

Governor Walker Should Include Schools in Opening Wisconsin for Business!

Dr. James Fitzpatrick

Last Saturday I was driving back to Fort Atkinson after watching our Show Choir perform in Monona Grove. I turned on WGN radio Chicago, where the talk show host was engaging listeners in a spirited discussion about Governor Walker appealing to Illinois businesses to come to Wisconsin.

On January 12th, Illinois approved a 67 percent increase in that state's personal income tax rate, and a 46 percent increase in its corporate tax rate to help plug a 15 billion dollar deficit. On the heels of this news Governor Walker evoked the old Wisconsin advertising campaign that targeted Illinois called "Escape to Wisconsin" in inviting Illinois businesses to come to our state.

While this talk show and other media reports have depicted Governor Walker as bold and brazen I think he is on the right track! Nothing will turn this economy around like good jobs and getting people working.

Border wars are nothing new. In fact Illinois was not the least bit shy as it joined other states in making a claim for the high speed train federal monies Wisconsin rejected. That Governor Walker would make a pitch for businesses and families to move to Wisconsin as he attempts to reduce taxes while states like Illinois are increasing them would seem an effective ploy. You read and hear about how our state has to be more business friendly if it wants to retain or attract new business.

I would submit the Governor has to go a step further. He should tout our education system in his pitch to attract businesses. In northern Illinois, that is business rich in the suburban and metropolitan Chicago area, parents often have little choice in sending their students to high schools with three thousand students like my nieces in nephews who live in west side suburbs. The Wisconsin College system is also a more accessible higher learning opportunity along with our technical schools and private colleges. Wisconsin educationally has a lot to offer!

Wisconsin K-12 School Districts by comparison are well maintained and have learning communities that are much more personal and family friendly. Per standardized measures like ACT and national exams, which admittedly are only a snapshot, Wisconsin compares favorably. When it comes to co-curricular opportunities, and schools being the fabric of the social scene for youth, Wisconsin typically offers more than many urban communities, where there are greater concerns for safety.

I submit the above because these considerations have *worked locally* when our businesses in Fort Atkinson have added the schools to their agenda when recruiting people for management positions or employment. In short schools can be a great asset in the Governor's efforts to add 250,000 jobs by 2015!

Of course to keep our education system K-16 an asset there also must be an investment and commitment to keep our school systems, strong, innovative, and progressive. Like families and businesses I believe all Boards of Education and school leaders are braced for having to do more with less as we attempt to pull out of this difficult economic cycle. We all need to do our part in sharing the discomfort of these economic times, and schools are no exception as we need to look toward creative ways to reduce spending and raise revenue outside tax dollars. However the

Governor and the legislature need to be mindful that schools in Wisconsin are an asset in retaining and attracting businesses as are reducing corporate taxes. I think we can strike a balance in this next biennium budget if we work together.