



Advertisement



## MILWAUKEE INSIGHT

### Milwaukee Insight: Wisconsin Economic Summit's Timing Couldn't Be Better

10/17/2003

By Gregg Hoffmann

MILWAUKEE - The [Wisconsin Economic Summit](#) scheduled for next Monday and Tuesday, Oct. 27-28, at the Midwest Airlines Center, has never been timelier.

The annual summit, sponsored by the University of Wisconsin system and several corporate supporters, has always led to stimulating interchanges of ideas and updates of projects and initiatives from around the state.

But, this year's summit comes as the economy appears to be at a crossroads.

There are some encouraging signs.

-- Activity at America's factories expanded for the third straight month in September, according to the Institute for Supply Management. It could be a sign that Wisconsin's important manufacturing sector, which has lagged behind other sectors in recovery, is picking up.

-- The Commerce Department reported last week that retail sales grew at a 12.2% rate in the third quarter. Some cited the federal income tax cut that took effect July 1 as a catalyst.

-- Locally, the federal government's recent \$2 million grant for cleanup and development of a 134-acre tract in the Menomonee Valley should be a big boost in turning a former railway yard into a business park.

-- Sticking with Milwaukee, and railways, the local Amtrak station is going to be renovated. That could boost Amtrak use service and stimulate business travel and tourism to and from Milwaukee.

-- Candidates for practically every political position, from Milwaukee mayor to President, are already making the economy a big issue for 2004. Recent numbers, touted by President George W. Bush when he appeared in Milwaukee Oct. 3, showed that 57,000 jobs were added in September in the nation.

But all the news is not good.

While there was a net gain in job numbers, 29,000 manufacturing jobs were lost September, a continuation of a string of monthly losses in that sector that goes back more than three years. Wisconsin has been hard hit by manufacturing's contraction.

What's more, a Wisconsin Policy Research Institute study contends that the state W2 program is not putting people to work, but instead paying people to take classes and training programs that don't lead to jobs.

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families reported last week that the poor in the state are losing gains they made in the 1990s. Statewide, 13.5% of children were living in families below the poverty level in 2002. In Milwaukee, that percentage jumped to 34.4%. That was more than in 2000, but not as high as in 1990, when 37.8% of Milwaukee kids lived in poverty.

#### SITE RESOURCES

[HOME](#)

[Online Store](#)

[WisOpinion.com](#)

[WisPolitics Archive](#)

#### FEATURES

[Election Coverage](#)

[Ad Watch](#)

[Salary Watch](#)

[Scandal Sheet](#)

[Month at a Glance](#)

[Budget Coverage](#)

[Wisconsin By the Numbers](#)

#### SEARCH

[Lobbyist Search](#)

[Money Search](#)

[Polling Archive](#)

[State Employee Directory](#)

[Find Your Legislator](#)

#### LINKS

[Government and Political Links](#)

[Media Links](#)

**LEGISLATIVE TRACKING****State Legislation****Congressional Bills****Online Legal Notices****PRODUCT SAMPLES****Weekly Report****SUBSCRIBER LOGIN**

Of course, the percentage of poor is tied to employment. With layoffs in the private sector, and upcoming job losses in county and city government, you could expect that percentage to remain high for at least a while.

Those who participate in next week's Summit will not have all the answers, but they will at least be addressing the topic of the economy under the theme of "Why Wisconsin...!"

Gov. Jim Doyle will make the keynote address at a major session on Tuesday and further outline some of the economic initiatives he is pushing.

Of course, some critics will say the time for talk is over, and action is needed. But, the Summit gives people an opportunity to learn what already is being done to stimulate economic development, as well as a chance to discuss new initiatives.

At a period when it looks like the national, state and local economy could follow diverging paths from the current crossroads, the Summit, followed by some definitive action, could not be timelier.

**--Artistic Display?--**

Club Paradise Gentlemen's Club, a place we would have called a strip club in less politically correct days, displays art on its walls from local artists, while its dancers display themselves to patrons. Because of the former, the club owners would like their business to be designated a "Center for the Visual and Performing Arts."

A Milwaukee Common Council committee at first agreed with the owners, but then caught enough heat and derision last week that it reversed its decision.

The Utilities and Licenses Committee reversed its decision and put on hold any action on the designation. The committee originally voted 2-1 for the designation, which would have allowed people younger than 21 into the Walker's Point club.

The center designation primarily is aimed at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts and other similar venues that sell alcohol in the lobby or at special events.

Some Common Council members said a hearing on the Club Paradise designation could still be held, perhaps later this week. In a prepared statement, outgoing mayor John Norquist said, "There is no public purpose served by allowing teenagers in strip clubs."

**--Recall Turnout--**

Milwaukee Election Commission officials were predicting no more than a 9% turnout in Tuesday's recall election of Senator Gary George. Nobody was predicting whether a small turnout would help George or his opponent, Spencer Coggs.

Some speculated that the turnout might even be smaller if George had not mounted so many legal challenges to the recall. George has said all along that his constituents did not want to recall him, and that the effort was led by people from outside his district. He will find out if that is true, at least for a slight percentage of his constituents on Tuesday.

**--More Summit--**

Here's a look at the Wisconsin Economic Summit's ambitious agenda:

The challenges of Milwaukee will be discussed in a session called, "Urban Anchors: Building the 21st Century Milwaukee." Antonio Riley, executive director of the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority, will moderate the discussion. Panelists include: Genyne Edwards, Deputy Secretary, Department of Tourism, Michael Morgan, Secretary, Department of Revenue, Julie Penman, Commissioner, Milwaukee Department of City Development, Lois Quinn, Senior Research Scientist, UW-Milwaukee, David Riemer, State Budget Director, Department of Administration, and Tim Sheehy, President, Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce.

Entrepreneurs who start small businesses provide jobs. In a session called, "The Economic Garden: Fertilizing Entrepreneurial Growth," Cory Nettles, Secretary of the Department of Commerce, will moderate a panel discussion.

The Young Professionals of Milwaukee, an organization that has grown to 240 people who fit the description in the name of the group, will discuss how to develop a "brain gain" of young people rather than suffer a "brain drain" from the state.

Various sectors of economic development will be addressed. The Wisconsin Association of Biomedical Research & Education will premiere a report on the state of bioscience in Wisconsin in a Monday press conference. Gale Davy, Executive Director of the association, and Bill Hendee, Senior Associate Dean & Vice President, Medical College of Wisconsin, will discuss the report.

Although the summit is held in Milwaukee, it will address economic development statewide. On Monday, a press conference will be held to unveil the NorthEast Wisconsin (NEW Economy) Project, an "economic development strategy for this region that utilizes the current strengths in the area while addressing the region's weaknesses and challenges for the development of a future strong and prosperous economy."

Appearing at the press conference will be Roberta Gassman, Secretary, Department of Workforce Development, Jim Golembeski, Bay Area Workforce Development Board, Rob Kelman, Chair, Regional NEW Economy Committee, and Cheryl Welch, Executive Administrator, Fox Valley Workforce Development Board.

*--Hoffmann is a veteran journalist and senior lecturer in journalism and mass communication at UW-Milwaukee.*