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Overview



- ▶ The American population has been shifting away from rural areas toward urban and suburban settings for more than 50 years. This trend has been the most pronounced in the plains states, though the upper-Midwest has seen an acceleration in this trend as well.¹
- ▶ The loss of rural population causes a downward spiral. As the population decreases, local businesses fail because they lose consumers, and new businesses look to locate elsewhere as the available workforce shrinks. School districts that lose population also lose funding, which leads to fewer class offerings, and fewer incentives that would attract young high quality teachers to the district. Shrinking rural communities are less likely to have easy access to health care, causing senior citizens to relocate upon retirement.
- ▶ In order to reverse the trend, rural areas must sustain local businesses and develop new ones that can employ the young people matriculating through the local schools and attract young families to relocate. Once population stability is accomplished, school districts can offer more tools to young people who are looking to enter an expanded workforce.
- ▶ The Rural Wisconsin Initiative will provide focus and leadership to the discussion of how we can build our future in rural Wisconsin. These seven pieces of legislation will be bolstered by other ideas attained from public input.

¹ Shah, Neil "Smallville, USA, Fades Further," www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303325204579463761632103386, (March 27, 2014).



Employment Development in Rural Wisconsin

- ▶ Rural Wisconsin is no stranger to the skills gap. Family sustaining jobs remain unfilled while young people labor under the false impression that they need to move to a large city to find a career.
- ▶ To reverse this trend, young people need to be exposed to the variety of good careers available in rural areas. Increasingly, this is being accomplished through apprenticeship partnerships. High schools, tech colleges, and local businesses are working together to equip young people with the skills they need to meet regional labor demands. During the course of the apprenticeship, the student is paid, trained for a job, and given post-secondary educational credit.
- ▶ To encourage these partnerships, we propose increasing the funding for Youth Apprenticeship Grant in fiscal year 2016-`17 by \$500,000 and for the Apprenticeship Completion Award program by \$150,000. This is a 22% and 67% increase, respectively. These increases will bring both programs into line with current demand, and further increases should be explored should demand continue to increase.



Bolstering the Workforce in Rural Wisconsin

- ▶ Maintaining the current population alone is not enough to reverse the population stagnation trend in rural Wisconsin. The state must also work to attract young workers from out of state.
- ▶ To that end, we are proposing the creation of rural opportunity zones, a concept pioneered in Kansas and Oklahoma, that would incentivize young people looking to relocate after finishing their post-secondary education.
- ▶ In our vision of the program, Wisconsin would repay up to \$25,000 or 40% of a new resident's student loans, provided the new resident maintained a full time job, avoided public assistance, had attained a post-secondary degree, and settled in a county that fit the Federal OMB's definition of rural.
- ▶ Kansas has maintained the program for four years, and has attracted more than 2,000 applicants through a similar program.² In counties like Greeley County, they are having success.³
- ▶ This program increases the size of the student loan repayment incentive, and uses other stipulations to more effectively reach a younger demographic.

² Shorman, Jonathan "Brownback Standing by Rural Incentives Program after Lawmaker Skepticism," <http://m.cjonline.com/news/2015-03-08/brownback-standing-rural-incentives-program-after-lawmaker-skepticism#gsc.tab=0>, (March 8, 2015).

³ Scott, Alyssa "Rural Opportunity Zone Program Working in Rural Kansas," <http://www.hayspost.com/2015/05/25/rural-opportunity-zone-program-working-in-rural-kansas/>, (May 25, 2015).



Investing in a Healthy Rural Wisconsin

- ▶ With the impending retirement of the baby boom generation, health care access will increase in importance for a large segment of the population, many of whom will be seeking an ideal place to spend their retirement years.
- ▶ With this understanding, the legislature created the Wisconsin Rural Physician Residency Assistance Program in 2010. The program funds residency opportunities in rural Wisconsin communities, with the understanding that a physician would be more likely to practice medicine in a setting similar to the one where they received their training.
- ▶ In 2015, the program awarded nearly \$600,000 in grants to rural hospitals, and had a hand in funding 77 of the state's 83 rural physician residency and fellowship positions (93%).⁴
- ▶ We recommend increasing program funding by \$250,000. This increase would allow the program to maintain its current service base, while expanding to provide residency programs for doctors pursuing obstetrics and gynecology specialties.

⁴ WRPRAP Annual Report, https://www.fammed.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/WRPRAP_2015_Annual_Report_0.pdf, pg. 6, (November 25, 2015).



Developing STEM Education in Rural Wisconsin

- ▶ STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education programs help to shape students' interests and prepare them to pursue the high wage, high demand careers of the 21st Century.
- ▶ The purpose of the Rural STEM Grant legislation is to help small school districts in rural Wisconsin communities start, expand, and maintain STEM education programs.
- ▶ If rural Wisconsin is to grow and be economically competitive, we need to graduate more students that are highly skilled and fully prepared to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers.
- ▶ We propose allocating \$1 million per year for the Rural STEM Grant program.
- ▶ Under this legislation, applicants would provide a 10% match.
- ▶ The grant maximum would be \$20,000.



Attracting Teachers to Rural Wisconsin

- ▶ In 2013, the Speaker's Task Force on Rural Schools identified teacher retention as a key goal to be addressed by future legislation.
- ▶ Rural schools face essentially the same difficulties as urban MKE schools in attracting teachers: both are areas of out-migration rather than areas that bring people in; both sets of schools face significant challenges attracting talented, young teachers.
- ▶ The Wisconsin Association of School Boards has advised that loan forgiveness is an effective means of attracting teachers to the field without directly changing teacher compensation; we leave more money in new teachers' pockets and reduce one of the primary stressors while maintaining direct compensation.
- ▶ Schools statewide need a broader pool of candidates from which to pull; expanding the loan forgiveness program will serve to provide the "tipping point" to students who want to stay in their communities to enter education programs.



Expanding Broadband in Rural Wisconsin

- ▶ In today's increasingly connected world, high speed internet access has become a necessity. Increasingly, educators are having students use the internet to complete assignments, businesses require high speed internet to connect with consumers, and ambulances must be able to share information with hospitals in an efficient manner. Those who do not live in an area with broadband access are in danger of being denied equality of opportunity.
- ▶ In the most recent budget, demand necessitated that we increase the broadband expansion grant program. Currently, \$6 million is available, but only \$1.5 million is allowed to be allocated per fiscal year. Demand greatly outpaces supply. LRB-4210 Would increase funding for broadband expansion to \$10 million, thus enabling Wisconsin's rural communities to compete on a level playing field.
- ▶ Statistics from MN indicate that there is a \$10 return for every \$1 invested.⁵

⁵ Helms, Marisa "Legislative Session 2015: The Broadband Challenge," <http://www.lmc.org/page/1/BroadbandJanFeb2015.jsp>, (Jan-Feb 2015).



The Rural Wisconsin Initiative is meant to be more than seven pieces of legislation. This is an on-going movement that needs to include ideas from all over the state of Wisconsin. Get involved today on Facebook, twitter, or on the website!



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