



La Crosse Chamber
Oktoberfest
in the Capitol
2014

601 7th Street North
La Crosse, WI 54601
608-784-4880

LACROSSECHAMBER.COM



About the La Crosse Area Chamber

Formed in 1868, the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce continues to unite as one voice approximately 800 businesses. Together, we call the economic basin surrounding La Crosse, Wisconsin home as our businesses, workforce, media and commerce flow back and forth throughout western Wisconsin, southeast Minnesota and northeast Iowa.

Please find enclosed the issues that impact our regional economy and that bring us to Madison. We hope you consider the enclosed information as you review bills before you, and we ask for your assistance in getting these issues resolved.

Attendees

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Department of Administration

Mike Huebsch

The Chamber delegates would appreciate:

- Budget Overview & Climate
- DOT Highway 53 Funding / Coulee Connections Funding Insight
- Other pressing issues impacting businesses from your office

The Chamber's Legislative Agenda: Budget & Fiscal Policy

Philosophy Statement

Governmental budgets must be balanced.

To accomplish this, government at all levels must reduce spending and exercise fiscal responsibility.

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

Tax policy at all levels should be fair, understandable, and applied equitably. The policy should favor savings and investment.

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. Support the creation of a zero-based budgeting system to help accomplish limited

growth and ensure that all spending policies receive regular review.

2. Balance tax relief measures against the need for budget stability in the long term, with an emphasis on ensuring continued fiscal soundness.
3. Establish a multi-year budgeting process in order to have a clear picture of the out-year costs of current programs.
4. Eliminate non-budget items from the biennial state budget.
5. Expand tax advantaged opportunities for individuals to set aside money for retirement, medical expenses and education.
6. Oppose the use of one-time federal or segregated funds, such as the transportation fund or the patient compensation fund, as a source of funding the general purpose revenue government budget.
7. Oppose the expansion of sales tax on service activities (e.g., advertising, professional services and goods not currently taxed) because of the potential negative impact on local businesses.



Department of Health Services & Commission on Insurance

Insurance Commissioner Ted Nickel & Health Services Secretary Kitty Rhoades

Feedback:

- The Chamber appreciates the state's role in creating a competitive marketplace for health insurance. Wisconsin is fortunate to have a diversified marketplace where there are an array of statewide and regional plan options for employers and citizens.
- La Crosse and our neighboring counties generally fared well in successfully enrolling citizens in private coverage following disenrollment from Badger-Care/Medicaid. The take-up rates in the greater La Crosse area ranged from 48.4% to 62.7% whereas the statewide average was 54%.
- The Chamber appreciates the department's recently released report on the burden of suicide and the data which shows that men between the ages of 45 and 54 living in rural areas like western Wisconsin have the highest suicide rates. In our area, both Mayo and Gunderson participate in two collaborative task forces that deal with mental health and alcohol. It is a broad-based community effort which includes participants from county health, other social service agencies, the three post-secondary schools and area school districts.
- Chronic underfunding of Medicaid has led to cost-shifting and the result is higher health care costs for employers. We support Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce initiative to reduce the "hidden tax" created by this underfunding. We also want to acknowledge current and past efforts by the Department and the Governor to minimize this cost shifting in its biennial budget.

- With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid eligibility changes, patient visits to St. Clare Health Mission, a free clinic jointly operated by Mayo and Gunderson, have dropped by 40% - from 5,000 visits in 2013 to an estimated 2,000 visits in 2014

Key Points:

- 1. Strong intergovernmental and public-private partnerships are key to maximizing enrollment.** Last year employers, Gunderson, Mayo, the counties, health plans, insurance agents and other stakeholders collaborated with the DHS on the Western Wisconsin Region Enrollment Network, which is a model and still in operation, to help maximize enrollment in healthcare coverage.
- 2. Continue to partner in providing transparent data on Medicaid and marketplace plan take-up rates** as Wisconsin enters the second year of the federal marketplace. The more localized the data, the better, including down to the zip code level. The emergence of real time and localized data can help local assistants identify best practices around outreach and populations where more attention is needed.

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The Chamber's Legislative Agenda: Health Care & Insurance

Philosophy Statement

La Crosse County is a national leader in the cost-effective delivery of health care. The integrated healthcare provided in the region is a model for the entire nation.

Effective health care reform requires involvement of all sectors including providers, consumers, government, employers and insurers. Reform should provide sustainable solutions that promote health, and individual responsibility.

All area residents deserve timely, accessible, affordable health care.

