

Gov. Walker: Announces Rural Agenda at Governor's Northern Economic & Community Development Summit

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MADISON – Governor Scott Walker announced his new Rural Agenda today at the Governor’s Northern Economic & Community Development Summit in Trego. The agenda focuses on comprehensively addressing the concerns of rural communities. “Wisconsin’s rural communities face a unique set of challenges: that’s why we’re undertaking a wide range of forward-thinking reforms to meet their needs,” said Governor Walker. “We’ve listened to rural communities across the state and we’re tackling their top priorities, like increasing investments in education, expanding broadband access, improving rural healthcare, and making state resources more easily available.”

The annual Governor’s Northern Economic & Community Development Summit connects state leadership with local business owners and community leaders to work together on fueling economic growth and successful communities in Northern Wisconsin. Attendees listen to expert speakers, meet in small discussion groups with Cabinet Secretaries, and conduct workshops aimed at encouraging businesses and communities to reach their potential and gaining insight at potential opportunities, challenges, and policy solutions.

Rural Agenda Overview

Step One: Improving Education

Increasing Sparsity Aid

- We support legislation that reintroduces language from our proposed budget, calling for an increase in Sparsity Aid which would provide \$9.7 million more for rural schools next school year. This will be in addition to our historic \$11.5 billion state investment in education in the 2017-19 budget.

Recruiting & Retaining Teachers

- Our budget creates a new teacher development training program, providing a tool for rural districts to address teacher shortages.

Step Two: Expanding Broadband Access

Increasing Broadband Expansion

- We allocate a historic \$35.5 million in additional spending for broadband access across Wisconsin. Specifically, our budget allocates an additional \$13 million for Broadband Expansion Grants over the 2017-19 biennium. This is the largest amount of funding ever for the Broadband Expansion Grant Program.

Providing Broadband Access to Students

- We also increase funding for Wisconsin’s Technology for Educational Achievement (TEACH) grants by \$22.5 million to provide students with high-speed internet, access to mobile hot spots, and access to laptop computers.

Step Three: Encouraging Economic Development

Lowering Property Taxes

- We continue to reduce property taxes for Wisconsin’s hardworking families. One way we do this is by eliminating the state portion of Wisconsin’s property tax bill. Property taxes on a median-valued home will be lower in 2018 than they were in 2010.

Manufacturing and Agriculture Tax

- We fully implement the manufacturing and agriculture production tax credit.

Expanding Trade

- In 2016, Wisconsin ranked 12th overall for agricultural exports, climbing five spots from 2010.
- In 2016, Wisconsin exported more than \$3.4 billion worth of agricultural products. This is an increase of 41% from 2010 exports of \$2.4 billion.

Advertising Out State Attractions

- We invest \$1.13 million annually in the Joint Effort Marketing (JEM) Grant Program which provides funding to local groups for advertising initiatives to promote the special attractions a community has to offer. These visitors help bolster the local economy and create jobs for local residents.

Streamlining Regulations

- We will work with the legislature and EPA to transfer regulatory authority over large farms from the DNR to DATCP to encourage the best use of technical expertise and create program efficiencies.

Step Four: Developing Wisconsin’s Rural Workforce

Investing in Rural Development

- Wisconsin’s READI program which provide funds funds to assist rural communities in economic development, workforce housing, and workforce training.
 - Economic Development loans of up to \$500,000 are available for proposals to create or expand a business resulting in the creation of low- and moderate-income jobs.
 - Workforce Housing loans of up to \$300,000 are available for proposals to attract new workers to rural areas by rehabilitating or creating workforce housing near the economic development project.
 - Workforce Training grants of up to \$200,000 are available to train new workers at the economic development project.

Step Five: Improving Rural Health Care

Training Rural Doctors

- Our budget provides \$200,000 over the 2017-19 biennium to expand the UW System’s Wisconsin Rural Physician Residency Assistance program, which will advance the development of rural rotations and rural training tracks in the state.

Increasing Opportunities for Nurses

- We support legislation to include Wisconsin in the Nurse Licensure Compact (eNLC), which provides nurses with a license that allows them to work in multiple states and provide telehealth nursing services.

Step Six: Investing in Public Safety

Encouraging High School Volunteer Firefighters & EMTs

- We will support legislation that will reward high schools and students that participate in EMT or Firefighter basic training.

Prolonging The License Renewal Period

- We will support legislation to change the certification renewal period from every two years to four years for a first responder, licensed EMT, or paramedic.

Step Seven: Caring for Wisconsin Veterans

Providing Resources to Wisconsin Veterans

- We support legislation to provide state GPR to continue the Veteran Outreach and Recovery Program. The program provides outreach, treatment, and recovery support programs to veterans who are homeless.

Continuing to Support Wisconsin’s GI Bill

- We continue to support the state’s GI Bill, which is one of the most generous in the country, remitting full tuition and segregated fees for veterans and their dependents for up to eight full-time semesters or 128 credits, whichever is greater, at and UW or WTCS school.

Step Eight: Moving State Resources Out of Madison

Transitioning Forestry HQ North

- We will move the Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry headquarters to Rhinelander, Wisconsin by the first of next year to better include and work with the forestry industry and northern forestry officials.

Dispersing State Resources Throughout Wisconsin

- We will disperse state resources throughout Wisconsin to improve communications and accountability between government organizations and the people they serve.