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Secretary Gassman Highlights Workforce Items in Governor's Grow Wisconsin Plan

During Up North tour, Labor Secretary lists opportunities for better jobs

SUPERIOR – Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman said today Wisconsin must raise the state minimum wage for hardworking families struggling in low-wage jobs and provide training opportunities that put them on career paths to better jobs.

“In his *Grow Wisconsin – The Next Steps* plan, Governor Doyle has a workforce agenda that not only provides a much needed raise to hardworking families struggling on low incomes, but a chance to get ahead,” Secretary Gassman said. “With higher prices, especially for fuel and food, we are moving to raise the minimum wage from \$6.50 an hour to \$7.25 an hour. In addition, the Governor is taking steps to see that these workers have opportunities to get better jobs. Employers need skilled workers, and by investing in people, we can meet their needs, grow our economy and create jobs.”

During a news conference at Northwest CSA in Superior, Secretary Gassman outlined the workforce agenda items in the Governor's latest Grow plan. They include:

- **Opportunity Grants** – Wisconsin has 723,000 workers who have little or no education and training beyond high school, at a time when two in three jobs require greater education. The Governor's plan would provide \$1.5 million in Opportunity Grants. Individuals could receive grants of \$1,000 per year to receive training in targeted areas of manufacturing, biotechnology and health care.
- **Skills Jump Start** – Public and private funding totaling \$640,000 would be available to low-wage workers who lack a high school education. With the Skills Jump Start program, they could complete their basic education and, at the same time, receive training for jobs in demand occupations.
- **Apprenticeship Opportunities** – Both the Youth Apprenticeship and Adult Apprentices programs would be expanded to include new programs. Each would receive new funding of \$300,000. Youth Apprenticeship would add school-to-career programs in veterinary science, dental technician and construction. Adult Apprenticeship would add programs in plastics, printing, utilities and health care.

Secretary Gassman also said DWD was moving forward with the minimum wage rule that received a public hearing last week in Madison. The rule would increase the state minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour, effective July 24, 2009, the second state minimum wage increase since Governor Doyle took office. She said the increase will benefit 230,000 low-wage workers.

The state increase is in step with a federal minimum wage increase to \$7.25 per hour next July. However, Secretary Gassman said the new state wage will benefit 2,800 seasonal workers who are not covered by the federal wage. More important, she said, all low-wage workers would benefit from state enforcement at a time when the federal government has fewer investigators who are focused on big employers.

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