Specific Positions:

1. Realign reimbursement mechanisms to reward value, not volume. Make it easier for employers and insurers to develop insurance plans that reward doctors for keeping patients healthy. In this context, value is defined as high quality, safety, service and low cost over time.
2. Support incentives for businesses and individuals participating in wellness programs.
3. Support transparency and cost effective methods to achieve quality outcomes. The components essential to transparency include legal protection, peer review and quality improvement efforts.
4. Support review of policies, resources, and care models for people with disabilities, chronic diseases, and late life care due to longer life expectancy and the people-intensive nature of care for these populations.
5. Support health insurance that is affordable and accessible for any person who wants it. Carefully examine of the number of mandates placed on insurance products. Collaborate with the federal government to ensure a smooth transition to the health insurance marketplace.
6. Support the existing medical malpractice system including the current caps. Maintain the integrity of the patient compensation fund.
7. Ensure Medicaid is a safety net for individuals with no other insurance options. Taxpayers should be the payer of last resort.
8. Allow businesses to pool together and negotiate with health insurers to lower cost, improve choice and facilitate competition.
9. Encourage harmonization of regulations across the tri-state region to minimize regulatory burden on citizens, businesses and the healthcare system.





Department of Transportation

Mark Gottlieb

Key Points:

- **Delay a recommendation to the Transportation Projects Commission on the USH 53 corridor project until June 30, 2015, to allow time for community dialog to occur regarding next steps.** The Chamber is particularly concerned with the threat to safety, efficiency, and economic development in the La Crosse region.
- **Increase funding of the Transportation Fund** due to the \$680 million annual shortfall in the state transportation budget that is expected to balloon to \$15 billion by 2024.

Without additional funding, the percentage of roads in the state highway system that are currently rated at poor or worse will more than double from 20% to 42% in 2023.

The Chamber recognizes that key pillars of Wisconsin's economy, including manufacturing, agriculture and tourism are dependent on the state's transportation infrastructure. Wisconsin's economy relies on safe and efficient transportation systems.

We are aware of the constitutional amendment on the November 4th ballot that prohibits raids on designated transportation funds, but that will not address the projected shortfall.

- **Assist with Airport viability.** Our airport remains a key access point to our domestic and global marketplace yet enplanement rates drop as people drive to larger markets. Our airport must remain viable.

Questions

- The DOT hosted a listening session in La Crosse and around the state. What common ideas/themes have emerged that would provide a long-term solution to the state's transportation budget shortfall?
- With regard to railroad transportation: How do we add an expand and increase frequency of service?

How do we increase safety of freight rail carriers?

Is there anything Wisconsin can do to reduce the backlogs of rail cars hitting hubs and slowing down shipments?
- How can communities such as La Crosse maintain the viability of our airport? Is the state considering any assistance?

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The Chamber's Legislative Agenda: Transportation

Philosophy Statement

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

Efficient transportation is essential to maintain a strong business climate, to assure safe travel of people and goods, and to preserve 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. Encourage area governments to consider consumer needs in making cooperative decisions that enhance transportation alternatives throughout the area.
2. Improve passenger rail service to enhance economic development in Western Wisconsin. Encourage the expansion and frequency of service.
3. Support addressing the critical capacity for safe transportation needs through the greater La Crosse area.
4. Support a balanced use approach to maintaining and improving the Mississippi River and its potential for commercial and recreational transportation.
5. Support federal action to eliminate competitive barriers, and continue to ease consumer's ability to bring action to the Surface Transportation Board. This includes supporting railroad anti-trust legislation to end monopolistic behavior by railroads which negatively impacts the economy.
6. Support the state's involvement in funding infrastructure improvements at the airport. Encourage additional transportation funding for the purpose of airport development. Support the pursuit of additional air service options to enhance the economic impact the airport provides to the region. Encourage the state's involvement in providing air service marketing support.



Department of Natural Resources Cathy Stepp

Key Points:

- **Develop balanced environmental regulations that are realistic and affordable.** Regulations should not place Wisconsin's economy at a competitive disadvantage. Industry and government should work together on reforms that lower the costs of doing business with environmental regulations that are realistic and cost effective.
- **The DNR's delayed response with decisions or actions can cause projects to fail, drastically increasing costs.** The DNR needs to be more responsive to the pressing permit and land use time-line of landowners, land developers and building contractors.
- **Consistency in DNR findings and**

decisions needs to be achieved to ensure businesses have the consistency to run their businesses effectively. Current DNR official findings are often subjective by the individual and without internal review, leading to a business' frustration.

Questions

- What types of internal processes are in place to review decisions made by individual DNR staff and balance those decisions with agency goals?
- What can be done to ensure individual DNR staff are abiding by standard guidelines, applying decision making criteria uniformly, and following legislative intent?

The Chamber's Legislative Agenda: Environment

Philosophy Statement

Improve the quality of the environment in the La Crosse area to best preserve resources for today and for the futures.

Improving environmental quality is a continuing process that requires 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 that are realistic and affordable. Regulations should not place Wisconsin's economy at a competitive disadvantage.

2. Encourage responsible stewardship and cooperative planning that maintains the area's natural beauty.
3. Promote balance between natural, recreational, and commercial uses of the Mississippi River and its tributaries, ensuring that these waters are clean accessible, navigable, and for the enjoyment of fishing and swimming.

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