



Legislative Agenda 2016

A strong economy with better paying jobs is necessary to improve the 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 support the needy. The best of these measures seek to encourage entrepreneurs to create jobs, help attract and retain capable workers and encourage more effective and efficient government services. The Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce supports a wide variety of initiatives that build stronger local, state and national economies, including:

I) Taxation and Government Spending

Government should be held to the highest standard of responsibility in the use of taxpayer dollars. The Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce will promote efforts to minimize the federal, state and local tax burden, as well as encourage economic growth and development to expand the tax base, ensuring a high quality of life in Eau Claire.

- State Priorities
 - Continue to look for ways to reduce wasteful spending (regularly audit all state agencies, entitlement reform etc) and limit increases in state spending
 - Encourage balanced budgeting
 - Adherence to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)
 - Fund budget-stabilization fund to deal with fluctuating revenues
 - Continue to reform Unemployment Insurance to help fill current and future job openings and to address the unemployment trust fund shortfall. Support drug testing as a qualification to receive unemployment benefits.
 - Support indexing of the WI Minimum Tax to match the federal AMT
- Federal Priorities
 - Work to reduce the federal budget deficit through higher economic growth, spending restraint and entitlement reform – not increased taxes
 - Repeal the alternative minimum tax (AMT)
 - Reduce tax rates on capital gains and dividend income
 - Ensure faster cost recovery of capital investment
 - Reduce corporate income tax rates (Nearly 40% - US now has the highest in the world putting us companies at a competitive disadvantage)
 - Advance simplification and ease of compliance with the Internal Revenue Code

II) 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 health care purchasing decisions, improving quality, increasing benefit

flexibility and choices, minimizing cost shifting, reforming medical malpractice liability and improved information technology.

- **State Priorities**
 - Address Medicaid reimbursement shortfalls and cost shifting in Western Wisconsin.
 - Tax credits for workplace wellness programs.
 - Improve the collection and analysis of health care outcome data, make quality transparent and encourage consumers, business purchasers, and insurance companies to direct resources to providers who demonstrate a commitment to patient safety, improving quality, and reducing unnecessary or inappropriate treatment.
- **Federal Priorities**
 - Support linking physician Medicare reimbursements to outcome-based benchmarks and adherence to best practices. Physician reimbursement rates currently are set by a sustainable growth rate formula that needs comprehensive reform. WI loses under the current formula.
 - Reduce Medicare/Medicaid fraud and abuse
 - Repeal the PPACA or the most onerous provisions including the employer and other expensive mandates and provisions that discourage consumer focused healthcare.
 - Support stand-alone legislation that offers tax credits for employer-sponsored workplace wellness programs for employees.
 - Support changes in Health Savings Accounts to make them more flexible and appealing to consumers and plan sponsors.
 - Support defining full time employment as a 40 hour work week for purposes of health insurance requirements.

III) Education

A world-class educational system is essential for businesses to remain competitive in a global economy. The Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce believes that adequate funding, measurement of education outcomes, improvement of accountability, encouragement of innovation and rewards for excellence are all important components of any effort to improve quality education from kindergarten to college.

- **State Priorities**
 - Ensure the continued alignment of higher education programs to meet the talent development needs of our economy
 - Maintain the valuable UW Family Medical Residency Program in Eau Claire that has been the source for a significant number of the current physician members of the regional medical community.
 - Continue local control and funding of the state's Technical College System, which has provided the needed responsiveness to the needs of local employers.
 - Based upon critical regional employer needs, support the continuing efforts of the Northwest Wisconsin Engineering Consortium to collaboratively pursue additional engineering programs at UW-Eau Claire, UW-River Falls and UW-Stout.
 - Support tax incentives to encourage employer sponsored education and training
 - Give local U System campuses the flexibility and autonomy they need to deploy and manage resources, create effective regional consortiums, make curriculum decisions to address region-specific needs, and maintain excellence in their recognized areas of specialization.

Federal Priorities

- Expand educational options for students, e.g. early enrollment of high school students in college-level courses, online learning programs, charter schools, etc.
- Increase focus on science, engineering, technology and math to be competitive with other industrialized nations

IV) Economic Development

The Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce supports and will aggressively advocate for economic development initiatives that will make area businesses stronger, healthier and more prosperous.

