



Legislative Agenda 2011

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 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
 1. Continue to look for ways to reduce wasteful spending and limit increases in state spending
 2. Reduce the capital gains tax
 3. Encourage balanced budgeting
 - Adherence to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)
 - Fund budget-stabilization fund to deal with fluctuating revenues

- Federal Priorities
 1. Promote efforts to make permanent the Federal tax cuts
 2. Repeal or substantially reform the alternative minimum tax (AMT)
 3. Reduce tax rates on capital gains and dividend income
 4. Ensure faster cost recovery of capital investment
 5. Reduce corporate income tax rates
 6. 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
 1. Align state tax deductibility for health savings accounts with federal tax code.
 2. Address Medicaid reimbursement shortfalls *and cost shifting in Western Wisconsin.*
 3. Tax credits for workplace wellness programs.
 4. 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**

1. Continue to support bipartisan legislation encouraging widespread adoption of Health IT and work to include in it a national standard for E-prescribing, a paperless approach that would reduce administration costs and human errors in prescribing and dispensing prescriptions.
2. Support linking physician Medicare reimbursements to performance-driven 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.
3. Support stand-alone legislation that offers tax credits for employer-sponsored workplace wellness programs for employees.
4. Support changes in Health Savings Accounts to make them more flexible and appealing to consumers and plan sponsors.
5. Support legislation that gives small businesses and individuals the option to purchase health benefits with the same tax advantages that large businesses have, pool together to leverage purchasing power, participate in benefits plans that are not burdened with costly state mandates, and permit the owners of small businesses to participate in their companies' benefits plan.
6. Enact medical liability reform to reduce lawsuit abuse

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**

1. Promote teacher competency; authorize school districts to utilize teacher competency evaluations for purposes of continuing employment and enhancing compensation.
2. Secure appropriated money to replace the obsolete Brewer Hall and Campus School at UW-Eau Claire and continue funding in the 2011-2013 budget.
3. Allow greater autonomy for UW campuses, primarily to set enrollment and tuition levels
4. Support tax incentives to encourage employer sponsored education and training
5. Support the CVTC Energy Education Center
6. Support legislation that requires regional representation on the UW Board of Regents.

- **Federal Priorities**

1. Change training, payment, and evaluation of teachers – pay for performance and incentive pay
2. Expand educational options for students, e.g. early enrollment of high school students in college-level courses, online learning programs, charter schools, etc.
3. Increase focus on Science, engineering, technology and math.

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.

- **State Priorities**

1. Support the 'Be Bold Initiative' ideas including:
 - Restructure economic development organizations to align processes and financial resources by creating quasi-public organization to manage economic development efforts and creating a statewide Innovation focused non-profit to deliver technical services, manage and fund investment programs.
 - Create and expand financial programs to bolster innovation and attraction of capital intensive projects.
 - 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.
 - Separate regulatory activities from business development functions.

2. Make tax credits portable
 3. Eliminate prevailing wage and wage lien mandates
- Federal Priorities
 1. Do not enact the so called Employee Free Choice Act
 2. Enact an investment tax credit to promote investment
 3. Reduce borrower and lending fees for small business lending programs

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
 1. Use state gas tax and vehicle registration funds exclusively for transportation.
 2. Broaden the Base of Transportation Funding *and end raids on the Transportation funds.*
 3. 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.
 4. Continue looking at providing a high speed rail link for West Central Wisconsin that connects Chicago-St. Paul via Eau Claire.
 5. 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.
- Federal Priorities
 1. Encourage Congress to pass a long-term surface transportation reauthorization bill to support U.S. global competitiveness, international trade policies, interstate commerce, interstate passenger travel, emergency preparedness, and national defense, which are compelling national interests.

V) – Energy

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.

- State Priorities
 1. Provide incentives to increase use of renewable fuels and for businesses for energy efficiency
 2. Tax credits, grants or other incentives to encourage research and development in clean energy technology
 3. Eliminate the moratorium on nuclear power plants and consider them as an option
- Federal Priorities
 1. Increase investment in clean coal technology
 2. Expansion of nuclear energy, research and development in wind, solar and other renewable energy
 3. Environment issues must be answered with commonsense solutions. Government should not mandate what technology cannot deliver
 4. Provide and promote incentives for business energy efficiency across all sectors
 5. Reduce burdensome regulations that discourage investment and imperil competitiveness

VII) – Eliminate Frivolous Lawsuits and Excessive Litigation

Excessive litigation and frivolous lawsuits is costing businesses and individuals billions of dollars, and is affecting our international competitiveness. At the state and federal levels we need to control excessive litigation, limit costs, and restore fairness and predictability to our legal system.

1. Establish strict limits on punitive damage awards.
2. Enact comprehensive product liability and other legal reforms.