
Labor Day: A Time to Reflect on the Contributions of Wisconsin's Workers

A Column by Secretary Scott Baumbach Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

MADISON – On the first Monday of every September, we recognize Labor Day as a tribute to the contributions that working men and women have made to the strength of our communities and our nation, contributions that have had a lasting impact on our quality of life.

The people of Wisconsin are hard working, talented, well-trained and educated. Wisconsin has the highest high school graduation rate in the country. Wisconsin ranks among the top states in labor force participation rates. Wisconsin is a leading manufacturing state, known the world over for quality goods and services, and its standing is due in large part to a highly skilled workforce.

At the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, our mission is to advance Wisconsin's economy and business climate by empowering and supporting the workforce. Our vision is to make Wisconsin the workforce of choice. Both reflect our agency's commitment to Wisconsin workers.

Throughout the decades, Wisconsin has been a pioneer in efforts to support workers, and this year we are celebrating many of these contributions with centennial events. These contributions include:

- **Worker's Compensation** – Through the combined efforts of labor, manufacturing and the Wisconsin Legislature, Wisconsin was the first state in the nation to pass worker's compensation legislation in 1911. The law became the model for similar state and national protections, and Wisconsin remains a leader today.
- **Apprenticeship** – Apprenticeship is also celebrating its centennial in 2011. Again, Wisconsin was the first state in the nation to regulate apprenticeship, making it a formal partnership between employers, organized labor, vocational education and apprentices.
- **Technical College System** – In establishing standards for apprenticeship, the Wisconsin Legislature had the foresight to pass laws in 1911 in support of vocational, technical and adult education. The Wisconsin Technical College System is celebrating its 100th anniversary as well.
- **Unemployment Insurance** – In 1932, Wisconsin once again led the way by enacting the nation's first Unemployment Insurance laws. Those unemployment benefits remain crucial today.
- **Labor Standards and Working Conditions** – Americans today work in clean, well-lit, well-ventilated workplaces. This is in contrast to a time – less than 100 years ago – in which workers, including women and children, endured poor working conditions. Labor played a major role in ending unfair practices and improving working conditions.

On this Labor Day, we also turn our focus to jobs. The Department of Workforce Development plays an important role in advancing Governor Walker's vision of creating an environment for 250,000 private sector jobs in Wisconsin by 2015. To this end, I believe a strong, skilled and vibrant labor force will help move our state's economy toward that goal.

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This year has brought tremendous challenges for Wisconsin workers, both government and private-sector alike. Restoring fiscal responsibility to our state finances has required sacrifice, but the difficult choices we've made are supporting economic reforms that are working.

Over 28,000 private sector jobs have been created this year, more than half of them in manufacturing. The website www.JobCenterofWisconsin.com is seeing record numbers of job postings, surpassing 34,000 in recent days. Wisconsin exports exceeded \$5.6 billion during the second quarter of 2011, up 5 percent from the 2010 fourth quarter.

Wisconsin and its people win when we foster economic growth. In declaring "Wisconsin is open for business," we are stating our commitment to help business and industry create jobs, and that means employment opportunities for the working men and women of Wisconsin, enabling them to support their families and communities.

On this Labor Day, I urge you to reflect upon how much has been accomplished by workers and for workers in our state. Here's to a safe and happy Labor Day, and for continuing our state's proud tradition for workers for decades to come.