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Dave Waymire: Michigan can learn from Massachusetts

9:42 PM, Jun 30, 2012 | Comments

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Dave Waymire

Any "dashboard" measuring quality of life today would show Massachusetts citizens enjoying good times. And Michigan — the needles measuring outcomes are stuck on the wrong side of the dial.

Massachusetts ranks second in per capita income; Michigan 36th. Massachusetts' unemployment is 14th lowest in the nation; Michigan's is 40th. Massachusetts has the eighth lowest poverty rate; Michigan ranks 35th. Massachusetts has the third lowest infant mortality rate; Michigan has the 37th lowest. The list goes on.

In the 1970s, Michigan and Massachusetts were much alike. But the two states took divergent paths. Massachusetts focused on retaining and attracting talent, Michigan on retaining and attracting factories. The two paths led to different places.

Michigan has chased smokestacks. Gov. Jim Collins to "invest" in specific plants. Gov. John Engler. Gov. Jennifer Granholm used tax dollars and tax breaks to attract factories. Now Gov. Rick Snyder is using

Written by

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Manufacturing Sector

It's worked, by and large. U.S. Department of Commerce figures show Michigan in 1980 ranked eighth in the share of gross state product connected with manufacturing. Today we are 10th. We are still a "state that makes things." But more "things" are being made overseas, productivity gains have reduced factory jobs and international competition has reduced compensation for those workers.

Massachusetts, a state that saw its textile manufacturing sector decimated by overseas trade during the

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1970s, took another tack. Policymakers invested in their cities and education. They attracted technology — Route 128 was Silicon Valley east — and financial services firms. In the process, they created an environment that attracted and retained young smart college grads.

The naysayers called it “Taxachusetts.”

So what do the Massachusetts and Michigan dashboards show?

In 1970, the states looked much the same: 12.6 percent of Massachusetts residents had a bachelor’s degree, good enough to rank 12th in the nation; Michigan wasn’t too far behind, at 9.4 percent. Per capita income in Massachusetts was \$4,483; Michigan was \$4,198 — both above the national average of \$4,085.

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