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HUDSON: 2 states should join forces, Doyle says

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Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle called for more cooperation between his state and Minnesota in a speech Thursday in Hudson.

And he said a good place to start is working together to make the long-debated Stillwater bridge a reality.

Doyle, a Democrat, said the bridge was crucial to the infrastructure of roads and bridges needed for job retention and expansion in the Twin Cities and western Wisconsin region.

"I'm committed to making it happen," Doyle said. "The price tag is high — \$162 million with Wisconsin's share \$63 million, but it is money well-invested."

Doyle spoke at the Hudson Area Chamber of Commerce's tribute to the Andersen Corp., which is celebrating its 100th anniversary.

Doyle and others praised the window and door manufacturer for being a good corporate citizen, paying its workers well and becoming involved in community projects, such as Habitat for Humanity.

"The synergy between Wisconsin and Minnesota, especially in the Twin Cities, is a good thing for us in Wisconsin," Doyle said. "We have a regional economy, and rather than competing against each other, we can compete together."

Doyle said he wants to help companies such as Andersen move in and expand.

"We want high-tech, high-wage jobs," Doyle said. "Andersen is a perfect example. Its success has benefited both Minnesota and Wisconsin."

Andersen is based in Minnesota but thousands of workers live in Wisconsin, and the company has

a Menomonie assembly plant, which employs several hundred people.

In his speech, Doyle stressed the similarities between Wisconsin and Minnesota, focusing on strong education systems. Another similarity is the yawning deficits that Doyle and Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty faced when they were sworn into office in January.

Like Pawlenty, Doyle decided not to raise taxes to deal with Wisconsin's \$3.2 billion deficit. Balancing the budget was difficult, but Doyle said it would benefit the state in the long term.

"We had gotten away from two basic Wisconsin values," Doyle said. "Don't spend more than you take in. And we got away from being prepared for a rainy day."

With those values restored, he said, Wisconsin is again working on firing the economic engines in a host of ways, including providing grants to companies that will expand or relocate. The grants will pay to train or retrain workers to use new or improved technologies or equipment.

Doyle was asked whether Wisconsin would follow Minnesota's lead on the issue of concealed weapons. The Wisconsin Legislature is considering lifting a 130-year ban on concealed weapons.

Doyle, who was the Wisconsin attorney general before being elected governor, said he expects lawmakers to pass "conceal-carry" measures. But Doyle vowed to veto the legislation.

"We'll see what happens from there," Doyle said.

"It defies common sense," he said. "Wisconsin has always been one of the safest states in the country."

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