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FALL 2015

WISCONSIN INTEREST

Marquette's Assault
on Academic Freedom

BY CHARLES J. SYKES

Where Are
the Workers?

BY DAVE DALEY

Is Scott Walker Done?

The governor's political future depends on
whether he can repair relations and his image

BY CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER

Putting the Squeeze on Local Government BY GREG PEARSON





Editor > CHARLES J. SYKES

Scott Walker is back in town

Postmortems — complete with recriminations and finger-pointing — will continue to be written about Gov. Scott Walker's aborted presidential bid. But the implications of that flame-out for Wisconsin politics are both immediate and potentially long-term. A campaign that once promised to be a culmination of Wisconsin's remarkable conservative revolution may turn out to have been a fatal distraction. Or perhaps merely a speed bump. Walker's most immediate task will be to dispel the notion that he returns to his day job in Madison as a wounded lame duck. Already, there are signs that a re-engaged Walker may revive the conservative agenda as he takes a more active role in state issues.

In our cover story, Christian Schneider asks the obvious questions: Now that Walker is back, what happens next? How will an increasingly independent GOP Legislature react now that Dad is home?

Also in this issue, I take a look at Mar-

quette University's ongoing attempt to fire a conservative tenured professor for a blog post that he wrote. The case of John McAdams, a well-known professor of political science, is already emerging as one of the pre-eminent academic freedom cases in higher education. As Richard Esenberg told me: "Marquette has to decide what kind of university it wants to be. Is it committed to free and open discourse? Or does it want to become ground zero in the battle over increasing intolerance on America's campuses?"

We also dive into a variety of the state's most pressing issues. Dave Daley explores the chronic problem of Wisconsin's worker shortage; Julie Kelly looks at a remarkable expansion of taxpayer-funded school lunch programs; Greg Pearson examines the savings and efficiencies of government consolidation; Esenberg provides his own look at the fight over religious freedom; and Sunny Schubert profiles the remarkable Alberta Darling, Wisconsin's own Iron Lady.

WPRI

The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute Inc., established in 1987, is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit institute working to engage and energize Wisconsinites and others in discussions and timely action on key public policy issues critical to the state's future, its growth and prosperity. The institute's research and public education activities are directed to identify and promote public policies in Wisconsin that are fair, accountable and cost-effective.

Through original research and analysis and through public opinion polling, the institute's work will focus on such issue arenas as state and local government tax policy and spending and related program accountability, consequences and effectiveness. It will also focus on health care policy and service delivery; education; transportation and economic development; welfare and social services; and other issues currently or likely to significantly impact the quality of life and future of the state.

The institute is guided by the belief that competitive free markets, limited government, private initiative, and personal responsibility are essential to our democratic way of life.

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Cover photo: Associated Press



Robert Helf photo illustration

A rough stretch for John Chisholm

This autumn, we put a disappointing Milwaukee Brewers season in the rearview mirror, as the Green Bay Packers make another Super Bowl run and the University of Wisconsin band and raucous crowds at Camp Randall drown out (almost) the incessant whining from UW bureaucrats still sulking over state budget cuts.

Slam-dunking the Doe

The John Doe probe targeting conservatives had been moribund for months but was given a definitive quietus when the Wisconsin Supreme Court declared in July that “the special prosecutor’s legal theory is unsupported in either reason or law.”

The court not only rebuked the prosecutors but also issued a ringing exoneration of the targets whose homes were raided, reputations trashed and lives turned upside down by what turned out to be a partisan witch hunt:

“It is utterly clear that the special prosecutor has employed theories of law that do not exist in order to investigate citizens who were wholly innocent of any wrongdoing. In other words, the special prosecutor was the instigator of



a ‘perfect storm’ of wrongs that was visited upon the innocent Unnamed Movants and those who dared to associate with them.”

On the bright side, the end of the Doe should give prosecutors, most notably Milwaukee County District Attorney **John Chisholm**, more time to devote to their day jobs.

Unintended journalism

In May, The New Yorker magazine featured a lengthy paean to Chisholm’s novel approach to criminal justice, “The Milwaukee Experiment: What Can One Prosecutor Do About the Mass Incarceration of African-Americans?”

The article by Jeffrey Toobin was intended as a puff piece but turned out to be an unintentional expose. It described Chisholm’s attempt to reinvent the role of prosecutors. “Chisholm stuck his neck out there and started saying that prosecutors should also be judged by their success in reducing mass incarceration *and achieving racial equality*.” (Em-



phasis added.) They supposedly did this by trying to “send fewer people to prison while maintaining public safety.”

The evidence suggests that the approach has been less than successful, especially for the African-American community.

Three months after The New Yorker piece ran, a headline in The New York Times read: “Murder Rates Rising Sharply in Many U.S. Cities.” Dateline: Milwaukee.

MILWAUKEE — *Cities across the nation are seeing a startling rise in murders after years of declines, and few places have witnessed a shift as precipitous as this city.*

The victims of this failed experiment? “Almost all of our shootings,” Chisholm admitted to Toobin, “and almost all of our homicides are black-on-black crime.”

Mine, mine, mine

In the wake of a constitutional amendment ratified by Wisconsin voters in April, the state Supreme Court moved quickly to oust progressive Shirley Abrahamson as chief justice. Abrahamson, insisting that she was entitled to the job despite the constitution and the vote of her colleagues, quickly sued. Her lawsuit (predictably) got tossed in federal court, but she has appealed to the federal appellate court.

To legal observers, her lawsuit seems quixotic and a trifle bitter. But there’s nothing mysterious about Abrahamson’s penchant for litigation. She’s a Madison liberal. It’s what they do.

A recovering liberal?

Speaking of Madison...

Over the summer, Madison Mayor **Paul Soglin** looked out over the result of decades of liberal policies on homelessness — and saw a godawful mess.



Noting that the city’s “transient, drifter population is growing every week,” Soglin said that the kumbaya attitudes of his fellow aging hippies had “created a circus atmosphere, where anything goes.” And he seemed

genuinely surprised by that.

