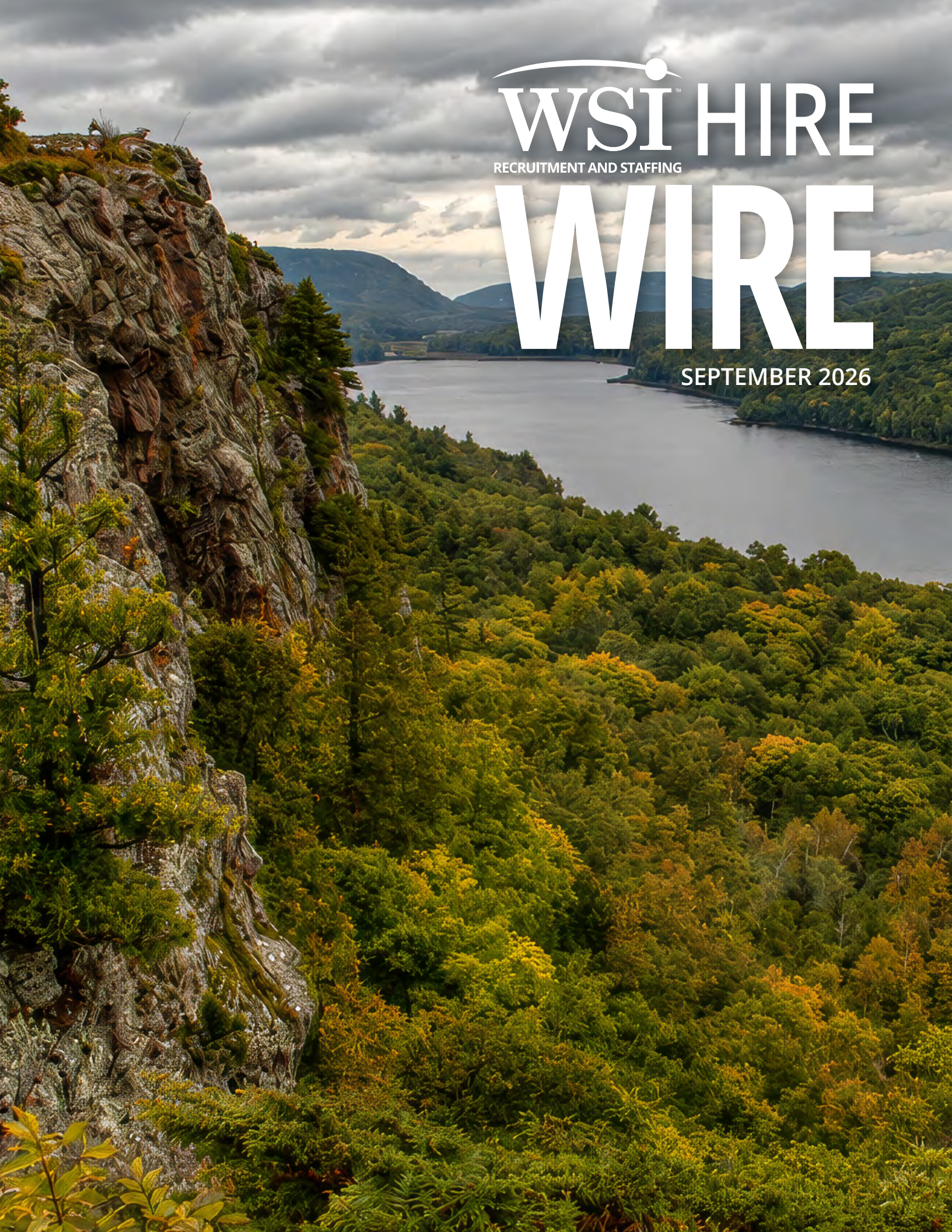


WSI HIRE

RECRUITMENT AND STAFFING

WIRE

SEPTEMBER 2026

Data centers are becoming political poison. But if America decides it doesn't want the infrastructure behind AI, and our ever-expanding digital world...somebody else will.

So it begs the question:

ARE WE DOIN' THIS **OR NOT**?

