

Footnotes...

THIRD QUARTER 2006



Letter to the board from the chairman . . .

As President Jeff Browne said at our last board meeting, an important part of insuring the long-term viability of the Forum is to increase membership so that it accounts for at least 50% of Forum revenue. We can reach that goal with the help of each and every board member.

I will be asking each of you in a separate letter to contact those companies at which you know someone who would be in a position to make the recommendation to become a Forum member. The experts tell us that growing membership is all about personal, one-on-one relationships. Cold calling or mass mailings simply are not effective – or cost-effective – for a small organization like the Forum.

Remember, you're asking for involvement in the region's future direction, which is both important and exciting. (Membership dues are dependent upon the number of employees, so, in large part, it is up to the company to determine what dues it will pay.)

Once you have determined which company(ies) on the list you will contact, I am asking that you reply via e-mail to Jerry Slaske at the Forum with that information so he can coordinate the effort. His e-mail is jslaske@publicpolicyforum.org.

We have a terrific board and I know everyone will support this initiative.

Thanks for your support,

F. William Haberman
Forum chairman

Race relations survey: Sure to have an impact Funders still needed to cover cost of project

By the time you read this, the Forum's race relations survey will have been completed. At least the actual interviews with 1,000 residents from throughout southeastern Wisconsin and across the racial spectrum will be done. Dissection and analysis of the information will take some time. In partnership with *The Business Journal*, the Forum plans to release the survey, along with all of its implications, late this fall in a special newspaper supplement. Based on initial results, Forum President Jeff Browne said he is confident it will have a significant impact on the race relations discussion.

Browne also said funding is still needed to cover the entire cost of the project. "We plan to take the survey results on the road to any organization or community interested in talking about the issue," he said. "It's going to take time and more funding than we currently have, but there is tremendous momentum in the community to find some common ground on race. Not since school desegregation 30 years ago (in the 1970s) has there been such a groundswell."

The Forum needs \$40,000 to finish the project and make sure it has an impact in the region. ❖

Footnotes (published quarterly)

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"Salute" raises record amount

More than \$26,000 – the most ever – was raised for the Forum at the "Salute" in June. It's the Forum's only fundraising event of the year so the support from members, their guests, and sponsors was extremely gratifying. ❖

Forum given "clean bill of health"

The Forum came through its second audit ever with hardly a scratch. All of the significant recommendations from the first audit, like the creation of personnel policies, were addressed. ❖

Water study: Impact in the making

The Forum's water study released last February helped inspire a legislative council study committee that has been established to study its recommendations and their relationship to the Great Lakes Water Compact legislation. Peter McAvoy, vice president of environmental health at the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, who advised the Forum's water policy advisory panel, said State Senator Neal Kedzie is chairing the 15-member committee, which has representation from a "broad array of interests." According to McAvoy, the committee hopes to release its findings before the end of 2006. "It's a credit to the Forum that it was able to elevate the issues and the discussion," he said. "No one else was calling for a legislative council to take up this issue." ❖

Research puts different spin on property tax burdens

When the Forum released its annual property tax research in July, it pointed out the region's largest cities – Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha – are relative "tax havens" in the sense that they ranked low in average property tax bills, defying conventional wisdom.

The "tax haven" label raised a few eyebrows. Some called it ridiculous and irresponsible and others said it added a new perspective to something that was always taken as a given. Whatever, it generated quite a bit of discussion. And the Forum heard from people it never heard from before.

The "tax haven" observation emerged when the Forum found that the typical homeowner in the region paid about \$4,000 in property taxes. In Milwaukee, the average tax bill was less than \$3,500; just over \$3,500 in Kenosha; and below \$3,000 in Racine.

Despite Milwaukee County municipalities having the highest tax rates in the region, the typical Milwaukee County homeowner paid somewhat less than the regional average in property taxes. On the flip side, Waukesha County homeowners had low tax rates, high property values, and much larger tax bills.

If you haven't seen the report, go to www.publicpolicyforum.org and give it a read. It might change your view on the cost of living in southeastern Wisconsin. ❖

Research funded by

 **Baird**
Robert W. Baird & Co. Incorporated

For all Forum studies, please visit
www.publicpolicyforum.org.

New perspective on school report

This year's schooling report looks at public schools as incubators for workforce development and, as such, it investigated the productivity of those incubators. To do that, the Forum measured absenteeism as educational opportunities lost because children were not in class.

The analysis found that students throughout southeastern Wisconsin missed 3.6 million days of school during 2004-05, or 6.5% of all school days. Could any employer remain productive or in business with that kind of absenteeism rate?

While the numbers showed improvement over the last five years, the lost educational opportunity in our region was higher in the region than for the state.

This finding, the report said, helps to explain the gap between the region and the state when it comes to the results on standardized tests. At every grade level and in every subject, average scores in southeastern Wisconsin were lower than the state average.

Jeff Schmidt, the report's author, said, "Measurements of absenteeism and test outcomes are important to understanding what has to happen to strengthen our region's economic competitiveness."