At a press conference in July, Soglin proposed time limits for people on benches and sidewalks, arguing that the measure is needed “because the city’s posture of compassion with no rules toward the homeless and drifters leads to behavior problems, including violence, drunkenness, drug use and trading sex for drugs.”

Ultimately, he said, “we have to have a change of culture and behavior.” But while Soglin seems to have been mugged by reality, he remains a distinct minority in Mad City.



Let 'em steal

In August, a UW-Madison official named **Everett Mitchell** suggested a solution to what he saw as the problem of “over-policing” and “mass incarceration.” As Media Trackers reported, Mitchell, at a panel on policing practices, proposed ignoring the five-finger discount, at least from the fat cats who run big-box stores.

“I just don’t think that they should be prosecuting cases or [unintelligible] up cases for people who steal from Wal-Mart. I just don’t think that, right? I don’t think Target or all them other places — them big-box stores that have insurance — they should be using justification, the fact that people steal from there as justification, to start engaging in aggressive police practices, right?”

Mitchell’s title is director of community relations, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Surely, the university can serve as a role model for Mitchell’s vision by announcing that it henceforth will not prosecute any shoplifting from its campus bookstore. Right?

Walker = Hitler?

UW-Madison also made news when one of its more outspoken faculty members, educational policies professor Sara Goldrick-Rab, shared her insight that Gov. Scott Walker was pretty much indistinguishable from a well-known genocidal maniac.

“My grandfather, a psychologist, just walked me through similarities between Walker and Hitler. There are so many, it’s terrifying,” she tweeted in July. Two days later, she tweeted a follow-up, describing Walker as a “fascist.” Because, science, you know.

Goldrick-Rab explained to The College Fix: “If you reread the tweet, you will see that I stated that an expert

in the field — a psychoanalyst with decades of experience — compared the ‘psychological characteristics’ of the two individuals, and that I was struck by his analysis,” she stated. “There do appear to be commonalities.”

We wonder whether the “expert” she cited has ever heard of Walker Derangement Syndrome.

‘Literally’

Not to be outdone in Walker derangement, Milwaukee Congresswoman Gwen Moore compared the governor’s policies to lynching.

Walker’s policies, she said in August, are “tightening the noose, literally, around African-Americans” in Milwaukee and Wisconsin.

We suspect that Moore quite literally does not understand what the word “literally” means.

The EPA drops a hammer

Was it something we said?

When the Obama administration’s Environmental Protection Agency dropped its latest clean air edicts on the nation, Wisconsin was hit harder than all but a handful of states. By one estimate, Wisconsin will have to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 34% from 2012 to 2020. Only five states would be hit harder.

But worse may be yet to come. Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers say that new ozone regulations will be the most expensive in history — and may turn Wisconsin into a “no grow” zone. At least we were warned.

Trump card

The summer was not kind to Walker’s presidential bid, as we witnessed the rise of The Donald. In August, I wrote:



“**Donald Trump** is a cartoon version of every leftist/media negative stereotype of the reactionary, nativist, misogynist right. Except that he’s not a cartoon ...

“To be clear, Trump is not only a cynical opportunist and an incoherent ideologue, but a generally repellent human being. Even reading his tweets makes you dumber.”

As a measure of my influence in conservative politics, Trump promptly extended his lead as the GOP front-runner.

Wisconsin Interest editor Charles J. Sykes is founder of the Right Wisconsin website and a talk show host on AM-620 WTMJ in Milwaukee.



Protecting religious freedom isn't always easy or popular

By Richard Esenberg

In one of the most ringing passages in our constitutional jurisprudence, Justice Robert Jackson observed, "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."

Our founders embedded an important aspect of this liberty in the Bill of Rights by guaranteeing the free exercise of religion. Religious freedom was thought to deserve special protection because claims of faith and conscience were considered uniquely compelling. In his "Memorial and Remonstrance" to the Virginia General Assembly,

James Madison cited as a "fundamental and undeniable truth" that "religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence." Freedom of religion was, both in theory and by its placement in the Bill of Rights, our "first freedom."

That was then. What about now? The recent debate over the interplay between claims of religious freedom and injunctions against discrimination (e.g., in the area of gay marriage) or the desire to regulate economic activity (e.g., the contraception mandate) suggests that not all of us are comfortable with this special protection for religious freedom.

The case of Kim Davis, a county clerk in Kentucky who did jail time over her refusal to issue marriage licenses

Freedom of religion was, both in theory and by its placement in the Bill of Rights, our “first freedom.”

to same-sex couples on religious grounds, has brought the debate front and center. That case, which involves an elected official whose actions may be necessary to enforce the law as interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court, is a special and more complicated case.

But what about the religious liberty claims of private parties, i.e., the evangelical photographer who does not wish to lend her artistry to a gay wedding or the traditional Catholic pharmacist who objects to filling prescriptions for abortifacients? Can the law compel them to act against conscience?

The attitude of many — particularly our cultural elites — toward religion has changed. It is no longer thought to be a compelling matter of duty but a private practice to be undertaken — if at all — out of the public eye and without any discernible influence on an adherent's public life.

Indeed, our cultural elites are far more likely to regard sexuality as imposing the type of demands that our ancestors ascribed to religious practice. One “chooses” to be Catholic and, because it is a choice, is entitled to less deference than other identities that are thought to be “immutable” or beyond individual control. Our founders, not all of whom were conventionally religious, would have disagreed.

They would have seen the demands of conscience as just as binding and constant as those of sexual desire. To paraphrase the words of a current television jingle, they would have understood that a devout Quaker, every bit as much as a gay man, “couldn't change, even if he wanted to.”

Notwithstanding the fact that private sexual behavior can have enormous public costs (something that we tend not to acknowledge), most of us believe that the state ought not to regulate the great run of consensual sexual practices. This is a good development. Whether this consensus on tolerance should be extended to intolerance of private discrimination on the basis of private sexual behavior is another matter.

Doing so becomes particularly troubling if a legal prohibition against discrimination requires a religious objector — say, the photographer or pharmacist — to facilitate or participate in conduct that he or she regards as immoral. Is there ever room to allow religious objectors to avoid

legal requirements to do things that they find morally objectionable?

