

Plan for Prosperity

2021- 22 Legislative Agenda

The Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce supports a wide variety of initiatives that build a stronger local and regional marketplace and economy. A strong economy provides the tax base necessary to support education and local services, along with building a sustaining community infrastructure. Consequently, we support a public policy agenda that fosters business growth and creates jobs. Additionally, cutting taxes, reducing the regulatory burden and investing in a skilled workforce have enabled Wisconsin to realize the tremendous gains we have seen in recent years.

We advocate for policies that strengthen talent and business attraction and retention to protect and grow family-supporting jobs. For Oshkosh and Northeast Wisconsin to be successful, policies must be in place which allows local and regional companies to compete on a global level.

As an organization:

- *We support* a tax system that incentivizes business growth and workforce investment.
- *We support* efforts to streamline and reduce regulation that impact the cost of doing business.
- *We support* empowering local government to use economic development tools in ways that will help them grow their employment and tax base.
- *We support* honesty in taxation that ensures revenues collected are expended for the reason stated.
- *We support* initiatives that ensure workers have the skills to compete in a global economy.

Economic Development:

The Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce supports economic development incentive programs and policies that drive private investment and serve as a catalyst for economic activity in the community. The Oshkosh Chamber recognizes that all efforts to strengthen and diversify our local and regional economy must include a commitment to education and training, ensuring that citizens, businesses and other organizations benefit from new knowledge, research, workforce talent, entrepreneurialism and innovation. Successful economic development plans will include plans for attracting, retaining and developing a strong pipeline of young workers. A strong K-12 and post-secondary education system is critical in creating a pipeline of talent to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to enter the workforce quicker. We support initiatives that provide workers with necessary skills to compete in a global economy and meet evolving workforce needs of employers.

Workforce Development

The Chamber supports workforce development initiatives that address Wisconsin's labor shortage and enhance worker training programs to meet the needs of employers.

- Support equitable funding for K-12 public education so that all public school districts can afford equipment and personnel to provide skills/certifications for high school aged students in collaboration with their area technical college or university.

- Expand Dual Enrollment - Wisconsin should expand dual enrollment opportunities so more students can earn higher education credits through the UW System, or make progress toward receiving a technical certification through the Wisconsin Technical College System while they are in high school.
- Support initiatives to grow the State's skilled workforce, including incumbent and transitional worker training, recruitment and retention incentives for in-demand professions and technical education programs.
- Support programs to provide the State's incarcerated population access to skills training and work experience opportunities like apprenticeship programs as a means to move this population into meaningful employment upon release from the State's correctional system.
- Support the provision of additional state General Purpose Revenue (GPR) as an investment in UW Oshkosh and UW System initiatives, including those that:
 - Lessen the time-to-degree, a primary driver of the cost of college, to successfully move students through the educational pipeline and into the workforce faster. Strategies include expanding dual enrollment opportunities that move first-year college experiences into students' senior years of high school.
 - Develop new partnerships with businesses and organizations that open doors to mutually-beneficial student internship and work experiences.
- Support the UW System's and the Board of Regents' proposal to extend a statewide undergraduate resident student tuition freeze through year one of the 2021-22 biennium and provide a tuition control in year two that limits any proposed increase to the rate of inflation.
- Support incentives such as tax relief to encourage recent graduates to stay in Wisconsin and to move here from other states. In the past, too many college graduates would leave Wisconsin for job opportunities elsewhere. While that trend has slowed, we now need to reverse it and ensure that we keep our homegrown talent and also draw graduates from around the country to Wisconsin.
- **PHASE II OF UW Oshkosh's CLOW SOCIAL SCIENCE CENTER/NURSING EDUCATION BUILDING:** Last session, the legislature approved funding to continue this project's advance. It is now time to approve full funding and authorize construction. The project was approved in 2011, but split in two to accommodate other System priorities. Phase I was completed in 2016 and created a state-of-the-art facility to train and teach nurses, including interactive learning spaces and simulation labs. Phase II concentrates on teacher education and adds active learning classrooms, a science education lab, a distance learning lab, outreach workspace and gathering spaces for student collaboration.

Business Climate

The Oshkosh Chamber supports policies that strengthen and help foster a competitive business climate and create new opportunities for economic growth.

- Opposed legislation to close the so-called "dark store" property tax loophole in Wisconsin. Local governments have asked the Legislature to prohibit the use of physically comparable vacant properties as comparable sales to occupied properties for property tax assessment purposes. The result of this policy would allow tax collectors to more subjectively assess property value, and taxes, and make it harder for businesses to challenge their tax bill.

- Support liability protections for employers against frivolous lawsuits related to COVID-19, as well as other policies that facilitate a positive economic recovery and response to the pandemic.
- Oppose regulations and policies that negatively impact Wisconsin's business climate. Oppose rules and policies that create uncertainty and are unnecessarily costly, complex and burdensome requirements on the regulated community. Support policies that incentivize investment and create an attractive business climate in Wisconsin so that our state continues to prosper.

Taxation:

Burdensome taxes – whether on individuals or businesses – make Wisconsin less competitive. Our high-quality services must be funded adequately, but continued progress must be made to eliminate excessive tax burdens on state residents.