(SPOILER ALERT: *WE ARE.*)

Something strange has happened to data centers in 2026.
Democrats are suspicious of them. Republicans are suspicious of them. Environmental groups are fighting them. Rural communities are organizing against them. Even politicians who spent years selling technology investment as economic development are discovering that opposing a giant windowless building full of computers plays pretty well on the campaign trail.

The backlash is genuinely bipartisan. 68% of Americans say government is doing too little to regulate AI and 61% oppose data centers in their communities. Electricity prices, water consumption, noise, farmland, tax incentives and fear over AI replacing jobs have turned data centers into an election issue across the country.

The critics have some very good arguments.
Data centers use enormous amounts of electricity. Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory estimates they could consume 11.8% of all U.S. electricity by 2030, with scenarios ranging from 9.5% to 15.3%.

Some use substantial amounts of water for cooling. Poorly planned projects can require expensive grid upgrades, new transmission lines and substations. Huge campuses can change rural landscapes almost overnight.

Then comes the argument that probably irritates people most: Why give incentives to a multibillion-dollar data center that might employ relatively few people permanently?

61% of Americans oppose new data centers in their community.

- 69% of Democrats opposed
- 54% of Republicans opposed
- 53% of Independents opposed

Fair question.

But counting only the people working inside the building after construction is a remarkably incomplete way to measure what is happening.

THE ECONOMY AROUND THE BOX

Data centers are industrial construction projects on an enormous scale. U.S. data-center construction spending exceeded a $75 billion annual pace in July, up nearly 60% from a year earlier. And construction itself represents only a fraction of total investment once servers, chips and other equipment are included.

That money does not magically teleport into a server rack. It pays electricians, operating engineers, concrete crews, ironworkers, plumbers, pipefitters, truck drivers, HVAC technicians, equipment installers, engineers and project managers.

Michigan already has a rather spectacular example. At The Barn, the massive Stargate data-center project under construction in Saline Township, more than 1,800 skilled tradespeople were working on the site by late August. The project had already logged one million union craft hours and is expected to support more than 2,500 construction jobs. That is before counting suppliers, trucking, concrete, fabricated steel, electrical equipment, cooling systems, restaurants, hotels and the secondary businesses that feed a project of that size.

The employment story continues after construction, although at a smaller scale. Indeed reports that data-center job postings have more than doubled in two years, even while overall U.S. job postings declined. Installation and maintenance workers make up roughly one-quarter of the hiring, and hourly data-center jobs in those occupations advertise about $10 more per hour than comparable jobs elsewhere. For a manufacturing state built around skilled labor, that is not nothing.

CHINA ISN'T CATCHING UP. THEY'VE CAUGHT UP.

Now comes the uncomfortable part. What happens if America decides the solution is simply to stop? AI does not stop. Cloud computing does not stop. The worldwide demand for computing does not stop. The investment goes somewhere else.

The International Energy Agency expects global data-center electricity demand to more than double by 2030. The United States is projected to account for the largest share of that increase, with China second. This is not a small emerging industry. **McKinsey estimates nearly $7 trillion in global data-center investment could occur by 2030.**

America can certainly decide it wants less of that. China, Europe, the Middle East and other technology hubs are under no obligation to make the same decision. Stanford's 2026 AI Index says the U.S.-China performance gap has "effectively closed."

PUBLIC OPINION ON A.I.	USA	CHINA
AI has more benefits than drawbacks	38%	85%
AI makes me excited	33%	83%

Source: Stanford AI Index 2026; Ipsos AI Monitor 2026

China now leads the U.S. in AI publication volume, citations, patent output and industrial robot installations. American models still hold a narrow edge at the very top. **That edge was just 2.7% in March 2026**. It was double digits a year ago.

Rejecting American data centers therefore does not amount to rejecting AI. It means accepting the possibility that more computing capacity, capital investment, technical expertise, supply chains and eventually AI companies themselves develop somewhere else.

That becomes a national competitiveness problem very quickly. Computing power is becoming industrial capacity in much the same way factories, electrical generation, railroads and oil infrastructure were industrial capacity in earlier eras.