Answering this question requires us to recall Adlai Stevenson's definition of a free society as a place where it is safe to be unpopular. No matter how sure we are that we know the truth, not everyone needs be compelled to come along.

Moreover, it is not helpful to limit religious freedom to matters of belief or worship. This is simply not the way that most religions operate. They demand not only assent to doctrines and participation in religious observances but living in a certain way.

And that will raise difficult questions. Religion is limited only by the human imagination and can be invoked to justify an unlimited array of practices. But even strong legal standards for the protection for religious freedom allow for state limitations on religious practice (as opposed to belief) that are necessary to achieve a compelling purpose. They provide a presumptive — but not absolute — freedom for the demands of conscience. They place a thumb on the scale, if you will, for religious freedom.

This has always been a heavy lift. Claims of religious liberty frustrate the designs of the majority. They are almost always asserted by unpopular persons who propose to do things that most of us disapprove of. People who adhere to mainstream religious views don't really need constitutional protection. In a democracy, they are unlikely to face governmental oppression.

The extension of constitutional protection to something like religion or speech or the right to be secure in our homes reflects a judgment that there are certain parts of life that should not be readily subject to political control or that can be lived only at the sufferance of the majority.

Honoring those claims has always required us to be open to the liberty of people we don't like. More than one commentator has noted that modern concepts of non-discrimination and solicitude for protected classes brook little dissent. To many, the idea that discrimination is wrong almost always trumps competing claims. Whether our “first freedom” can survive the current zeitgeist remains to be seen.

This has always been a heavy lift. Claims of religious liberty frustrate the designs of the majority.

Richard Esenberg is president of the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty. He blogs at sharkandshepherd.blogspot.com.

MIKE NICHOLS



The value of a job

Has America lost its will to work?

Marlyd Velez, a 37-year-old Milwaukeean at the Wisconsin Job Center on Milwaukee's near south side, says she has had surgery on both feet since May and isn't able to fit them into a pair of steel-toe boots quite yet.

Still, she's looking for a job — and not just for the paycheck.

"I can't stand being without a job," she says, standing outside the center, where she receives advice on her resume and peruses job listings. "I know there are people who would love to just stay home all day, but I can't.

"I like to feel useful."

The optimists among us, those who believe a job brings more than bread to the table, who think the value of most work lies, too, in the dignity it brings to the soul, want to believe most people still feel that way in America. But there are indications otherwise.

Workforce participation — the number of people employed or looking for a job — has fallen to the lowest level in America since the late 1970s, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The national rate is now under 63%. The rate in Wisconsin is higher, almost 68%, but down from 72% in 1997.

As Dave Daley points out in the accompanying article, lots of companies see a conundrum: They can't find workers at the same time that 8 million Americans are standing in unemployment lines and many more aren't even looking.

Is Marlyd Velez just a throwback to an old-fashioned ethic? Has much of America lost its will to work?

Demographics play a sizable role in declining workforce participation numbers in Wisconsin and across the country. Americans are getting older at the same time that more people are staying in school longer. There is a gap, too, between what many people learn in school and what they actually need to know to get a job.

But there are also indications that more people no longer see the value of working.

The number of Americans receiving Social Security Disability Insurance benefits has doubled in the past 20 years — a period when the U.S. population increased only 19%, according to a recent WPRI analysis. Many are surely unable to put in long hours. But disability determinations are increasingly being made for mental illness and muscular-skeletal issues such as back pain

— conditions that make it difficult for doctors to definitively determine whether an individual is able to work, according to a study by the Secretaries' Innovation Group.

The same study determined that, despite passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 — legislation intended to provide workplace accommodations — people with health issues are less likely to work than were their counterparts in 1981.

Meanwhile, a study by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis points out that America — where a strong work ethic was once seen as part of the American identity — is not faring well compared with other developed nations. Workforce participation among males ages 25 to 54 is lower here than in Canada, Japan and many European nations.

Many Americans continue to resist becoming too reliant on government, even when they need it. Velez, for instance, says she hates "to have to come and ask for help."

Workforce participation has fallen to the lowest level since the late 1970s.

But she also suspects that not everyone has the same motivation to become or remain self-sufficient. "There are people with health issues," she says. "But," she adds, "you can tell that half the people don't have a job because they don't want one."

Arthur Brooks, author of "The Conservative Heart," cites a phenomenon he calls "learned helplessness." Assistance programs that seem sensible in isolation add up to an overarching message, he writes, that nobody intended to convey: "You can't do it, so we're going to carry you."

That's not just bad for the economy.

"Work," he writes, "gives people something welfare never can. It's a sense of self-worth and mastery, the feeling that we are in control of our lives." Research indicates that people who work are happier than those who don't, he points out.

Work can be a drag, no doubt. Studs Terkel's classic, "Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do," proves that. There always have been people convinced that they can never be anything but a machine or a mule. But there is also the waitress who loves to serve and the stonemason who sees immortality in Bedford limestone.

There are policy issues here. We need to resist big job-killing increases in the minimum wage that have become the cause du jour. (The Earned Income Tax Credit is a much better tool.)

But we also need to remember something too often forgotten: The only thing that can make you unhappier than going to work on a bad day — having to help build something, whether it's a bridge or a book or a burger — is not even wanting to go to work at all. And almost any job on a good day can, in Terkel's words, be a search "for daily meaning as well as daily bread."

Marlyd Velez seems to know that. Too many other Americans have been made to forget.

Mike Nichols is the president of WPRI.

The Worker Shortage Paradox

Millions of Americans sit unemployed while businesses can't find enough qualified workers

By Dave Daley

The headlines are relentless: 600,000 skilled manufacturing jobs are going unfilled; trucking companies need 35,000 drivers; home builders lack labor; the IT worker shortage is near crisis.

At a time when more than 8 million Americans are standing in unemployment lines, businesses are complaining that they cannot find workers to fill job openings.

