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Being Open for Business Means Making an Investment in Business

First, I want to publicly congratulate Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker on his recent election to the highest seat of government in Wisconsin. The voters have spoken, and they have chosen Governor-Elect Walker to make some very difficult decisions on their behalf. As he and I discussed by phone the morning after the election, the City of Milwaukee will be a willing partner with this new administration – we are more than ready to innovatively collaborate in order to see our state prosper. All of us must work together to ensure that Wisconsin is open for business.

Over the years, the Governor-Elect has continually made it clear that he unequivocally supports highway expansion – despite the billions of dollars in cost to taxpayers – because he deems such work to be an investment in future growth. I take him at his word that when it comes to the daunting tax-funded price tag, he considers these projects to be necessary.

We all know that certain government services cannot be eliminated, so taxes are necessary in order to pay for those services. If we want bridges and civic buildings to be built up to code; if we value public safety and education; if ensuring that people can drive to work is important – there is no way around the importance of public investment. Where there is waste or duplication, we must find ways to eliminate those impediments to prosperity. We must seek out smart public investments that offer Wisconsin the most bang for its buck. We must stabilize our future by investing today.

Which brings me to public transportation.

If spending *billions* of dollars on highway expansion is a worthy taxpayer expense, then surely spending *millions* of dollars on a modern public transportation system can be as well. Buses and trains are not just for the poor – they are not subsidies or social programs – they serve all of us. There are thousands of white-collar executives, college students, factory workers and industry professionals who simply prefer public transportation. In America, we often say that the car is king, but that does not mean that public transit must play the pauper.

Business leaders support connecting Wisconsin's two largest cities via high-speed rail. Mark Sabljak, the publisher of the *Business Journal of Greater Milwaukee*, recently urged support of the Madison-Milwaukee line, saying that "the degrees of separation between the Milwaukee business community and state government, the University of Wisconsin system and Madison's business community seem like a trip to China." He added, "As a taxpayer who understands that everything has costs, I vote for high-speed rail."

We cannot afford to be afraid of connecting our citizens to opportunities. There is no reason that the varied economic fabric of Wisconsin should not be knit together. This project represents much more than connecting Milwaukee to Madison – and eventually to LaCrosse; it affords Wisconsin residents the opportunity to access a modern Midwest network of high-speed rail. Cities such as Kansas City, St. Louis, Omaha, Minneapolis, Chicago, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Pittsburgh will all likely be connected by this new system. The real question is: Should such a network bypass Wisconsin businesses and residents? Our citizens deserve access to a 21st-Century transportation system just as much as their Midwestern neighbors.

Support for this project will show the nation and the world that Wisconsin truly is open for business, because an investment in high-speed rail is an investment in business. County Executive Walker was never afraid to take a principled stand. My hope is that Governor Walker will stand with business and support high-speed rail.