- Phase out and/or repeal the personal property tax paid by businesses on equipment which is difficult to administer and costly to comply with. This annual double tax on property is both costly for businesses to comply with and difficult for government to administer. The Legislature took the first step towards eliminating this tax during the 2017-19 budget. Finishing the job and phasing out or eliminating the tax will make Wisconsin a more competitive place to do business.
- Oppose modification to property tax assessment that does not meet the uniformity clause of the State's constitution and that disproportionately shift the property tax burden onto commercial and industrial property owners.

Continue meaningful limits on school and local government property taxes, while allowing for reasonable increases from new development.

Oppose the creation of new municipal fee(s) that would underwrite the cost of a municipal services currently being provided without providing an equal, proportionate tax levy credit to the property tax payer.

Maintain Wisconsin's Manufacturing and Agriculture Tax Credit - Protect the tax credit that has allowed two pillars of Wisconsin's economy, manufacturing and farming, to thrive.

Prohibit Taxpayer Funded Lobbying – The Wisconsin state legislature should enact measures to prohibit the use of taxpayer dollars for lobbying purposes. Using taxpayer money to lobby in favor of higher taxes is inappropriate, and an abuse of local governments' responsibility to use finite resources wisely.

Encourage Balanced Budgeting and Leverage the Private Sector - The size and scope of government should be limited to avoid unsustainable spending that often drives future tax increases. Our state budget should avoid raids on dedicated funds, maintain a healthy reserve and budget stabilization fund, and dedicate surplus revenues to tax relief for the taxpayers to whom it rightfully belongs. The state should outsource those functions which can be accomplished more cheaply and efficiently by the private sector, and eliminate instances where taxpayers subsidize competition against private sector businesses.

Transportation Infrastructure:

A robust transportation infrastructure network is essential to economic growth. Ensuring adequate funding is available for scheduled road maintenance and road improvements will give Wisconsin manufacturers an advantage over their competition. The Chamber supports fiscally responsible public investment in Wisconsin's transportation system.

Support the development of a fair and reliable transportation funding plan for Wisconsin. Oppose industry-specific tax/fee increases. Support an increase of transportation funding based on User Fee Approach that includes (exclusive and/or combination):

- Gas Tax
- Registration Fees
- Use of sales tax of automotive-related parts
- Extend the 5% sales tax to gasoline purchases, provided funding is earmarked exclusively for transportation related expenditures
- Creation of an interstate tolling system

Support the following transportation projects:

- Planning, expansion and construction of Interstate 41 from Appleton (Hwy.15) to the southern Brown County line.
- Planning and construction of a west side arterial from State Hwy. 21 to State Hwy. 44.
- Reconstruction and expansion to four lanes State Hwy. 21 from Oshkosh to Omro.
- Reconstruction & expansion of State Highway 26 to a four-lane facility from I-41 to US 151

Oppose the creation of a local municipal Transportation Utility Fund or a Transportation Assessment Replacement Fee (TARF) that disproportionately shifts the cost of street reconstruction and sidewalk replacement on to commercial and industrial property owners based on the amount of parking lot stalls, square footage of parking lots and/or buildings, and/or other factors, including trip generation.

Support increasing the maximum weight limit on trucks beyond 80,000 pounds to help keep Wisconsin businesses competitive, reduce the number of trucks on Wisconsin roads, and ease the burdens imposed by the national driver shortage.

Regulatory Reforms:

Unpredictable and overbearing government regulation can be responsible for driving businesses to states with more predictable and flexible regulations. Wisconsin's regulatory environment must strike a balance between protection and the cost of implementation. The State needs to have a competitive business climate and should seek to eliminate and reduce state regulations that impede economic growth and job creation.

Oppose an expansion of the salary threshold for the exemption of overtime pay under the Federal Labor Standards Act.

Support harmonizing Wisconsin's Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) law with the federal law to end duplicative, expensive compliance for employers.

Align Wisconsin employment and environmental regulations with corresponding federal requirements to eliminate the additional cost and complexity of complying with overlapping and "Wisconsin-only" regulations.

Review and Repeal Obsolete Regulations - Improve our regulatory environment by reviewing existing administrative rules to repeal or reform obsolete, costly or cumbersome regulations.

Human Resources and Employment Law:

Support state-wide employment standards - The State, not local units of government, should be in charge of setting employment law standards. Lawmakers should pre-empt local governments from being able to set employment law standards that are different from state law in areas like wage and hourly, employment discrimination, sick leave, family leave, and other employment regulations that differ from state or federal regulations.

Contain Workers Compensation Medical Costs with a Fee Schedule - Wisconsin's work comp medical costs are significantly higher than the national average, making our employers less competitive. We support curbing these costs, as 44 other states have already done, by implementing a fee schedule for workers compensation charges.

Oppose Minimum Wage Increases - Raising the minimum wage will increase the cost of employing entry level workers, resulting in fewer job opportunities for workers entering the workforce who need to build skills and experience for their career. Wages should be market-driven, not established by government.

Government Efficiency & Accountability:

To ensure adequate resources are available to meet our most critical public needs, the Oshkosh Chamber supports policies that promote and increase government efficiencies and collaboration at all levels.

- Advance and support efforts to promote government efficiencies between various agencies at the state, county and municipal levels.
- Advocate to remove state and federal barriers that prevent schools from being flexible and responsive in meeting the changing needs of area employers.
- Advocate for greater government transparency.

Support the creation of a State Commission aimed at establishing and restoring credibility in our election process.