



# Wisconsin State Journal

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## **FOCUS ON ECONOMY A WELCOME SIGN**

EDITORIAL

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When even the far left in Madison embraces economic development as a top priority, something right is going on.

Progressive Dane, better known for fostering Madison's anti-business image, announced this week four key goals for the city in the coming year. The first one mentioned is promoting local business and economic development.

They even have a few good, if not very dramatic, ideas.

Progressive Dane has long touted itself as friendly to locally owned businesses. But its view of economic development has been too narrow.

Whether Progressive Dane in its latest announcement is just posturing for political reasons or is serious about expanding its support for business development remains to be seen. In any case, the fact that the issue is leading their to-do list is significant and positive no matter the party's motives.

It was less than a month ago that a diverse group calling itself the Common Sense Coalition jumped onto the local political scene. The coalition rapped city government, and by extension Progressive Dane, for failing to champion and improve our economy and business climate. Progressive Dane's agenda responds to that.

Remember that Progressive Dane is the party that tried to pile reams of restrictions onto "big box" stores that are popular with Madison customers. PD, as the party is known, also tried to force many small-business people to register as city lobbyists simply for speaking at public meetings and occasionally contacting city officials.

PD helped adopt one of the toughest anti-smoking laws in the state.

PD briefly turned Madison into a wage island that would have been one more disincentive for certain businesses to open in the city instead of its suburbs. The state nixed the city's minimum wage for a statewide minimum wage.

Despite its poor track record on economic development and business issues, PD is trumpeting the need for more attention to these areas in the coming year. Party members

want to establish a health-care purchasing pool for businesses in Madison. They want to encourage economic development in low-income neighborhoods.

Sounds good to us.

We also have agreed in the past with certain PD members that a public subsidy for a grocery store on well-to-do Monroe Street wasn't needed. And we went to bat for a public subsidy to help development in the not-so-well Allied Drive area.

PD announced last week it wants the city to clarify why and how it will give out subsidies to development projects. That's another good idea. Let just make sure we don't pile on a bunch of extra restrictions and red tape to the process.

It's also fine to celebrate locally owned businesses. Yet Madison, Dane County and southern Wisconsin need outside investors and companies to move or invest here as well.

And that's why creating an economic development corporation is so vital. It would be a powerful force for prosperity, luring companies, jobs and tax base to Dane County.

Mayor Dave Cieslewicz is on board with the idea, which business leaders are fostering. All City Council members -- including PD -- should put it high on their priority lists, too, if they're serious about helping our economy.