What explains this seeming contradiction? Have Americans lost their appetite for work? (See related column by Mike Nichols.) Is the education system failing to prepare the workforce for in-demand jobs? How can we bridge the gap between job seekers and job openings?



Robert Helf photo illustration



Skyward, a big software company that designs administration programs for K-12 schools, is building its \$30 million world headquarters in Stevens Point.

Tom Lynn photo

The issue is complex. The short answer: The workforce across the United States is changing as baby boomers retire, and there's a mismatch between the next generation of workers funneling into the job pipeline and the jobs available at the end of that pipeline.

Wisconsin is seeing the same fracturing as the rest of the country: workers sitting at home while jobs go unfilled in occupations that span many industries. Two of the state's biggest business groups are warning that Wisconsin's current shortage of skilled workers will only worsen over the next decade.

Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce said in June that the lack of qualified and willing workers was holding back Wisconsin's economy. In a survey of 306 top business executives in the state, WMC reported that 70% were having trouble finding workers — up from 64% in the group's January survey and 53% a year earlier.

"The sad irony is that as the economy improves, there is a greater demand for workers,"

WMC President and CEO Kurt R. Bauer said.

"But if businesses can't find workers, then the economy can't achieve its full potential."

Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce President Tim Sheehy says his staff projects that over the next 10 years, the seven-county metropolitan Milwaukee region will have 100,000 jobs without workers to fill them.

The basis of that projection: Population in the region is expected to grow 3% from 2013 to '23, but the primary workforce group, those age 15 to 69, is projected to decline slightly (0.4%). During the same period, regional employment is expected to grow 10%.

Strong job growth is expected in fields such as education, professional and scientific services, and company management — jobs that pay well and require more education. But growth is also expected in average-pay and average-education jobs in the

accommodation and food service businesses, and in administrative positions, MMAC says.

Wisconsin needs to move aggressively to address projected shortages, Sheehy says. "How do we grow, retain, attract diverse young talent that we're going to need to fill these jobs and fulfill the premise that if you invest in Wisconsin, if you invest in metro Milwaukee, that we are going to have the talent you need to grow your business and compete?"

Is the education system not adequately preparing the workforce? The consensus is yes. Too many colleges are graduating students with liberal arts degrees in limited-job specialties such as Renaissance art, and too few tech schools are producing graduates with skills in high-demand fields such as information technology.

**"IF BUSINESSES CAN'T FIND
WORKERS, THEN THE ECONOMY CAN'T
ACHIEVE ITS FULL POTENTIAL."**

— **Kurt R. Bauer**, *Wisconsin Manufacturers
& Commerce president and CEO*



The academic community — chiefly four-year universities — needs to take a hard look at the classes offered and better match coursework with real-world jobs, experts say.

Stephen Moore, a distinguished visiting fellow at the Heritage Foundation,

wrote in *Forbes* magazine in March that mechanics, electricians and plumbers have no trouble finding jobs, yet high schools are scrapping old-school basics like shop classes. Meanwhile, universities are turning out graduates who've acquired massive debt but no practical job training.

Universities turn up their noses at blue-collar professions and give preference to what Moore called the "talking professions" — the law, the media, the church and academia. "Those who can't 'do' become attorneys and sociology professors," he wrote.

While higher education is falling short, so are schools at the grade-school level, Sheehy points out.

"We've got to improve on 15 or 16% of the third-graders in

Milwaukee that are reading at grade level,” Sheehy says. “There’s a huge potential pool of talent in the 120,000 kids in the city of Milwaukee. Young African-American and Hispanic kids make up the fastest-growing portion of that young population. We can’t have that talent pool leaking early on by not graduating from high school or not being able to go on to a two-year apprenticeship program.”

Milwaukee schools are key to any long-term strategy to find enough workers over the next decade, Sheehy says. “Part of the policy perspective has to be better education, more high-performing schools serving these children, if we are going to meet the talent demands going forward,” he adds.

For youths not on the college-degree track, the answer may be a career in the largest single employment sector in Wisconsin: manufacturing.

But manufacturing has an image problem.

“There is a perception of manufacturing jobs as dirty, dumb and dangerous, and all you need is a strong back and a good alarm clock,” Sheehy says. “Those analogies can get tossed out the window when you look at today’s manufacturing environment and requirements.”

Companies must reform manufacturing’s image to attract the large number of workers needed to replace retiring baby boomers.

On a per capita basis, metro Milwaukee ranks second in the country in manufacturing jobs. Wisconsin ranks eighth in terms of manufacturing employment growth over the past three years.

Manufacturing, Sheehy notes, is still “Wisconsin’s fastball, and we can’t afford to lose any speed on that fastball. The types of jobs are changing, but it’s still critically important to our economic health and it provides high-value, high-wage jobs for Wisconsin citizens.”

To head off projected shortages, the industry needs to invest in apprenticeships, internships and other initiatives that acquaint youths early on with opportunities in manufacturing.

MMAC is investing in a program called “Be the Spark,” which last year placed 1,000 Milwaukee Public Schools seventh-graders in small businesses and on factory floors to expose them to those fields. The association hopes to double that number over the next year.

Manufacturing today requires teamwork, an ability to work with technology and adaptive thinking and learning, Sheehy says. “It’s an exciting environment, and we need to do a better job of communicating that to the kids who view a dark, dingy workplace as the definition of manufacturing.”

The industry also is collaborating more with workforce development boards to train workers through apprenticeship programs and by working more closely with high schools and tech colleges to craft classes that better fit the jobs of the future.

One example: Ford Motor Co. is implementing “career academies” in its plants in Nashville, Louisville and Cleveland, where high school kids can see firsthand what a career in a manufacturing plant looks like.

Another example: the Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance is recommending that

companies utilize the wealth of practical knowledge of retirees by rehiring them part time to serve as mentors to new workers.

Locally, educators are seeing the need to feed more youths into the factory pipeline. Arrowhead High School in Hartland this fall established what is, in effect, a manufacturing plant in the school — a 10,000-square-foot design, engineering and manufacturing center that the school hopes will interest more high-schoolers in manufacturing careers. So far, 260 students are enrolled.