The full report and accompanying poster can be found at www.publicpolicyforum.org. ❖

Research funded by

GE Healthcare



GK Griffin, Kubik, Stephens
& Thompson, Inc.
Investment Bankers



Northwestern Mutual®
Foundation

Upcoming reports

- 10th annual philanthropy report for the counties of Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee and Washington;
- 9th Racine school report comparing the Racine district to the other nine largest Wisconsin school districts;
- Public safety report covering southeastern Wisconsin;
- Economic development report reviewing all city of Milwaukee expenditures – federal, state, and local – for economic development. Study author Ryan Horton promises the report to be exhaustive and eye-opening. ❖

Upcoming events

- **Friday, October 27** – "The role of higher education in making the region more competitive" – Viewpoint panel discussion at Brookfield Suites, Moorland Road.
- **Friday, December 1** – Race relations survey results. Details forthcoming.

Check www.publicpolicyforum.org for more information. ❖

Forum jumps on voting reform in middle of election season

Voting reform took center stage at a Viewpoint panel discussion on September 7. What better way to kick off Wisconsin's election season? The Forum brought in experts from outside the region to talk about the chances of substantive change in the current voting process.

Charles Stewart III, head of the political science department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said that 4-6 million votes are lost in every national election because of antiquated equipment and practices and unanticipated consequences of good intentions like convenience voting methods, including "motor voting."

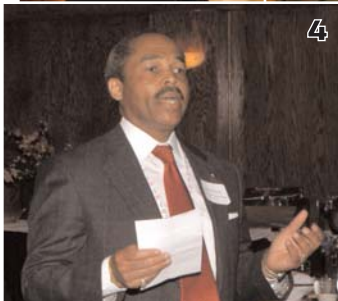
Dr. Toby Moore, who is project manager on the Carter-Baker Commission on Federal Election Reform at American University's Center for Democracy and Election Management, said that any reform will be slow in coming

because reliable data is often non-existent, partisanship dominates, current rules lack consistency and transparency, consensus is lacking, and reform is entangled in America's racial and ethnic history.

Stewart said voting machines are better in 2006 and election administration has cleaned up its act, but that politicization and the rush to reform has increased confusion.

Kevin Kennedy, executive director of Wisconsin State Elections Board, called Wisconsin's voting system imperfect, but basically credible, and urged both sides to tone down the divisive rhetoric.

The discussion was moderated by Bill Holahan, economics professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. ❧



Viewpoint sponsored by:



1-5: Voting reform definitely is a "hot button" issue for the general public. There are passionate feelings on all sides and it was no different at this Viewpoint. There was plenty of comment from the audience. **6:** Dr. Toby Moore (left), from American University's Center for Democracy and Election Management, said the voter ID controversy is "emblematic of US election reform." What we need, he said, is "more and better data, less fear mongering, better resources, and compromise and careful reform." Charles Stewart III (right), head of political science at MIT, said there are a number of times throughout the voting process when votes can go astray. Those times include during registration of voters, authentication of voters, rendering of ballots, counting of ballots, and aggregation and certification of the vote. **7:** Kevin Kennedy (second from left), executive director of the Wisconsin State Elections Board, talked about how the state's voting process could be improved. Bill Holahan (at podium), economics professor at UWM, kept the program on target and on time. **8:** About 120 attendees got a national perspective about why the chances are slim for any meaningful voting reform in the near future.

New Forum members since the beginning of 2006 ...

Arnold & O'Sheridan Associated Bank, N.A.	Jackson, Village of
Buratto, Mary Kay	Johnson, Tracy K.
City of Waukesha	Keller, Kit
Crumble, Denise	LeCapitaine, Jane E.
Cyr, Arthur I.	Martin, Deidre A.
Dubner, Eileen	Messing, Renee
Forest County	Milwaukee Downtown BID #21
Potawatomi Community	Sanders, Katherine M.
Foster, Byron T.	Seeds of Health, Inc.
Hope House of Milwaukee, Inc.	Waukesha, City of
	White, Wallace

Movin' on up

According to the National Association of Realtors, the median home price in the Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis area is \$227,700. That's up 5% in the past year. ❏

Jury still out on choice schools

An article about school choice by the Forum's research director, Anneliese Dickman, appeared recently in the Summer 2006 issue of *Oregon's Future*, a nonprofit magazine of opinion published in Portland, Oregon. The article, entitled "*The Half-Billion Dollar Question*," explored the question of whether choice schools are a good academic alternative to public schools. Regarding the Milwaukee choice experiment and its performance results, Dickman said, "After 15 years of vouchers, valid and unbiased research still eludes us." She also referenced research done by others and alerted the lay person to things to look for before making a decision on a child's school. The magazine's Web site is www.oregonsfuture.org. ❏

Forum going paperless

If you haven't already, please send us your e-mail address. We want to do as much communication with members and other interested parties via e-mail. In the long term, the change will save the Forum money and increase efficiency. Please send your e-mail address to Cathy Crother, Forum office manager, at ccrother@publicpolicyforum.org. ❏