

Brain

From A1

Cities offer not only attractive employment opportunities, but also a wide variety of amenities to support a lifestyle that is attractive to people who have just earned their degree.

"Young college graduates are looking for urban locations, usually larger urban locations with lots of amenities," Knapp said. "For Wisconsin, their choice is really (only) Milwaukee."

"There is also an imbalance between the degrees earned in Wisconsin and the industries with available jobs. 'We've historically been a manufacturing state,' Knapp said. 'A lot of times, we don't have significant numbers of the kinds of occupations that many of these college graduates are going into.'"

The degree debate

For Mauston Mayor Brian McGuire, brain drain hits close to home. He worked as a teacher for 34 years, and still works part time as a substitute in Mauston.

"We do have plenty of opportunities to work, but a lot of those are not requiring degrees," McGuire said. "So when people do want to advance academically to further their career, they are looking elsewhere."

McGuire thinks where people choose to live is also a matter of preference and not just about pay. Both of his sons are college educated, but one prefers to live in the city while the other "really likes small-town living."

If more people were open to the idea of forgoing a four-year degree and looking at other educational opportunities, brain drain might be less extreme.

Education, in McGuire's view, should help people find their strengths and then build upon them. "Part of our job as educators is to look for your strengths and to help you see them and develop them," McGuire said.

This includes emphasizing to students a four-year degree is not the only post-high school option for a career.

"The college degree is, for a lot of people, just an exercise in persistence," McGuire said. "I don't equate the college degree with more intelligence."

Wisconsin Dells Mayor Brian Landers agrees. Landers, who teaches criminal justice at Madison Area Technical College, said he is constantly telling students and parents a bachelor's degree is not necessary for everyone.

"You don't need a bachelor's degree to earn a very good living and be successful," Landers said. "Our welding students, we have a certificate program for welding that's less than one year, and they're hired before they leave the campus. Oftentimes with jobs upwards of \$60,000 to \$80,000 (in annual pay)."

Landers feels some educators are "turning a blind eye to a lot of the associates degree work that is out there."

Finding rural attraction

New Lisbon Mayor Lloyd Chase has seen young professionals leave his city as well. Chase has encouraged several businesses to move to New Lisbon, but said "they want a certain population in a certain radius."

Although he understands the reasoning, Chase said this presents a challenge for smaller municipalities. "The difficulty is we don't have a dense population here," Chase said. "That drives a lot of things."

Chase's son works as an engineer for the Department of Transportation, but in order to pursue the career of his choice, he had to leave home for Stoughton. "He would not be able to come here with the kind of work he wants to do," Chase said.

Young college graduates leaving a state can be offset by those that come in, but ensuring the latter keeps up with the former can be a challenge.

State Rep. Ed Brooks, R-Reeds-



Dr. Jennifer Gavinski, professor of biology at Madison Area Technical College Reedsburg campus and Wisconsin Dells School Board member, reviews material for an exam during an anatomy and physiology class at Madison Area Technical College campus in Reedsburg.



Wisconsin Dells Mayor Brian Landers, who teaches criminal justice at Madison Area Technical College, said he is constantly telling students and parents a bachelor's degree is not necessary to become a law enforcement officer.

burg, co-authored a workforce package designed to attract young college graduates to rural areas in Wisconsin. The package would create rural opportunity zones throughout the state and offer benefits to college graduates who move there, given certain conditions.

The main benefit is state assistance in paying back student loans. College graduates who moved to a rural opportunity zone would receive a repayment of up to \$25,000 or 40 percent of their outstanding student loans, whichever is less. "The most that a person can get is \$5,000 a year, for five years," said Brooks' staff member Kathryn Heitman.

Some have voiced skepticism over rural opportunity zones, claiming a person could stay in Wisconsin for five years and leave after receiving assistance in paying back their student loans. But Heitman thinks the benefits of having a working professional in a rural area for five years outweighs the potential drawbacks of them leaving after the five years.

