



Walker takes credit for improving economy

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On Friday, Governor Walker's Administration took credit for Wisconsin's unemployment rate dropping to 4.3 percent and a \$135.6 million surplus in Wisconsin's General Fund.

"This week, we received confirmation that our tough, but prudent, reforms continue to have a positive effect on Wisconsin," said Gov. Walker's office in a written statement.

Indeed, Wisconsin's economy has improved drastically over the past several years. In the Fox Valley, the unemployment rate has dropped from 5.3 to 3.8 percent from August 2014 to August 2015, according to Jeffrey Sachse, senior economist with the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

It is not clear, however, how much credit is due to national economic trends, versus Walker's fiscal

policies, which have not been without criticism.

Criticism spans all sectors including labor (collective bargaining), transportation (high speed rail), health care (no state health exchange) and the environment, where Walker has traditionally favored the relaxation of laws governing mining, wetlands, and pollution controls in waterways.

Whether the long term impact of Walker's policies have had "a positive effect," that's still an unknown. However, what is clear, is that Wisconsin's economy is on the rebound, according to industry experts.

"Everybody's hiring. We had to turn down 30 employers at a recent job fair, because we didn't have room," said Jim Golembeski , Executive Director at Bay Area Workforce Development Board.

But according to the Bureau of Labor statistics (BLS), that 4.3 percent statistic may not be showing the complete picture. 4.3 percent does not take into account for a number of factors, such as those who are underemployed or exhaust their unemployment benefits, Golembeski said.

BLS calculates what is referred to as a U-6 rate, which factors in workers who are employed on a part-time basis purely for economic reasons, among other factors. The national U-6 (more complete unemployment rate) has been more than 10 percent or even higher for much of 2015. And in other parts of the state, take [Milwaukee \(http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2012/feb/13/david-clarke-jr/conservative-black-sheriff-says-milwaukee-blacks-h/\)](http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2012/feb/13/david-clarke-jr/conservative-black-sheriff-says-milwaukee-blacks-h/) for example, more than 55 percent of African American males are unemployed according to various reports, a far cry from the recent 4.6 percent statistic.

During Walker's first term as Governor he made a [campaign promise \(http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/promises/walk-o-meter/promise/526/create-250000-new-jobs/\)](http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/promises/walk-o-meter/promise/526/create-250000-new-jobs/) to create 250,000 private sector jobs in Wisconsin. According to PolitiFact, Walker created only 146,795 jobs, falling short of his promise by about 42 percent.

Walker maintains he continues to work hard for Wisconsin.

"Opportunities for Wisconsin's workforce continue to grow, and these latest numbers highlight the positive business climate in our state. Our work is not finished, we remain focused on helping the hard-working men and women of Wisconsin develop the practical skills they need to prosper in our workforce and to connect these skilled workers with employers," Walker added in the written statement.

But while border states such as Minnesota are able to retain companies over the past several years such as 3M, General Mills, Best Buy and Target, Wisconsin has been less fortunate. MillerCoors moved its headquarters from Milwaukee to Chicago, Jelly Belly moved its Wisconsin warehouse from Pleasant Prairie to Tennessee, and over the years, Harley Davidson, moved much of its operations to York, Pa and Kansas City. The list goes on.

However, Walker contends that his [recent travel abroad \(http://wbay.com/2015/10/10/gov-walker-defends-travel-expenses/\)](http://wbay.com/2015/10/10/gov-walker-defends-travel-expenses/) has served to bring businesses into Wisconsin. His recent efforts include, the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health signing a memorandum of understanding with the German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases to collaborate on research efforts aimed at slowing the onset of Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and other neurodegenerative diseases.

Walker's administration also says it secured an \$11 million dollar project with Saint-Gobain Corp. The company plans to expand its medical device manufacturing facility during the first half of 2016. This marks the company's [fourth expansion \(http://inwisconsin.com/press_releases/saint-gobain/#sthash.EnFV1kvf.dpuf\)](http://inwisconsin.com/press_releases/saint-gobain/#sthash.EnFV1kvf.dpuf) in Portage in the last decade, according to Laurel Patrick, Gov. Walker's Press Secretary.

Like Walker, Golembeski remains optimistic.

"The economy in Northeastern Wisconsin is growing and employers are expanding," he said noting that with the retirement of baby boomers and companies expanding, there will be even more job openings in the future.

And, Wisconsin's General Fund has a surplus of more than \$135.6 million, according to the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA). DOA, recently released its annual fiscal report.

As for Walker taking credit for the improvement in Wisconsin's economy, Golembeski says, "that's arguable."

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