Concerns about impending worker shortages in Wisconsin are not new. Three years ago, the Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce Foundation held more than 50 listening sessions around the state involving more than 300 Wisconsin manufacturers.

One conclusion: The definition of success needs to be changed and students need to take a hard look — a reality

check, in effect — at what kind of jobs they can expect to find in their chosen fields.

“If every 16-year-old and their parents have all this information and a full understanding of — and an open mind to — all the occupations available, we will work through this shortage,” WMC Foundation President Jim Morgan said at the time.



Morgan

“Currently, though, our definition of success seems driven by a mentality that master’s degree is better than bachelor’s degree, bachelor’s degree is better than technical degree and technical degree is better than work experience. (But) the workplace is not that linear and easily defined,” he said.

As in manufacturing, the construction industry is struggling to find qualified workers. And the reason is much the same: not enough parents and high schools are encouraging kids to enter the skilled trades.

As construction jobs disappeared with the 2007-’09 recession, many tradesmen retired or switched careers and did not return with the current resurgence in construction projects.

Morgan noted that there were shortages of welders, machinists, masons and computer-numerical controlled (CNC) machine operators. “Some of those require work experience, some apprenticeships, some technical degrees, some four-year degrees or more,” he added. “Let’s make sure everyone knows the market, because the market will drive us to success.”

In central Wisconsin, a worker shortage in information technology is reaching a crisis stage, according to Lori A. Weyers, president of Northcentral Technical College in Wausau.

“If you talk to any businessman, they’ll say ‘I need as many (IT workers) as they can get me,’ ” she says.

**“FOR THE ECONOMY OF THE FUTURE,
60% OF THE JOBS WILL BE TECHNICAL.”**

– **Lori A. Weyers**
President of Northcentral Technical College



Workers

Officials at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point report that the school cannot graduate enough IT students to meet the demand. So both private businesses and technical colleges are scrambling to add more classes and outreach programs that encourage high school students to choose a technology career over the traditional four-year college.

Skyward, a big software company that designs administration programs for K-12 schools, is building its \$30 million world headquarters in Stevens Point and expects to open its doors **next spring**, creating even more demand for IT workers.

"If we could find 20 more programmers today, we'd hire them," says Skyward CEO Cliff King. "That's what we're up against. We need software developers, and we need them today."

Skyward expects to expand from the 421 employees it now has across the country to about 900 workers in Wisconsin alone over the next decade. That includes as many 260 software programmers. "That's a real need we have to try to grow our business," King says.

Skyward's software products, which are used in schools in 21 states, allow administrators, teachers, parents and students to track everything from when a student is tardy to test scores to what's on the lunch menu. "It's all real time," King says. The software also tracks the numbers — student population, reading levels, number of faculty and staff — that drive the state and federal funding that school districts receive.

Renaissance Learning in Wisconsin Rapids, which develops software for accelerated learning programs in schools, regularly finds its recruiters competing with other software firms for IT workers. Renaissance Learning employs 500 people in Wisconsin Rapids and 950 workers overall in the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. The company has customers for its assessment, teaching and accelerated learning programs in more than 60 countries, including the U.S., says John Corrigan, the company's senior vice president of human resources and administration.

Similarly, Epic Systems Corp., based in the Madison suburb of Verona, is attracting IT talent from other parts of the state. The tech company, which develops software for hospitals and other health-related businesses, now employs more than 8,000 workers and is continuing to expand.

The rapidly growing IT field, covering almost every aspect of the 21st century economy, is the chief reason for the increased

need for tech-savvy workers. "The demand for IT workers is growing by leaps and bounds," says Weyers of Northcentral Technical College. "In health care, in manufacturing, in education — it crosses every occupational group."

"For the economy of the future, 60% of the jobs will be technical," she adds.

As in the manufacturing sector, only now are IT businesses realizing that traditional college curriculums are not meeting the growing demand.

Businesses need to send a message to high schools that a two-year technical college degree can land graduates a good-paying job and that a four-year baccalaureate degree is not always needed, experts say.

To that end, Northcentral and the 15 other schools in the Wisconsin Technical College System are working with high schools to establish "IT academies" — much like Ford's "career academies" — that better prepare students for IT careers and train high school teachers for IT courses.

In April, businesses and colleges formed the Central Wisconsin IT Alliance to help develop an IT workforce in the region and spark interest among students.

Skyward's King, who leads the alliance, says it is focusing on getting high schools, technical colleges and the university system to ramp up IT courses and add more instructors. "You've got to start young, in the K-12 schools," he says.

If it is any consolation, Wisconsin is not alone in its IT worker shortage. "This is a national issue," Weyers says. But for Wisconsin, the stakes are high.

The growth of tech companies in the state hinges on whether Wisconsin can funnel enough workers into the IT job pipeline to meet demand. Manufacturers fear that a lack of qualified workers will hold back the state's economy. And in southeastern Wisconsin over the next decade, there could be 100,000 jobs without the workers to fill them.

Meanwhile, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 137,400 people in Wisconsin were unemployed in August. For Wisconsin's economy to thrive, the state must figure out how to get those thousands of unemployed into the thousands of waiting jobs.



Tom Lynn photo

**"IF WE COULD FIND 20 MORE
PROGRAMMERS TODAY, WE'D HIRE THEM."**

THAT'S WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST.

WE NEED SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS,

AND WE NEED THEM TODAY."

— Cliff King, Skyward CEO

Dave Daley, a journalist for 30 years, covered the Capitol for The Milwaukee Journal and legal affairs for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

Apprenticeships and tax credits may be part of solution

Facing a skilled worker shortage in 2007, South Carolina turned to an old-school solution: apprenticeships where workers are taught skills on the job while earning small paychecks.

Called Apprenticeship Carolina, the program offered a tax credit of \$1,000 a year per apprentice to any company hiring a trainee. It caught on: In seven years, the number of apprentices in the state jumped from about 800 to nearly 11,000; companies with apprenticeship programs climbed from 90 to 670.

Apprenticeships were not limited to the traditional building trades but were offered in a wide range of fields, including health care and information technology.