You can dislike that reality. It remains reality.

SO WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?

There isn't really an alternative to data centers if we intend to keep using cloud software, streaming video, online banking, logistics systems, medical research, cybersecurity and AI. There are, however, alternatives to badly designed data centers.

Computing can become more distributed. Smaller regional and edge facilities can move certain workloads closer to users. More processing can occur directly on computers and phones. Existing industrial properties and brownfields can be redeveloped instead of consuming productive farmland.

Cooling systems can dramatically reduce water consumption. Computing workloads can shift toward periods when electricity is abundant. Data centers can bring dedicated generation, battery storage, solar, wind, geothermal or nuclear power instead of simply plugging into an already-constrained grid.

And the computers themselves will become more efficient. The Model T was not an environmentally elegant machine. Early automobiles were inefficient, dirty and introduced problems nobody had figured out how to manage. We did not solve those problems by banning automobiles. We built better engines, better roads, better safety systems and better rules. AI infrastructure may be sitting somewhere around that stage. The first generation is clumsy. That does not mean the destination is pointless.

MAKE THEM PAY FOR IT

Michigan may actually be approaching the issue correctly. Instead of choosing between unrestricted development and an outright ban, the state is trying to establish conditions.

Under Michigan's 2026 Affordable and Responsible Growth plan, participating data-center companies agree to cover their own energy and water costs, pay for grid upgrades attributable to their projects, add new power resources where needed, protect water resources and hire Michigan workers.

Michigan regulators also require protections including longer contracts, financial guarantees and exit fees so families are not stuck paying for infrastructure if a project disappears. During grid emergencies, qualifying large-load customers can be forced to reduce power before residential customers. That seems considerably more useful than yelling yes or no.

Some projects should be rejected. Some incentives deserve scrutiny. Some locations simply do not make sense. But that is an argument for better rules, not retreat.

If America decides the answer is "not here," the technology does not stop. The capital, construction, research and advantage simply move somewhere else. The real question is not whether data centers are coming. It is whether we intend to shape them, or watch someone else shape what comes next.

THE DATA CENTER DEBATE

THERE IS A NEED TO AGREE ON A RESPONSIBLE APPROACH TO BUILDING AND REGULATING DATA CENTERS IN THE UNITED STATES TO REMAIN TECHNOLOGICALLY COMPETITIVE.

	OPPONENTS' CONCERN	HOW TO MOVE FORWARD
ELECTRICITY USE	Data centers consume enormous amounts of power and could strain an already aging grid.	True. Require developers to add generation, pay for grid upgrades and participate in demand-response programs rather than shifting those costs to residents.
HIGHER UTILITY BILLS	Families will subsidize billion-dollar technology companies through higher rates.	They shouldn't. Michigan is already developing rules intended to separate those costs and require large users to pay their own way.
WATER CONSUMPTION	Cooling systems can consume millions of gallons and compete with households, agriculture and ecosystems.	Water-intensive designs should face scrutiny. Closed-loop and newer cooling technologies can dramatically reduce consumption, and water availability should determine where projects are located.
TOO FEW PERMANENT JOBS	A giant facility might employ surprisingly few workers once construction ends.	Permanent headcount is only one part of the impact. Construction can require thousands of skilled workers for years, followed by higher-paid electrical, mechanical, networking, security and operations positions.
MASSIVE TAX INCENTIVES	The world's richest technology companies do not need corporate welfare.	Often a legitimate criticism. Incentives should be tied to measurable investment, jobs, infrastructure and community benefits rather than simply handed out to win a project.
FARMLAND AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER	Massive industrial campuses do not belong everywhere.	Correct. Site them near appropriate transmission, industrial corridors and brownfields instead of treating every available parcel as interchangeable.
GRID RELIABILITY	One enormous customer can consume as much electricity as a small city.	Large users can also finance new generation and transmission. Michigan additionally allows emergency curtailment so these customers can lose power before residential customers.
AI COULD ELIMINATE JOBS	Why build infrastructure for technology that may eventually replace workers?	Refusing domestic infrastructure does not prevent automation. It increases the odds that the technology, investment and companies creating it develop elsewhere.
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT	More electricity demand could mean more fossil-fuel generation and emissions.	That risk is real. But enormous new electricity customers are also helping finance nuclear, renewable, battery and geothermal projects that otherwise might not be built.
JUST STOP BUILDING THEM	Slow everything down until society understands where AI is heading.	Regulation and selective limits are reasonable. A permanent retreat is different. Global AI development continues, and countries willing to build the infrastructure gain the investment and capacity America declines.
THERE MUST BE ANOTHER WAY	Surely AI can exist without these giant campuses.	Some computing can move to smaller facilities, edge devices and more efficient hardware. Frontier AI training and large-scale cloud computing still require concentrated computing infrastructure. The realistic alternative is better data centers, not no data centers.