- **Local Priorities**
 - Encourage and support collaboration between the private and public sector – including business, local governments and education – through public-private partnerships that make public services and facilities more feasible and cost effective.
 - Support downtown, city and regional economic development efforts which recognize the impact of quality of life and demographic trends in attracting high-paying jobs and driving increases in the tax base.
 - Support the Confluence Project in downtown Eau Claire, including the public funding contributions by the City of Eau Claire, Eau Claire County and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.
 - Support prudent use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as an important tool for local governments to capture the value created by new development to provide essential infrastructure, but which also create long-term tax base increases and other economic benefits.
- **State Priorities**
 - Continue financial programs/initiatives to bolster innovation and attraction of capital intensive projects (including tax credit portability, crowd funding and other pro-business initiatives).
 - Align economic development, educational, business and public leadership around key target industry sectors tied to statewide and regional clusters. Develop statewide business retention program strategies to retain leading position in key industry sectors.
 - Utilize available technology to manage, build and expand effectiveness of business interactions and visibility across multiple economic development stakeholders.
 - Continue initiatives that address the skills gap.
 - Pursue comprehensive regulatory reform that alleviates the overwhelming and unclear regulations that damage businesses' confidence, causing them to hesitate before investing and hiring.
- **Federal Priorities**
 - Enact an investment tax credit to promote investment
 - Reduce borrower and lending fees for small business lending programs
 - Collect accurate, timely information on industry and labor market trends to ensure that job recruitment and training systems meet the needs of employers.
 - Eliminate redundant and overlapping federal job training programs and give state and local policy makers flexibility in using funds to address the skills gap.
 - Pursue comprehensive regulatory reform that ensures workplace safety and protects public health, is fair to everyone, takes into account the views of communities and businesses, evaluates the impact rules will have on jobs and small businesses, and protects our economic and personal freedoms.

V) Infrastructure/Transportation

The Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce will support efforts to strengthen our community's infrastructure. This will enhance our ability to attract and retain quality businesses, which will lead to improved job opportunities, wages, and quality of life in the Greater Eau Claire Area.

Recognizing the importance of a quality, economical transportation system is vital to business, including airports, rail systems, mass transit and highways. The Chamber will support efforts to maintain and improve transportation into, out of, and within the area.

- **State Priorities**
 - Broaden the Base of Transportation revenue and consider recommendations made by the WI transportation Finance and Policy commission including reasonable user fee increases, exploring innovative new funding mechanisms, adequate funding of local roads, possible establishment of Regional Transportation Authorities and reduced reliance on debt.
 - Expand Transportation Infrastructure, focus scarce resources on needed highway capacity expansion projects to accommodate the growing transportation needs of the Wisconsin economy, such as the potential for the expansion of I-94 from Eau Claire to Hudson
 - Continue looking at providing a high speed rail link for West Central Wisconsin that connects Chicago-St. Paul via Eau Claire
 - Support plans to work with West Central Wisconsin counties and appropriate Minnesota jurisdictions in the Eau Claire-St. Paul corridor to study the feasibility for commuter rail to serve local and regional needs
 - Advocate for expanded broadband services to help meet business and workforce needs

- Federal Priorities
 - Support a balanced federal transportation approach that addresses long term funding and fosters U.S. global competitiveness, international trade, interstate commerce, interstate passenger travel, emergency preparedness, and national defense, which are compelling national interests.

VI) Energy and the Environment

Energy powers our economy and our lives. Without access to affordable and reliable supplies of energy in the United States, U.S. businesses are forced to move elsewhere, taking U.S. jobs and support for the economy with them and impacting our global competitiveness.

Economic growth and environmental progress go hand in hand. Responsible stewardship of our resources can both grow our economy and preserve the planet.

- Local Priorities
 - Support evaluation studies and responsible, cost-effective measures to improve water quality and preserve the natural resources of Lake Altoona, Lake Eau Claire, and other local waterways.
 - Support local educational efforts to encourage reduced use and recycling of disposable bags, but oppose mandated fees and usage bans.
- State Priorities
 - Tax credits, grants or other incentives to encourage research and development in clean energy technology
 - Eliminate the moratorium on nuclear power plants and consider as an option
 - Provide and promote incentives for business energy efficiency across all sectors
- Federal Priorities
 - Support investment, development and continued expansion of domestic energy production.
 - Expansion of nuclear energy, research and development in wind, solar and other renewable energy
 - Environment issues must be answered with commonsense solutions. Government should not mandate what technology cannot deliver

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"Our Community is Our Business"