"I think this is something that can get bipartisan support," Heitman said.

Other states, such as Kansas and Oklahoma, have also enacted rural



Zach Dahl checks his phone at cafe near his workspace in Sauk City.

opportunity zone legislation. Wisconsin's ROZ legislation is partially modeled after Kansas' but Kansas goes further with benefits, offering temporary income-tax exemptions to participants in the program. Knapp says "those kinds of

policies can help stem the brain drain," but remains wary of ROZs as a solution to the overall problem. Given young people's known preferences for urban areas and the lifestyles they offer, he said it is a legitimate question whether they

would stay in a rural opportunity zone.

Chase was more skeptical. "I think that when people get student loans they're making an investment in a lifetime of higher pay," Chase said. "And so I'm not very liberal in my thinking about forgiving student loans because people have chosen to do that in order to elevate themselves above a certain pay level."

Young professionals look forward

Not all solutions are achieved through legislation. In addition to working in finance in Sauk City, Dahl is also the chairman of the Sauk Prairie Young Connection, a group designed to offer a sense of community to young professionals.

"We just focus on issues that young people have," Dahl said. "Whether that's getting into the workplace right out of college, whether that's networking with peers, whether that's dealing with baby boomers."

During Dahl's tenure as chairman, the club also rebranded to be more inclusive toward young people working in blue-collar professions. The club has seen more members working in plumbing, electric and agriculture. "We try to incorporate that, and that's gone really well," Dahl said.

Dahl said he thinks that in college it is easy to meet people because most of the students are in similar situations, but after graduating it can be more challenging. "You get into town and that's kind of hard to find," Dahl said.

The Sauk Prairie Young Connection aims to offer that network of peers to young people and replicate the social atmosphere many of them have become accustomed to. "If you're there for two to three years, you start to get to know the people and then you feel like you're part of a community — it happened to me," Dahl said.

To some, this community-based approach can cultivate a sense of belonging.

Although brain drain may continue for years, if the burden of student debt can be eased and young college educated people are made to feel part of the rural communities they find themselves in, some of them might just stay.

You can reach Jake Ekdahl on Twitter @jakeekdahl

Housing

From A1

"My biggest concern is trying to make sure that we have housing for our workforce," Whipple said. "Which includes trying to draw skilled people to this area."

Group home fees tabled

In a 16-1 vote, the county board tabled the proposal put forward by the Sheriff's Committee to charge fees to other counties whose residents stay in Juneau County group homes for the cost of services.

The proposal was tabled at the recommendation of Corporation Counsel David Lasker, who stated "this is a very complicated subject area with a lot of legal implications." Lasker said he plans to coordinate a series of meetings with



AICP Executive Director Dennis Lawrence presents the results of Juneau County Housing Study to the county board.

representatives from all groups affected by the proposal and work

through the details. Without taking proper precaution, Lasker felt

the board would be walking into a "minefield of legal issues."

Jack Jasinski was the only board member to vote against tabling the proposal. "It's a burden on the county," Jasinski said. "That's my concern."

Coroner position eliminated

The board decided to eliminate the position of coroner and replace it with the position of medical examiner. The current coroner Linda Mitchell-May will serve the remainder of her term, which ends Dec. 31.

Rather than be elected to a four year term as coroner is, the medical examiner will be appointed by the county board. The medical examiners' compensation will be established in the 2019 county budget.

According to the passed pro-

posal, the medical examiner will have the "same duties" as coroner.

Mitchel-May said she supports the decision and "feels like this is such a move forward for the county." She said the Wisconsin Medical Examiners and Coroners Association is "pushing for legislation to set state standards."

Mitchel-May plans to help with the transition and said she has "enjoyed her time here."

Other business

The board appointed former UW-Extension Agent Judy Kennedy to the Juneau County Agricultural Industrial Recreational Society Committee.

The Juneau County Board will meet again March 20.

You can reach Jake Ekdahl on Twitter @jakeekdahl