MICHIGAN IS THE LAZIEST STATE IN AMERICA FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW. BE PROUD OF THAT.

WalletHub ran back its annual clickbait, crowning Michigan the “laziest state” for the second straight year. But calling two identical results a “trend” is like re-running a broken script and acting surprised when the same error code pops up. Same lagged Census data, same formula, same answer. That isn’t shifting worker character; it’s arithmetic on repeat.

What the rubric actually rewards is state-level hardship. South Dakota snagged the top spot partly because 6.5% of its workforce has to stack multiple jobs just to pay rent. WalletHub frames that as “effort,” alongside burning out without taking earned vacation. The survey measures exhausted labor inputs, not actual output. If Michigan is so slothful, explain the $98 billion in annual manufacturing value-added—**a top-six national flex** produced by a workforce ranked dead last. Don’t forget a respectable cost of living in our state means we don’t have to sacrifice balance for everyday expenses.

The dip in average hours isn’t bad character; it’s industrial reality. Michigan runs on production calendars, OEM downtime, and supply chain shifts. Volatility is an operations constraint, not a moral failing. Taking earned time off and thriving on a single paycheck isn’t sloth—it’s efficiency followed by heading to the lake, the beach, or a campground. The data says Michigan works hard and plays hard.

The Operational Takeaway
Skip the comment section wars. High-ranking states simply enjoy flatter demand curves. Instead of defending state pride, manage capacity: pair a stable core workforce with a managed flexible tier to scale through swings without the ramp-up chaos. WalletHub won’t rank operational flexibility, but your margins will.

NOBODY’S FIRED. NOBODY’S HIRED. EVERYBODY’S TIRED.

The U.S. labor market enters autumn 2026 with a stronger August jobs report after a disappointing July. Employers **added 162,000 jobs, well above forecasts of 50,000 to 65,000**, while unemployment held at 4.1 percent. The rebound does not erase recent weakness, but it makes the broader picture look steadier than last month’s numbers suggested.

July had raised concerns after the economy unexpectedly **shed 23,000 positions,** while BLS benchmark revisions reduced the year’s payroll growth by 79,000. August’s gain therefore matters: it suggests employers are still hiring, even if job creation has slowed from the faster pace seen earlier in the expansion.

Economists still describe the market as “low-hire, low-fire.” Weekly jobless claims near 206,000 put layoffs at a two-year low, showing that businesses are largely holding onto existing workers. Hiring is more selective, but widespread job cuts have not followed.

Labor supply is also shaping the numbers. Participation fell to a five-year low of 61.4 percent, influenced by boomer retirements and some prime-age workers leaving the workforce as childcare costs remain high.

For workers, the economy remains mixed. Manufacturing remains uneven, with Great Lakes sectors expanding -yet dealing with a Canadian tariff war, while others face pressure. AI and automation boosted second-quarter productivity, while the labor share of GDP slipped to 52.9 percent and real weekly earnings remained under pressure.

Consumers still feel higher prices, now 3.4 percent above last year, and sentiment remains weak. Even so, the August report offers a clearer sign of stability: hiring rebounded, layoffs remain low, and unemployment is holding steady.

The key question for fall is whether employers can maintain that pace while the economy absorbs slower labor-force growth, changing technology, and uneven conditions across industries.

