

# WISCONSIN WILL FACE WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

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Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Chief Economist Dennis Winters presents to members of the Greater Beloit Economic Development Corporation during the annual investors meeting Wednesday at Hotel Goodwin in Beloit.

BELOIT - Issues with the state's workforce capacity are being felt in Beloit, according to representatives from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD).

Chief economist Dennis Winters and research analyst Tom Pethan presented an update on the state of Wisconsin's labor prospects at the annual investors meeting of the Greater Beloit Economic Development Corporation (GBEDC) on Wednesday.

Winters told GBEDC members of statewide trends, from anticipated population changes across the state to issues

anticipated for the state's labor force, while Pethan focused on local figures for Rock and Winnebago counties.

According to Winters, the state will see virtually no increase in overall population projected to 2035, although Rock County is expected to see a 12.1 percent population increase aided in part by residents relocating to the area.

Winters said the state, country and global business communities are facing an aging labor force as more workers are retiring, leaving fewer to fill positions in turn creating labor shortages.

For the first time ever, Winters said the state's labor force could go flat or "may go negative" by 2035.

"That's never happened before," Winters told GBEDC members. "It's not a skills gap problem, it's a quantity problem. There just aren't enough people to fill those jobs."

Winters also quashed fears of a potential recession, but noted economic growth could slow.

"There's nothing in the data that I see that would indicate the economy is going into a recession any time soon," Winters said. "Things will slow, but I don't see them turning negative."

According to the Wisconsin Job Center, there are currently 100,429 open jobs as of November 20 across the state, with only 34,711 resumes submitted. Both DWD officials urged GBEDC members take advantage of WisConomy.com, a new state portal aimed at providing market information on jobs, wages and industry/occupation projections.

In Beloit, 59 percent or nearly 10,000 workers live and work in the city or township, while 15 percent of the city's workforce, nearly 2,500 workers, live in Winnebago County. The combined, dual-county unemployment rate of 5.3 percent in 2017 was two percent higher than the state average, according to DWD.

According to figures presented Wednesday, the fastest growing industries from 2016 to 2026 will be professional and business services, construction and self-employed workers.

Between 2010 and 2017, Rock and Winnebago counties added 10,451 jobs, according to DWD data. Between 2020 and 2030 population growth of 6.5 percent is expected, marginally higher than the state projection of 6.2 percent.

Going forward, Winters urged GBEDC members to invest in early childhood development, expand education-business partnerships and increase services.

"We need the talent," Winters said. "We need the productivity increases. That's much more appealing than anything else."