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## Secretary Gassman Urges Students to Sign Wisconsin Covenant

### *State Labor Secretary visits youth at Covenant Days event in Wisconsin Rapids*

WISCONSIN RAPIDS – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today called on eighth graders to sign the Wisconsin Covenant and ensure a spot for themselves in a Wisconsin college or university, provided they work hard during high school and meet certain requirements.

Secretary Gassman was joined at Wisconsin Covenant Days at Mid-State Technical College by eighth-grade students signing the pledge from John Edwards and Auburndale Middle Schools.

“Through the Wisconsin Covenant, thousands of young people are on a successful path to higher education, focusing on maintaining a B average, completing the right classes and fulfilling important roles in their communities,” Secretary Gassman said. “As the state Labor Secretary, I see firsthand the importance of education in ensuring a skilled future workforce. The Wisconsin Covenant provides every student the opportunity to reach their dreams of higher education and, along with that, success in their future careers.”

Wisconsin Covenant Days are an opportunity for eighth grade students to get an idea of what life is like on a college campus. Eighth grade students who choose to participate in the Wisconsin Covenant will sign a pledge affirming that they will earn a high school diploma, participate in their community and be a good citizen, take a high school curriculum that prepares them for higher education, maintain at least a B average in high school, and apply in a timely manner for state and federal financial aid. Students have until September 30 of their freshman year to join the program.

In return for keeping the Covenant pledge, each of the Wisconsin Covenant Scholars will earn a spot in either the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Technical College System, or at one of the state's 20 private, nonprofit and independent colleges. As students enter college, they may receive a mix of loans, grants, and work study opportunities based on their family's financial needs.

Currently, over 50,000 students have signed the pledge, representing all 72 Wisconsin counties. The first class of Wisconsin Covenant Scholars will graduate in 2011.

Secretary Gassman was joined at today's event by former Philadelphia Eagles and UW-Madison fullback Cecil Martin, along with Covenant Partner James Zylstra, Vice President of the Wisconsin Technical College System, and MSTC President Dr. John Clark.

As Wisconsin Covenant Partners, the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU), and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction have already taken major steps to join the state in moving forward the Wisconsin Covenant.

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Four years ago, the Wisconsin Covenant Partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding that commits to ensuring a place in higher education for Wisconsin Covenant Scholars. In 2007, the Legislature passed Act 20 to create the Office of the Covenant, and last June, in the 2009-2011 State Budget, the Legislature created a \$25 million annual permanent appropriation for the Wisconsin Covenant.

In March, Governor Jim Doyle announced that every student who has signed and fulfilled the Wisconsin Covenant pledge and goes on to college in Wisconsin will receive a Wisconsin Covenant Scholar Grant for eight semesters. The grants will be distributed under a two-part award system that will allow the state to maximize the number of Covenant Scholars who can receive Scholar grants.

Under the proposed administrative rule, for each Wisconsin Covenant Scholar's first four semesters, they will receive grants based on their family income and their financial need:

- Students with the greatest financial need will receive \$2,500 to help cover the cost of tuition -- \$1,000 from the Wisconsin Covenant Scholars Grant program and \$1,500 from the Wisconsin Covenant Foundation.
- Students whose families have higher incomes, but still qualify for assistance will receive \$1,500 or \$1,000, depending on their family's income.
- Students whose families do not qualify for financial assistance according to the federal government will receive \$250 for education costs.

In the third and fourth years of college, these specific dollar figures will be adjusted to ensure that each class of Covenant Scholars receives its entire \$25 million allocation without overspending.

Governor Doyle has worked hard to make college more affordable and accessible for all students and their families. Since taking office, Governor Doyle has tripled the amount of financial aid available to students to \$243 million in financial aid. The Governor has also signed legislation to increase the maximum Wisconsin Higher Education Grant for UW System schools from \$2,500 to \$3,000 and has expanded the college tuition tax deduction.

Last year, Governor Doyle and Richard D. George, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Covenant Foundation, announced that each student who has signed the Wisconsin Covenant pledge and fulfills the pledge, enrolls at least half-time in a Wisconsin college or university in fall 2011, and demonstrates significant financial need will receive a \$1,500 grant from the Foundation to be used for postsecondary education expenses.

For detailed information on the terms of the Wisconsin Covenant and the Wisconsin Covenant Grant Program, visit: [www.wisconsin covenant.wi.gov](http://www.wisconsin covenant.wi.gov).