MICHIGAN MARKETS SEE MODEST UNEMPLOYMENT UPTICK IN JULY

UNEMPLOYMENT	May	June	July
Battle Creek	5.3	5.1	5.8
Grand Rapids	4.4	4.2	4.3
Kalamazoo	4.7	4.5	4.6
Detroit	6.4	6.4	7.3
Michigan	5.1	5.0	4.9
USA	4.3	4.2	4.1

The August jobs report, released Friday, showed the U.S. economy added a solid 162,000 jobs, beating economist forecasts of 50,000 to 65,000, while unemployment held at 4.1 percent. The gain marks a welcome rebound from July’s surprise loss of 23,000 positions and offers some reassurance after several months of softer hiring and downward revisions.

Michigan continues to run warmer than the nation, though statewide unemployment is moving the right direction: 5.1 percent in May, 5.0 in June, and a preliminary 4.9 in July. Local markets were mixed. Battle Creek rose from 5.1 to 5.8 percent in July, with Detroit posting a similar increase, while Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo remained comparatively stable.

THE GREAT LAKES WILL LOSE THE TRADE WAR WITH CANADA

CANADA IS A TRADE ALLY TO MICHIGAN. BUT FOR HOW MUCH LONGER?

A high-stakes trade war between the United States and Canada is threatening to disrupt the industrial heartland of the Great Lakes, exposing regional manufacturers to a bruising "two-way tariff stack" that **economists warn could squeeze businesses and raise consumer prices.**

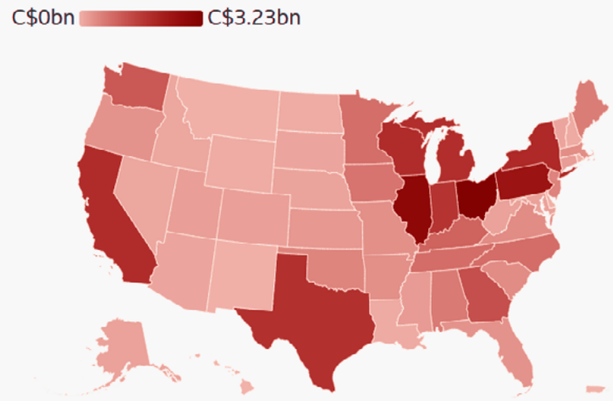
While the Trump administration promises that new trade barriers will spark a domestic manufacturing renaissance, the reality on the ground in Michigan reveals a precarious economic balancing act. Under Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930, the U.S. enacted 50% tariffs on a $20 billion basket of Canadian imports on Aug. 22. Canada retaliated with its own C$27.6 billion (US$20 billion) package, set to levy duties of up to 50% on **American steel, aluminum, and manufacturing equipment starting Sept. 8**.

Unlike the rest of the country, which remains relatively insulated, Michigan is uniquely vulnerable. Canada absorbs up to 39% of the state's total exports, making it the second most Canada-dependent state in the nation. Michigan business leaders and local commerce groups warn that the greatest risk is the disruption of tightly integrated supply chains, where parts cross the Detroit-Windsor and Port Huron-Sarnia corridors multiple times before a vehicle or machine is fully assembled.

"Persistent reciprocal tariffs can multiply border costs across the production cycle," the Michigan Chamber of Commerce warned in an August advisory, pointing out that smaller suppliers will bear the brunt of the administrative and financial pain.

Impact of Canadian counter-tariffs on US states

Value of US exports to Canada to be affected by tariffs (in billions of C$)



Trump's Effective Tariff Rate Is the Highest Since 1967

Average Effective Tariff Rate on All Goods Imports, Historical Rates from 1890-2025, Estimated Rate for 2026 Under Trump's Imposed Tariffs

Note: Excludes the impact of refunds for illegally collected tariffs.
Source: US Census Bureau; US Treasury; Tax Foundation calculations.

TAX FOUNDATION

Indeed, a comprehensive state trade exposure model estimates that the new Canadian retaliation puts up to $1.5 billion of annual Michigan-origin exports at risk, threatening a gross border-tax wedge of up to $600 million. Even more severe is the import side: Michigan firms bring in $43.5 billion annually from Canada. Under the U.S. Section 338 tariffs, Michigan importers face a staggering $1.13 billion in annualized U.S. customs liability on Canadian inputs.

