

Wisconsin video game sector 'ripe for growth,' advocate says

Posted on Wednesday, Apr 26, 2023

A spokesperson for the Entertainment Software Association says Wisconsin's video game sector is "ripe for growth" as the global industry continues to expand rapidly.

Tara Ryan, vice president for state government affairs with the ESA, spoke yesterday during a Wisconsin Technology Council luncheon in Madison. She said the association has been urging legislators around the country to consider creating or boosting tax incentives for video game production.

"You've already got a tech bubble here, you've got a lot of young game companies, you've got a lot of big game companies that have studios here, so it's perfect," she said. "It's the perfect time."

Ryan noted video games represent the fastest growing form of entertainment in the world, as well as the fastest growing sport in the world given the rising popularity of esports at high schools, colleges and beyond. About two-thirds of U.S. households include someone who plays video games, she added.

But because most of the tax incentives in the United States are currently clustered along the coastal regions rather than the Midwest, she argues Wisconsin and nearby states have a big opportunity to compete for talent.

"We have to get people to think about video game industries with that same sort of starry eyed gaze that people have about Hollywood," Ryan said. "Because we're bigger than Hollywood, and we're bigger than music. And we're bigger than Hollywood and music combined. So let's see what we can do to bring this to Wisconsin."

Tim Gerritsen, chief operations officer for the Madison-based development studio Lost Boys Interactive, noted Madison is "now on the map" for game development due to availability of tech talent and a growing number of companies in the industry. That includes PUBG Studio, which is owned by a South Korean company called Krafton, Raven Software and others.

“The biggest thing is talent; we live and die by our talent,” he said yesterday. “We aren’t selling a good, we’re selling a service or a piece of software. We can’t do that without the top talent.”

He noted game production is a multidisciplinary effort, involving programmers, designers, artists, writers, musicians, producers and other business operations.

But Ryan noted some of the country’s top game design schools are losing graduates to Canada, which she said has more enticing incentives for the industry.

“Companies are looking at incentives, and they’re looking at workforce,” she said. “And if you’ve got a state like Wisconsin, where you have great game design programs and can increase that in your universities, you can keep the people here.”

-By Alex Moe