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton has gone South Carolina one better — calling for a \$1,500 federal tax credit for any U.S. business hiring a young apprentice.

Under two recently announced federal grants, 600 Milwaukee-area apprenticeships will be created over five years in construction, design, engineering, health care, IT and manufacturing. The Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board and the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design will receive grants of \$3 million each.

One advantage of apprentice programs: Apprentices are paid — generally at half the wage of a journeyman or veteran worker — as they learn and do not pile up massive debt as do many college students. A typical apprenticeship graduate can go into a construction job that pays close to \$33 an hour. The tax dollars spent through the employer tax credit are repaid three times over, on average, through increased tax revenue from both the apprentice and the employer, studies show.

Tim Sheehy, president of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce and a member of the WPRI board of directors, calls Clinton's proposal "helpful" but emphasizes that the strategy must be comprehensive if adopted. "This has to be a core policy mission for educators and workforce development leaders as well as employers," he says. "This is not something that ... we're going to solve by operating on the fringe of an incentive program. This needs to be an embedded part of our strategy going forward."

Wisconsin has a strong apprenticeship history. It founded its apprenticeship program in 1911, and the state's technical college system grew out of that, according to the state Department of Workforce Development.

The number of apprentices in Wisconsin fell sharply from 1,200 10 years ago to only a few hundred in the depths of the 2007-'09 recession. But it has since rebounded to about 850. The Associated Builders and Contractors of Wisconsin sponsor apprentices in a dozen trades.

DWD spokesman John Dipko says the department works under the philosophy that "a nimble talent



Sheehy

development system" is key to keeping Wisconsin businesses competitive. To that end, the state has helped implement youth apprenticeship programs, where high school students can learn a skill both in class and at a job site, and registered apprenticeship programs, where employers can train their own workers in new skills — in effect growing their own workforce.

This year, the state counted 2,500 youth apprentices and 10,000-plus registered apprentices in these programs, largely in the state's construction, industrial and service sectors.

Two years ago, the state launched the Wisconsin Fast Forward program that now has allocated \$30 million in worker training grants in high-demand occupations.

One of the groups applying for Fast Forward grants is the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin. "The skilled worker shortage in Wisconsin is expected to exceed 13,000 vacancies by 2021 in the metal manufacturing sector alone," Jorge Franco, the chamber's chief executive officer, said at the time.

In a twist on the typical job training program, the chamber is including four to six weeks of "essential life skills training" as part of an up-to-16-week welder training course.

— *Dave Daley*



Julie Kelly is a cooking teacher and food writer from Orland Park, Ill. She writes extensively about food issues including the organic industry, the anti-genetically modified organisms movement and government food policies such as the National School Lunch Program. She is a contributing author for the Genetic Literacy Project and has been published in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, *National Review*, *Forbes*, *Roll Call* and *The Hill*.

FREE LUNCH

AT A PRICE



Thousands of middle-class Wisconsin students get taxpayer-funded meals under a new federal program

By Julie Kelly

Under a new federal program that greatly expands access to free school meals, an estimated 21,600 students in Wisconsin public schools who previously didn't qualify for federally funded breakfast and lunch were eligible last year, a WPRI analysis has found. The meals came at a potential cost to taxpayers of \$17.9 million or more. The program — called the Community Eligibility Provision — represents a massive expansion of a costly federal entitlement program that now provides subsidized meals to thousands of middle-class children whose families can well afford to buy or pack a lunch.

The CEP, implemented nationwide last year after a pilot program, is part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, first lady Michelle Obama's signature initiative intended to stop childhood hunger and obesity by overhauling child nutrition programs. The law also set the stage to drastically increase the number of free school meals by allowing entire school districts — rather than individual households — to apply for subsidized meals. This is a stark departure from how the free lunch program had been administered over the past several decades, when families were required to submit applications to prove financial need.

Since 1946, the National School Lunch Program has provided free or reduced-price meals to children from low-income households. The program has grown in scope and cost and now serves subsidized meals to about 20 million kids nationwide, including more than 500,000 in Wisconsin. In the 2013-'14 school year, Wisconsin schools served more than 50 million free or reduced-price lunches and another 23 million breakfasts, costing federal taxpayers more than \$172 million. Those figures are likely to soar due to the CEP.

Here's how it works: In Wisconsin, a district can earn CEP status, which is good for four years, if at least 40% of its students automatically qualify because their families receive other benefits such as FoodShare or Wisconsin Works (W-2).

Homeless, runaway and migrant children are also eligible.

This is called direct certification. The 40% threshold can be reached by an individual school, by grouping several schools together or by district.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers school meal programs, then applies a multiplier — called a claiming factor — that boosts the figure by 60%, under the assumption that many more students qualify but don't apply.

According to USDA spokesman Johnathan Monroe, "The multiplier is based on an analysis that indicated that for every 10 students who qualify for free or reduced-price meal

benefits based on their participation in programs like SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), an additional six come from families who would only qualify for meal benefits by submitting a household income application. The multiplier accounts for the students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals but do not receive types of federal assistance that would allow them to be identified without a household application. We are reaching students who would be eligible for free and reduced-price meals but do not have someone at home turning in their paperwork."

For example, if 50% of students in a district are directly certified, the claiming factor adds another 30%, so the total number of eligible students jumps to 80%. Then every student is eligible for a taxpayer-funded breakfast and lunch whether or not the student needs it. The district receives reimbursement from the federal government at the "free" rate, which currently maxes out at \$5.29 per student per day. So 80% of the students would be reimbursed at that "free" rate, and the remaining 20% would be reimbursed at a lower "paid" rate, currently about 30 cents. Any shortage in the program must be paid out of local funds.

This is when the program captures students who don't need the benefits. First, the claiming factor is uniformly applied to every district with no distinction between rural, inner city and suburban areas. Second, the remaining number

WHAT IS THE CEP?

The **Community Eligibility Provision** is a four-year meal reimbursement program that allows entire school districts or groups of schools — rather than individual households — to apply for taxpayer-subsidized lunch and breakfast.