$1.13 BILLION

The massive annualized U.S. customs liability that Michigan manufacturers face on imported Canadian industrial inputs under the new Section 338 tariffs.

While heavy metal manufacturers celebrate tariff shields, West Michigan's contract furniture makers face a sudden economic squeeze. The Canadian retaliation schedule takes effect September 8, slapping steep 25% to 50% tariffs on American wood and metal furniture exports. In Grand Rapids, where the furniture-products supply chain remains highly concentrated, companies rely heavily on Canadian buyers. Local exporters must now decide whether to absorb the steep tariff margins or risk losing loyal Canadian clients to local alternatives. "A 50% tariff is large enough to make Canadian substitution highly likely," warns the state's latest trade analysis.

The administration credits its trade barriers for a modest turnaround on factory floors, noting that U.S. manufacturing added only 5,000 jobs in July. However, economists at the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research in Kalamazoo, Michigan, argue that the marginal gains are being driven by a massive, AI-led data center construction boom rather than tariffs.

The financial friction is already translating into consumer anxiety. Economists estimate that the 50% U.S. tariff on Canadian building supplies will **spike lumber prices for home builders,** while everyday retail shoppers face major markups on imported Canadian dairy and paper goods.

"It's a contradictory strategy," said Dr. Chris Douglas, an economics professor at the University of Michigan-Flint campus. "The administration is using tariffs as a blunt instrument to protect some jobs, but they are forcing consumers and other industries to pay the bill."

Impact of Trump Tariffs by the Numbers

President Trump's Imposed and Threatened Tariffs, Topline Preliminary Estimates

Average Tax Increase per US Household in 2026	10-Year Conventional Revenue, 2026-2035 (Billions)	Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	Capital Stock	Hours Worked Converted to Full-Time Equivalent Jobs
$840	$1,506.6	-0.4%	-0.3%	-345,000

Source: Tax Foundation General Equilibrium Model, August 2026

MICHIGAN GETS HOSED

High gas prices are here to stay. Even back in April, Secretary of Energy Chris Wright said that gas falling back below $3 "*might not happen until next year.*"

Since the start of the Iran War on Feb. 27, 2026, Michigan gasoline has **risen $1.21 a gallon, more than the $1.11 national increase.** The war with Iran has pushed crude oil, shipping and refining costs higher, while tariffs are raising prices on imported goods and components. Here in Michigan, **diesel prices are up 58%** from last year and, on Friday, hit an all-time high.

Most importantly, **the war has killed 18 American service members** and injured more than 750 personnel. While most of us won't be the ones to bear that terrible sacrifice, the war itself continues to punish Americans at home as fuel cost increases have blunted wage increases, and increased the price on everything from groceries, heating costs, construction, housing prices and more. Just while wages are rising and hiring is robust, Americans aren't seeing any income growth at the end of the day as it is absorbed in expanding costs related to the Iran War, as well as the trade wars initiated by the President.

PRICE INCREASE OF GASOLINE SINCE THE START OF THE IRAN WAR. (per gallon)	
MINNESOTA	+ $1.35
OHIO	+ $1.34
ILLINOIS	+ $1.31
WISCONSIN	+ $1.23
MICHIGAN	+ $1.21
INDIANA	+ $ .74

The average national increase since the war began was $1.11 per gallon. Michigan rose $1.21 per gallon, which is 10 cents more than the national increase and ranks 18th highest among the 50 states plus D.C. The largest increase was Utah ($1.62) while Indiana was the lowest.

And this burden is not evenly shared. A wealthy household pays the same extra dollar at the pump, but it consumes a much smaller share of its income. Lower-income workers are more likely to drive older, less-efficient vehicles, commute farther and have less flexibility to absorb higher food, transportation and goods prices. Yale's Budget Lab has found fuel price increases **and tariffs** take a substantially larger share of **income from poorer households** than richer ones.

That is the problem. An economy cannot roar indefinitely while households finance a trade war at the store, an overseas war through taxes and higher fuel costs on the commute.

