

Mayor's Column for December 9, 2009 Review

I have been absorbing a lot of information about jobs and unemployment the past several weeks and mulling over what it means for us at the local level. Here are a sampling of some of the events, articles, and interviews.

As I began writing this week's column President Obama was holding a jobs summit at the White House (December 3). Job creation was one of the forum topics. Retooling the workforce with appropriate skill sets for a "new economy" was also on the agenda. Summit participant Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm, interviewed the morning of the summit on MSNBC's "Morning Joe", stated that she expected discussion of how to keep a manufacturing sector in the U.S. CNBC news anchor Maria Bartiromo commented in response to Governor Granholm that the U.S. economy was transitioning from manufacturing-based to service industry and technology-based. Bartiromo pointed out that small business was where there was economic growth in the U.S.

Elizabeth Warren, Chair of the Congressional Oversight Panel and Professor at Harvard Law School, wrote an article on the December 3 Huffington Post entitled "America Without a Middle Class". Warren stated, "The crisis facing the middle class started more than a generation ago. Even as productivity rose, the wages of the average fully-employed male have been flat since the 1970s."

"By the early 2000s, families were spending twice as much (adjusted for inflation) on mortgages than they did a generation ago – for a house that was, on average, only ten percent bigger and 25 years older. They also had to pay twice as much to hang on to their health insurance."

Warren observed that the result was the rise of two-income families, but that even with the increased income, families today spend less on food, clothing, furniture, etc., and have gone into debt to pay for college, cover medical costs, and pay for home ownership. She summarizes her article with the following: "America today has plenty of rich and super-rich. But it has far more families who did all the right things, but who still have no real security. Going to college and finding a good job no longer guarantee economic safety. Paying for a child's education and setting aside enough for a decent retirement have become distant dreams. Tens of millions of once-secure middle class families now live paycheck to paycheck, watching as their debts pile up and worrying about whether a pink slip or a bad diagnosis will send them hurtling over an economic cliff."

Browsing among magazines while delayed in the Colorado Springs airport a few weeks ago, the cover of "Business Week" jumped at me. The title was "The Lost Generation", with the subtitle "The job crises is hitting young people especially hard—imperiling their future and the economy." The October 19, 2009 article authored by Peter Coy explains that the "most enduring harm is being done to young people who can't grab onto the first rung of the career ladder", whether new college graduates or high school dropouts. Coy points out that studies suggest that over time unemployment in young people can depress lifetime income, have detrimental impacts on work motivation, and even label individuals

as “damaged goods” to potential employers. He discusses the problem of multiple generations fighting over jobs available in the recovery. In addition, the “boomer” generation is counting on the young workforce to help fund retirement and health care. Coy states that permanently depressed income in our young workers means lower tax payments dedicated to Social Security and Medicare.

Economist James K. Galbraith was a featured speaker on the PBS show, “Bill Moyer’s Journal”, on October 30. Galbraith reinforced the ideas in the “Business Week” article. Galbraith stated, “. . . if something is not done to provide particularly young people, who are looking for work and cannot find it, with an opportunity to move on in life at this stage, it will mark them for the rest of their lives.”

The November 30, 2009 Wall Street Journal included an article on Milwaukee entitled “Water Plan Aims to Help Jobs Flow”. The story was about Milwaukee’s preparation of a Public Service Commission application that would allow a program that would offer reduced water rates for up to five years to new businesses that bring in at least 25 jobs. The historical manufacturing center in our state, former home of Pabst Brewery and Harnischfeger Industries, is seeking to provide incentives for businesses with 25 employees.

What does this mean for Evansville? First, the Chamber is focusing its efforts on “buying local”. Most of our businesses are locally owned—giving your business to your neighbors and friends strengthens the community as well. A strong business community adds vibrancy and vitality to a city.

A strong, progressive school district can provide tools for our youth. Mentoring programs can allow one on one time with our students that is critical. The Workforce Development Task Force that grew from the Economic Development Summit identified a number of programs to investigate to develop training in Evansville, for students and adults. The school district is investigating a number of these opportunities and we will work as a community to bring forward those that will be of benefit.

We have learned of an entrepreneurial “boot camp” called E-Hub. It involves six half-day classroom sessions, one-on-one coaching, and networking opportunities with other entrepreneurs and established, successful small business owners. The cost for the program is \$250. Those eligible as displaced workers or adults under the Wisconsin Investment Act may qualify for tuition grants. An informational meeting about the program, lasting about one hour, is scheduled for Thursday, December 18 at 8:00 a.m. or 5:00 p.m. at the Rock County Job Center, 1900 Center Avenue, Janesville. Please RSVP your attendance at one of the two December 18 meetings by calling Eric Kuznacic of the Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board at (608) 741-3502 by noon on December 16.

The Economic Development Committee, Chamber, the newly-formed Council of Evansville Economic Development, School District, and other local organizations will be

focusing efforts on other ways to assist businesses and workers in this challenging environment. Stay tuned.

Energy Saving Tip

Leaky air ducts can reduce heating and cooling efficiency by 20 percent or more. Use duct sealant, which works much better than duct tape, to seal air leaks. The U.S. Department of Energy indicates that cleaning inside ducts is not usually necessary.

Community Announcements

The ambulances have now moved into the newly completed garage on Church Street. They are no longer parked in the City Hall. **Please do not park in front of the garage doors; it will delay the ambulances in emergencies.**

Property tax bills will be mailed by this Friday, December 11. Taxes on a \$100,000 home in the city will be \$46.30 lower than last year. Other charges and credits (if applicable), including trash collection, lottery credit, and first dollar credit, could lower your bill an additional \$39.41. Property taxes are to be mailed to or paid at the Rock County Treasurer's office, **not** at Evansville City Hall.

Please remember that sidewalks must be cleared of snow and ice within 24 hours following a snowfall. Appropriate use of sand/salt will also assist pedestrians during the winter.

Overnight winter parking restrictions are in force. From 1 a.m. to 7 a.m., on odd-numbered days park on the odd-numbered side of streets; on even-numbered days park on the even-numbered side of streets.

Yard waste pick-up is completed for the season.

The Park Board is considering renting out operation of the Park Store during summer 2010. If you or your organization is interested, please call City Hall at 882-2266 or e-mail Aquatics Director Rick Hamacher at rboston@ticon.net.

During these economically difficult times, assistance and counseling is available. If you are feeling overwhelmed, please seek help. For farm families, call the Wisconsin Farm Center at 1-800-942-2474. First Call is also available in the Evansville area at 882-9966 for citizens needing counseling/assistance.

Community Thanks

Evansville thanks the Ecumenical Choir for the wonderful, uplifting concert on Sunday night. Approximately 200 people attended/performed this year. The Choir has performed holiday music in our community for more than 30 years. The annual event is a terrific sharing activity that can be enjoyed by all.

I would like to extend a heart-felt thanks to the Evansville community for the generous support of AWARE in Evansville. Needs have greatly increased this year. The Snackpacker Backpack Food Program provides weekend breakfast, lunch, and snack items to 174 children in our community, a 35% increase over last year. This year the Toys for Evansville program has enrolled 211 children who are hoping for a brighter Christmas. The city, school district, churches, businesses, civic organizations, and individual citizens together support AWARE in its efforts to reach out and help low income households in these difficult times.

At the AWARE Love Lights Tree Lighting Ceremony last Friday, I spoke of the outstanding generosity in our community. A gentleman yelled, "Yeah, Evansville!" He is absolutely spot on. "Yeah, Evansville!" As I drive by the beautiful lighted tree in front of City Hall, I recognize it as a symbol of community generosity. It warms my heart.