

Wisconsin State Assembly's North Central Delegation

November 16, 2008 ... FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rural Legislators Unveil 2010 Job Creation Agenda **Focus on Jobs, Biofuel, Education and Transportation**

RHINELANDER – Republican State Representatives from North Central Wisconsin gathered Monday with job creators and economic development experts in Rhinelander today to release a new rural job creation plan for 2010. The legislators focused on tax relief, transportation infrastructure and renewable energy to begin creating new jobs around Wisconsin. They were joined by Wisconsin business leaders to discuss the issues affecting their workforce and industries.

“Eighteen percent of Wisconsin citizens need new options and a better diversified economy if we are going to pull out of this slump stronger than we entered it,” Representative Donald Friske (Merrill) said. “Wisconsin businesses, workers and their families need to know their government won’t quit working to promote new, local and good paying jobs.”

The job creation agenda included proposals in a variety of areas needing government action such as government permit streamlining, education, bio-energy independence, insurance reform, manufacturing, and transportation laws.

“We have here a number of great job creation ideas we need to get moving on,” Representative Dan Meyer (Eagle River) said. “The winter legislative session begins in January, ends in April and after that there are no more guaranteed opportunities to take decisive action.”

Among the highlights of the legislation proposed included creating tax exemptions for energy efficient biofuel equipment (stoves, furnaces and boilers), sawmill and logging business expansion and modernization tax credits and creating a biofuels major at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point. These proposals will encourage more people to use energy efficient biofuels, create stability in timber and agricultural waste wholesale pricing and provide a level playing field for biomass currently enjoyed in the tax code by wind and solar.

“As the economy has weakened, jobs across the state have suffered. In the north, our paper mills and pulping facilities are among those struggling to stay open,” Representative Mary Williams (Medford) said. “Loggers have already found new markets to enter by utilizing their wood waste, but we need to free up their resources to do so which is exactly what these tax credits will do. If we can help expand the logging market, it will benefit woodland owners as well.”

“Wisconsin’s dairymen and Governor Doyle had a great idea when they passed the Dairy Modernization tax credits earlier this year,” Representative Jeff Mursau said. “The same great idea for agriculture will work for our aging sawmills around Wisconsin by providing tax incentives for upgrading equipment and expanding their facilities to create new jobs.”

“The University of Wisconsin Stevens Point is perfectly located between the two major river valleys our paper mills have built themselves upon,” Friske said. “Its on-campus paper machine and its proximity to both prime

agricultural and papermaking facilities make it the ideal university to secure the best and brightest students in the country to research and develop biofuels in the Midwest and the nation.”

Legislators also proposed changes to the way Wisconsin permits new business construction and expansions. They proposed requiring the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Department of Transportation (DOT) to issue permits to county economic development corporations (EDCs) and municipal governments that outline the maximum allowable emission and transportation levels. The EDCs would then be able to recruit new and established businesses to (re)locate into their communities with a marketing plan that demonstrates they are ready to break ground at a moments notice.

“An important key to this is to ensure the State has a rapid response team available to meet with relocating businesses at a moment’s notice,” Meyer said. “Given our growing information technology and the increasing competition from all over the globe, at a minimum the Departments of Commerce, Financial Institutions, Natural Resources and Transportation should have a rapid response team to secure small-window large-impact economic development opportunities.”

Energy efficiency opportunities remain on the table and available to government institutions and schools around Wisconsin. Legislators pointed to the successful implementation of Fuels for Schools at a number of schools around Wisconsin including Park Falls, Barron, Rib Lake, Rice Lake and Antigo High Schools. They have made the transition to using renewable and locally available biomass to reduce their heating and cooling costs.

“We want to make all school districts aware of the potential savings to be had by using biomass to heat and cool their buildings,” Williams said. “Far too few district administrators and school boards know about the free pre-feasibility studies available through the Fuels for Schools program.”

“At minimum, districts need to know when a transition to biofuels will make sense for their financial and environmental benefit,” Friske said. “The best part is that the information is available for them free through Focus on Energy.”

Wisconsin’s logging industry is facing a huge financial strain. This strain is exacerbated by high workers compensation rates. Assembly Republicans lead the charge to get the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance to create separate rates for mechanized and non-mechanized logging operations. This change has lowered workers compensation rates for many Wisconsin businesses.

“The next step is to create a group self-insurance pool similar to Michigan’s,” Mursau said. “Its program has existed for decades and loggers in the self insurance pool enjoy lower workers compensation rates.”

This is due both to economies of scale created by a pool and the comprehensive worker safety training protecting workers and lowering the bottom line for employers,” Mursau said. Self insurance pools are currently illegal in Wisconsin, but this bill will legalize them.”

Finally, they discussed transportation opportunities to improve both infrastructure and business models. The legislators proposed dedicating all unencumbered federal stimulus funds towards structurally deficient roads and bridges essential to agriculture and forestry industries. Second, they proposed authorizing Wisconsin’s governor to enter into a compact with Michigan regarding weight limits to increase and equalize the flow of raw materials and finished goods between the two states.

“Our economies are in part tied together,” Friske said. “Wood and goods pass over the boarder every day, but current weight limits and exemptions inhibit economic and job expansions in both our States.”

Legislators promised they would issue bills for cosponsorship on these topics in November and to work with the legislative majority Democrats in a bipartisan manner to promote job creation through the end of the legislative session on April 22, 2010.

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