FUEL TIMING INDEX — SOURCE: GASBUDDY 2026 ANALYSIS

THE BEST & WORST DAYS TO FILL UP YOUR TANK IN MICHIGAN

The war in Iran is increasing costs for fuels

Prices of select commodities as of August 19, compared with prewar levels

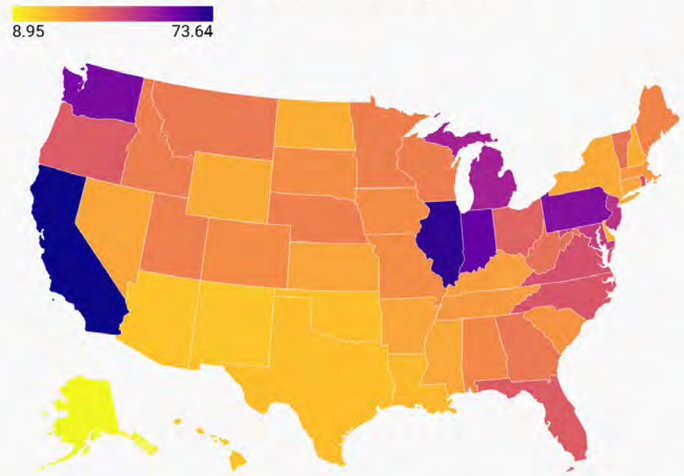
Indicator	February 27, 2026 (before the war started)	August 19, 2026	% increase
West Texas Intermediate crude oil (WTI) *per barrel*	$67.02	$84.29	+25.8%
Brent crude oil *per barrel*	$72.87	$91.47	+25.5%
Dutch Title Transfer Facility natural gas (TTF) *per megawatt hour (MWh)*	€31.98	€63.35	+98.1%
Gasoline *per gallon*	$2.98	$4.09	+37.3%
Diesel *per gallon*	$3.76	$5.50	+46.3%
Jet fuel *per gallon*	$2.50	$3.90	+56%
Heating oil *per gallon*	$2.60	$4.44	+70.8%

HIGHEST STATE GAS TAXES IN UNITED STATES (CENTS PER GALLON)	
1. California	$ .7364
2. Illinois	$ .7040
3. Indiana*	$ .6310
4. Washington	$ .6017
5. Pennsylvania	$ .5870
6. Michigan	$ .5340

LOWEST STATE GAS TAXES IN UNITED STATES (CENTS PER GALLON)	
45. Texas	$ .2000
46. Oklahoma	$ .2000
47. Arizona	$ .1900
48. New Mexico	$ .1888
49. Hawaii	$ .1805
50. Alaska	$ .0895

How Do Gas Taxes Compare in Your State?