Part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the CEP was implemented nationwide in 2014 following a three-year pilot program.



of students (in this example, the 20%) are eligible for both free breakfast and lunch even though they don't need them. Monroe acknowledged that "while some children from higher-income families will receive free lunches through the CEP, eligible schools will only choose to participate if it is financially viable for them."

In 2014-'15, at least 256 Wisconsin

public schools participated in the CEP, resulting in free breakfast and lunch for more than 111,000 students, a nearly 20% increase over the number of eligible students the previous school year. So more than 21,000 public school students who hadn't qualified before (likely due to higher family income) became eligible for free meals under the CEP. Last year's minimum "free" rate was \$4.60, and the "paid" rate was 28 cents. About 80 private schools in Wisconsin also participated last year.

This school year, 382 schools have signed up, 43 more than last year, including public schools in West Allis and Sheboygan.

The USDA claims many advantages of the CEP, such as saving money by reducing paperwork and eliminating the

stigma associated with free meals. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the benefits of the CEP are:

- *Free lunch and breakfast for all students in participating schools.*
- *No household applications for free and reduced-price meals.*
- *No verification of applications.*
- *Potential for increased meal participation rates, especially breakfast.*
- *Simplified counting and claiming process by not having to track free, reduced-price and paying students.*

WISCONSIN'S NUMBERS

2014-'15

At least 256 Wisconsin public schools participated, resulting in free breakfast and lunch for more than 111,000 students, a nearly 20% increase over the number of eligible students the previous year. About 80 private schools also participated.

2015-'16

382 Wisconsin schools are participating.

While reducing paperwork is a plus, other consequences should be considered. The program will be responsible for big budget increases over the next several years. "The main driver for the expected participation increase in school meals is the Community Eligibility Provision," according to the USDA.

During congressional testimony this summer, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said only "about half the schools that are eligible for this have adopted it." That means the current budget for both the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program — about

“Teenagers have creative ways of expressing their displeasure at having to take food they don’t want.” – Diane Pratt-Heavner
School Nutrition Association spokeswoman

\$16 billion in 2016 — could skyrocket if every eligible school applies.

The issue is a special crusade for Vilsack, who has recounted painful childhood experiences that led him to promote the expansion of free school meals. As the adopted son of an alcoholic mother, Vilsack told a House subcommittee in June, “During the times she was drinking, she was not there. A lot of families deal with those issues, and somebody’s gotta be there. You would hope the school district is taking care of them, protecting them, feeding them well and teaching them well.”

In a speech in September at the Center for American Progress, Vilsack reiterated: “I know what can happen in a schoolyard when you’re a little overweight and a little slow because of it (hunger). I don’t want that for any child.”

Making sure hungry kids are fed and addressing alarming obesity rates among the nation’s youth are laudable goals. But the CEP is another example of government overreach, a well-intentioned program that quickly and irreversibly spins out of control.

In fact, tangible deliverables so far from expanded school meal programs are nebulous at best. Little data is available on childhood obesity rates since the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act took effect in the 2012-’13 school year. Critics of the law — including school nutritionists across the country — have complained about inedible food and a big increase in food waste. The School Nutrition Association estimates that about 1.5 million paying students have stopped buying school lunches, causing financial strain on districts. The complaints prompted congressional hearings last spring and summer.

U.S. Rep. Glenn Grothman (R-Wis.) pretty much summed up the law’s central failure at a June 24 meeting of a House Education and Workforce subcommittee about child nutrition programs. Grothman told one state nutrition director, “To force you to serve food that hungry kids throw out tops the list as evidence of what the federal government shouldn’t be doing.”

Of course, kids throwing away unappetizing school lunches is nothing new. But students are mostly discarding perfectly edible produce they are forced to take — and that’s paid for by taxpayers — under new rules that micromanage every plate served at school. The School Nutrition Association

estimates that food waste has doubled since the law took effect. A Government Accountability Office survey indicates food waste was the top concern of school nutritionists. (The USDA doesn’t currently track food waste in the school lunch program.)

Here’s what happens: A Wisconsin high school student must take at least three items from a lunch selection of five — a meat/meat substitute, milk, whole grain, fruit and vegetable. One of the three must be a fruit or vegetable, even if the student doesn’t want it. So the student takes the item and then tosses it in the trash. “Teenagers have creative ways of expressing their displeasure at having to take food they don’t want,” jokes Diane Pratt-Heavner, SNA spokeswoman.

Her group urged Congress to simplify child nutrition programs and ease administrative burdens. “The standards have gone too far to the point of driving kids away from healthier meals,” Pratt-Heavner says. She cites challenges in making whole grain tortillas in the Southwest, cornbread in the South and bagels in the Northeast since white flour is a no-no under the policy.

Sodium levels are so restrictive that cheese had to be removed from deli sandwiches; one lawmaker recounted how a teacher had to monitor the pickle jar to make sure “kids only took three pickles instead of four” because the extra pickle would violate federal salt restrictions. Some schools report kids bringing in — and even selling — salt, pepper and sugar packets in an attempt to make lunches more palatable.

The expanded meal program and its mandates also teach millions of students that there is such a thing as a free lunch. Forcing kids to take food that ends up in the trash at taxpayer expense and that does little to make kids healthier is more than bad policy; it replaces individual and parental accountability with government decree. And it creates one more costly federal entitlement program that will be difficult — if not impossible — to repeal in the future.

Forty years ago, Milton Friedman’s book “There’s No Such Thing as a Free Lunch” was published. The adage has long been associated with the Nobel Prize-winning economist, who popularized the phrase to contradict the belief that “government can provide goods and services, can spend money, at nobody’s expense.”

Friedman would be alarmed, but probably not surprised, that “free” school lunch is poised to be the next big American entitlement program. And rather than simply making sure that needy, hungry students are fed at school, the program is rapidly becoming a catch-all to promote the idea that the government — not parents — is primarily responsible for feeding the nation’s children.



Vilsack

Is Scott Wa

The governor's political future depends on w



Walker Done?

