

Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce: State of the State: WMC highlights Wisconsin's competitiveness crisis

Posted on Tuesday, Feb 17, 2026

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON — In advance of Governor Tony Evers' State of the State address, Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC), warned that Wisconsin is falling behind on key competitiveness metrics, citing WMC Foundation's new [Wisconsin Competitiveness Report](#). WMC President/CEO Kurt R. Bauer urged the Governor to address the state's workforce shortage, high tax burden, regulatory barriers, failing educational outcomes, and soaring health care costs.

"Wisconsin is falling behind," said Bauer. "A declining population, a stagnant workforce, an unworkable regulatory environment, poor educational outcomes, unaffordable health care, and a hefty tax burden on middle-class families and businesses are all issues that threaten our state's future. These pressures erode affordability for families and employers, and ultimately drive up costs, making it harder for people to live, work, and build a future in Wisconsin."

METRICS THAT MATTER

Workforce

- Wisconsin's median age is 40.7. That's more than a year older than the national average (39.2).
- Wisconsin residents age 65 and older make up 19.6% of the population, compared to 18.0% nationally.
- Wisconsin's labor force participation peaked in 1997 and has steadily declined

since.

- Sixty percent of employers say they cannot find enough workers.

Taxes & Regulations

- Wisconsin's top individual income tax rate is 7.65%, the 9th highest nationally.
- Wisconsin's corporate income tax rate is 7.9%, the 12th highest in the country.
- Wisconsin has the 8th highest property taxes in the country.
- If school districts take advantage of this new tax revenue, the school portion of property tax bills will double in about 21 years.
- By that time, the average residential property owner will have paid an estimated \$21,107 in additional school property taxes solely because of the governor's veto.
- Sixteen states now have flat income taxes, and nine states have no income tax at all.
- Wisconsin is the 13th most regulated state in the country.
- The state administrative code contains over 165,000 regulatory restrictions.

Education

- State report cards say 94% of schools meet expectations, even though national tests tell a different story.
- NAEP data show nearly two-thirds of Wisconsin students are below grade level in math.
- Seven in ten students are not reading at grade level.
- Since 2000, per-pupil spending has more than doubled.
- Over the same period, enrollment fell by 65,000 students, while non-teaching staff grew by more than 8,000.
- For every eight students lost, schools hired one additional non-instructional employee.

Health Care

- Wisconsin's hospital costs the fourth highest in the nation and the costliest in the Midwest.
- Wisconsin hospitals charge 318% of Medicare rates, compared to the national average of 254%.
- Wisconsin has the highest workers' compensation medical costs among 36 states studied.

- Medical payments are 55% higher than the median state.

“Wisconsin has to decide whether it wants to be a state that rolls out the red carpet or red tape for families and businesses,” said Bauer. “Despite the clear and present danger our state faces, for the last eight years, we have witnessed leaders implement destructive policies. By increasing workforce participation, modernizing tax and regulatory systems, and strengthening education and healthcare outcomes, Wisconsin can roll out the red carpet and regain what we’ve lost.”