US State Gas Tax Rates, Cents per Gallon, July 2026

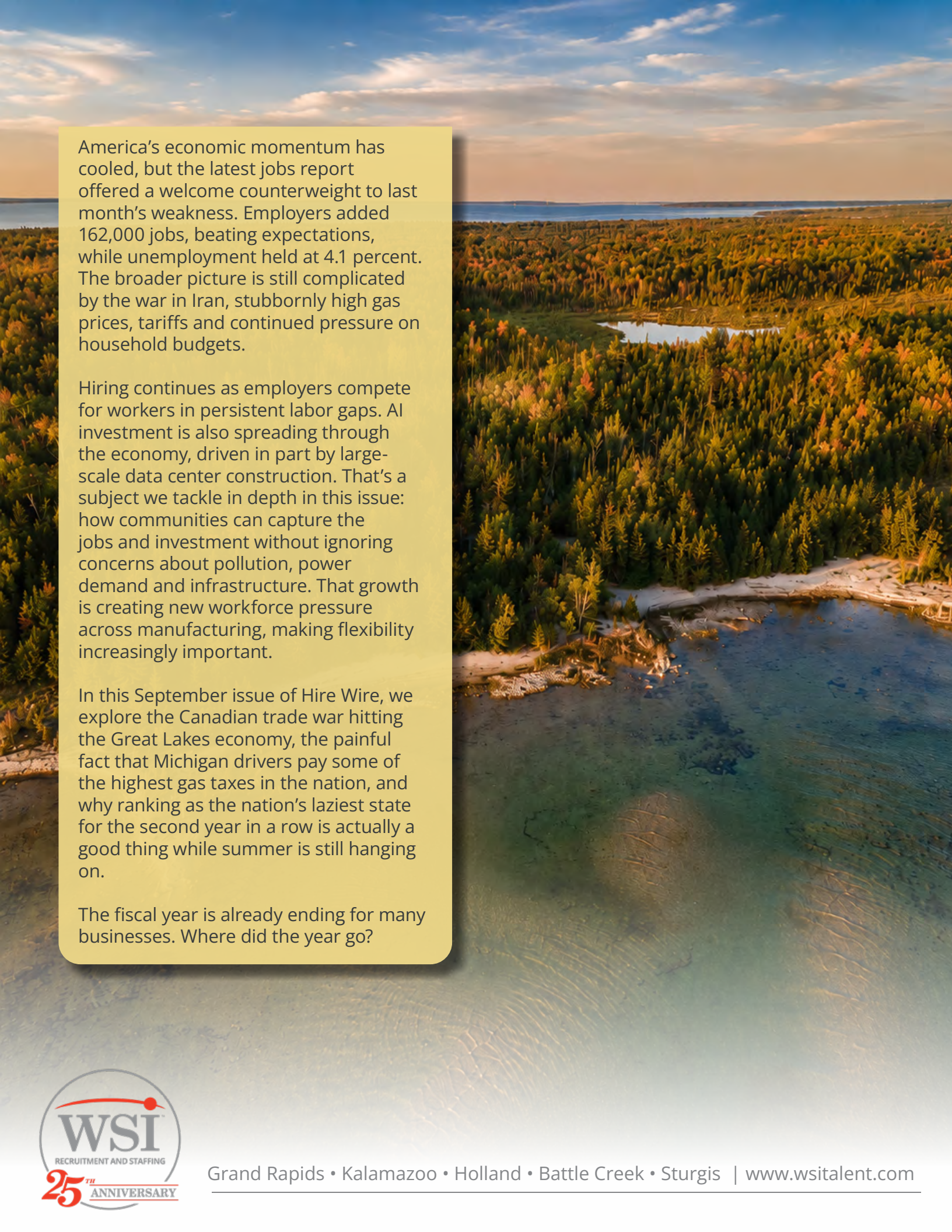


Note: Does not include some local taxes, taxes on net or gross receipts, or indirect burdens from environmental programs
Source: State statutes; author calculations.

TAX FOUNDATION

State gasoline taxes vary dramatically, adding another layer to what drivers pay at the pump. As of July 2026, California leads the nation at 73.64 cents per gallon, while Alaska is lowest at 8.95 cents. Michigan ranks sixth overall at 53.40 cents per gallon, well above the national state-tax average. Those taxes are separate from the federal gasoline tax of 18.4 cents per gallon and may exclude some local charges.

*Indiana: 63.1¢ statutory rate, temporarily suspended in 2026 through Labor Day.



America's economic momentum has cooled, but the latest jobs report offered a welcome counterweight to last month's weakness. Employers added 162,000 jobs, beating expectations, while unemployment held at 4.1 percent. The broader picture is still complicated by the war in Iran, stubbornly high gas prices, tariffs and continued pressure on household budgets.

Hiring continues as employers compete for workers in persistent labor gaps. AI investment is also spreading through the economy, driven in part by large-scale data center construction. That's a subject we tackle in depth in this issue: how communities can capture the jobs and investment without ignoring concerns about pollution, power demand and infrastructure. That growth is creating new workforce pressure across manufacturing, making flexibility increasingly important.

In this September issue of Hire Wire, we explore the Canadian trade war hitting the Great Lakes economy, the painful fact that Michigan drivers pay some of the highest gas taxes in the nation, and why ranking as the nation's laziest state for the second year in a row is actually a good thing while summer is still hanging on.

The fiscal year is already ending for many businesses. Where did the year go?