education in order to achieve Wisconsin's goal of equal educational opportunities for all public school students.(S)
2. Develop alternative funding sources and resources, including other governmental agencies, private or non-profit options, and new combinations created through public/private partnerships.(S/L)
3. Support public post secondary education by providing adequate funding for these institutions to assure accessibility of quality higher education. Fiscal responsibility and full accountability must be required of the institutions. (F/S)
4. Encourage employment training by establishing tax incentives to encourage the expansion of employer-sponsored education opportunities for prospective and current employees.(S)
5. Eliminate unnecessary barriers and burdensome requirements that limit the development of charter schools statewide.(S)
6. Support participation, cooperation and collaboration within Wisconsin's PK-12 and post-secondary educational system by citizens, educators and community organizations.(S/L)
7. Encourage cooperation among various entities within the state's higher education system to allow mobility and transferability for students within the state's higher educational systems.(S)
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.(S)

# **Employment**

## ***Philosophy Statement***

*The role of government should be to encourage employment and never be an obstacle to economic growth.*

### ***Specific Positions:***

1. Support employers' ability to attract and retain a qualified workforce by:
  - Encouraging public and private educational institutions to respond to the needs of the business community, especially in preparing their students for work,(S/L)
  - Encouraging public workforce investment systems, such as the Job Center, to respond to the needs of the business community by providing an effective labor exchange, screening, and preparing job seekers to meet current and future workplace expectations, and (S/L)
  - providing real time labor market information on wages, employment trends, commuting patterns and employment demographics for businesses planning future growth.(F/S/L)
2. Advocate a restrained federal, state, and local employment regulatory environment by ensuring that regulatory agencies legislate in a supportive and less punitive manner in order to maintain and create jobs in Wisconsin.(F/S/L)
3. Support tax incentives for Wisconsin businesses that hire new graduates with associate, bachelor or graduate degrees from Wisconsin post-secondary institutions.(S)
4. Support tax incentives for Wisconsin businesses for training and re-training workers to keep them competent, productive and competitive in order to keep jobs in Wisconsin.(S)

# 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. (F/S/L)
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.(F/S)
3. Support development of new plant sites, transmission and generation systems that ensure an adequate energy supply for economic development and residential building.(F/S/L)
4. Encourage the reform of the current utility regulatory framework to eliminate unnecessary requirements that create regulatory and economic uncertainty, delay needed capacity enhancements, and drive up costs.(F/S)
5. Urge Congress to address the lack of federal involvement in the solution to shipping rates for coal used in the production of electricity. The inequities that exist have created a negative impact to the cost of doing business and living in western Wisconsin.(F/S)
6. Support climate change legislation that works to develop fair and comprehensive policies to address greenhouse gas emissions; and that will cause no harm to electric reliability while having minimal impact on affordability while still improving the environment.(F/S/L)
7. Oppose climate change policies that will harm or inhibit economic growth in WI. (F/S/L)
8. Support collaborative community approaches to energy efficiency, renewable energy, and environmental stewardship.(L)

# **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 governmental agencies to develop balanced environmental regulations which are realistic, affordable, and do not place Wisconsin's economy at a competitive disadvantage.(F/S/L)
2. Encourage the preservation of natural aesthetic characteristics of the area bluff lands through responsible stewardship and cooperative planning.(L)
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.(F/S/L)
4. Encourage the cleanup and redevelopment of blighted urban areas.(L)
5. Support the establishment of specific, reasonable, and enforceable time limits for the issuance of environmental permits.(S/L)

# **Government Reform, Cooperation & Planning**

## ***Philosophy Statement***

*Governmental planning should 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.*

*The Chamber will strive for the ideal, while at the same time be realistic in the accomplishment and time horizon for the achievement of goals.*

### ***Specific Positions:***

1. Call for elected officials to investigate the financial and efficiency benefits of creating a sewer and water district to serve the Coulee Region area. Consideration should be given to consolidating ownership and management of sewer and water services and facilities, and the potential benefits of such an arrangement.(L)
2. 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, a common fire department, and a regional airport to serve the Coulee Region. The group shall meet on a regular announced basis giving the public an opportunity to participate.(L)
3. Support a reduction in the size of the County board. This reduction will add accountability to its elected members.(L)
4. Maximize the utilization of existing information, previous studies, and agencies and entities already in place.(F/S/L)
5. Encourage greater development of the region through cooperation and additional boundary agreements between local units of government.(L)
6. Support coordination of local area master plans so as to create a smooth transition along local municipal boundaries.(L)
7. When creating TIF districts, Government should consider the number of jobs created, the total amount of investment, and the overall impact on the community. They should determine when/where TIF districts are created by using the same criteria for all requests.

# 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 create incentives to improve health outcomes and reduce the costs of health care.*

**Value:** *Health care organizations strive to provide the highest value services with quality outcomes. Market factors will help determine the level and type 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 remedy 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 is a critical need for Wisconsin to recruit and retain the best medical, dental, and healthcare services.(F/S)
2. Support administrative simplification and cost-reduction by eliminating over-regulation and non-value added mandates. Sufficiently fund already legislated mandates.(F/S)
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.(F/S)
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.(F/S)
5. Urge federal and state government to review policies, resources, and care models for people with disabilities, chronic disease, and late life care needs because of longer life expectancy and the people intensive nature needed for care of this population.(F/S)
6. Support existing medical malpractice systems in the state including Wisconsin's existing tort medical malpractice caps and funding levels for the patient compensation fund.(S)
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 health system and payment reform to improve health and reduce cost.(F/S/L)

# **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.(S/L)
2. Support 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, and the Chamber recognizes this as an extremely high priority issue for the area and will urge Congress to provide federal funding for the project.(F/S/L)
3. Support addressing the critical north/south transportation needs through the greater La Crosse area. Also, 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.(S/L)
4. Support a unified approach to maintaining and improving the Mississippi River and its potential for commercial and recreational transportation, including the establishment of a Port Authority.(S/L)
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).(F)
6. Support railroad anti-trust legislation in an effort to end monopolistic behavior by railroads which have dramatically increased energy costs, agricultural expenditures, and the transportation of other basic goods in Western WI. Specifically, support the *Railroad Antitrust Enforcement Act of 2009*, introduced by members of our WI delegation: Senator Kohl and Representative Baldwin. (F)