Whether he can repair relations and his image

Scott Walker is a one-hit wonder. That's the impression left on the national electorate — inconceivable a few short months ago — following the Wisconsin governor's botched presidential campaign. And it appears that his national collapse has also damaged his standing at home.

By **CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER**

Cover Story

Walker's job approval rating sank to a low of 37%, with a 59% disapproval rating, in the latest Marquette University Law School poll. The respective numbers in August were 39% and 57%. By contrast, his approval rating during 2012-'14 held steady around 50%.

A majority of Wisconsinites, 62%, do not want to see the governor run for a third term, while 35% do. Among Republicans, 79% support Walker's running for a third term. The Marquette poll, conducted after Walker dropped out of the presidential race, was released on Sept. 30.

Once heralded across the country as a conservative hero for taking on and defeating the state's public employee unions in 2011, the governor couldn't translate that signature achievement into a plausible national persona. A string of gaffes and lackluster debate performances quickly extinguished the one-time Iowa front-runner's momentum.

After such a spectacular fall, is Walker's political future over in Wisconsin? Can he repair relations with GOP leaders and rising upstarts who filled the void while he was courting voters nationwide? Can he win back constituents miffed by the amount of time he spent not doing the governor's work? What will his priorities be?

Walker says he plans to finish out the remaining three-plus years of his term. Upon his return to Wisconsin in late September, he immediately supported a legislative plan to alter the state's civil service process to streamline the hiring and firing of state employees. This was accompanied by a "kiss and make up" tour around the state to remind Wisconsinites that he was, in fact, still their governor.

He toured a factory in De Pere on Oct. 1 and declared that he'll focus on jobs training to address a worker shortage in skilled manufacturing. (See related stories on Pages 6-11.) "This year, our big challenge is not just creating jobs but filling jobs and making sure people have the skill sets they need," Walker told the Sheboygan Press. "Working with Northeast Wisconsin Technical College or others like them across the state is now more important than ever," he added.

But first, Walker "has some bridges he needs to mend," according to University of Wisconsin-Madison political science professor Ken Mayer. And those bridges must lead to both parties, Mayer says.

"Democrats are not going to be interested in working with



Joseph Sohm / Shutterstock

him, but I think there were some Republicans that were less than thrilled with the way in which the campaign played itself out," he says.

"People viewed the state as a stepping stone for his bigger ambitions, and if it served his purposes

to throw people under the bus for his presidential ambitions, then he was willing to do that," Mayer adds.

Former Gov. Tommy Thompson agrees that Walker has repair work to do with the Republican Legislature, telling a Milwaukee TV station that Walker "left them a bad budget" and "didn't give them the leadership they expected."

Walker also needs to improve his standing with Republican voters who didn't want him to run for president in the first place, says Mike Wagner, an associate professor in UW's School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

According to the Marquette poll, 30% of Republicans say they wish Walker had not run for president; 51% of right-leaning independents wish he had not run. Only 28% of Republicans and right-leaning independents say they would have supported him had he stayed in the race, with 55% favoring a different candidate.

When Walker gets back to taking on big issues, Republican voters will come around, Wagner says. "To come back and immediately meet with the Republican caucus and to begin talking another bold policy reform that's in the same vein as

his other major policy reforms — these are all signals to Republicans who might have been upset at him that he's going to be the Scott Walker they knew and liked," he says.

The extent to which Walker is able to get things done in Wisconsin also rests on his long-term plans, whether he still has

national aspirations and how the 2016 presidential election plays out.

If a Democrat wins the White House, Walker might consider another presidential bid. The chance to challenge a first-term Democrat, with lessons learned from this year's campaign, could lure Walker in 2020.

But there is also the Rick Perry lesson. GOP voters remember the presidential candidate's implosion four years ago, and that helped doom the former Texas governor's run this year. Walker could suffer the same fate in 2020.

Because running for president as an out-of-office candidate

Once heralded across the country as a conservative hero for taking on and defeating the state's public employee unions in 2011, the governor couldn't translate that signature achievement into a plausible national persona.



walker.wi.gov

is difficult, Walker might seek re-election in 2018 to help his presidential chances.

If a Republican wins the presidency next November, the office is likely blocked for another eight years. Walker has said he's not interested in a cabinet position, but if he's still taking a beating in state polls next fall, he might change his mind and accept the call.

Or the governor could drift away from politics altogether. If Walker — a middle-class family man with two college-age sons — has the chance to finally make some money in the private sector, he couldn't be blamed for taking it. But could someone who's held elected office since 1992, much of his adult life, simply walk away from politics?

If the perception in Wisconsin is that Walker isn't running for a third term, state Republicans may begin trying to draw contrasts between themselves and the incumbent in order to bolster their own gubernatorial prospects.

Legislative leaders in Wisconsin might be more willing to exert the influence they gained while Walker was on the campaign trail. As he traveled the country, the Legislature was busy making Wisconsin a right-to-work state, repealing the prevailing wage law for local government and enacting a ban on abortion after 20 weeks.

Each of these bills originated with the Legislature, and Walker took credit for each of them while campaigning for president.

Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke says Walker's absence prompted the Legislature's surge in activity. "If you don't have the guy at the top with the bully pulpit, picking that direction and moving the Legislature in that direction, there's going to be more of the individual personalities pushing their own agendas and trying to rally people toward that," he says.

It's unlikely that Assembly Speaker Robin Vos and Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald will fade into the background willingly, especially when their caucuses face elections in 2016.

Vos suggests a new path for Republicans moving forward. "We have to remember we are in a purple state," Vos says. "As conservatives, we have to make sure that we always bring the public along, convince people of why we're doing things and speak to win people over, as opposed to just speaking to people we've already won."

And despite Walker's reputation for getting things done, there

is still much to do. For instance, even with the state's union reforms and tax cuts, the Tax Foundation named Wisconsin eighth worst for taxes. While the sales tax is relatively low, Wisconsin still ranks near the top in income taxes and property taxes. Momentum also has been

building to repeal the state's minimum markup law.

Thus, in Walker's absence, legislative leaders were formulating their fall agendas. Proposals likely to see action include banning the sale of fetal body parts, campaign finance reform, reforms to the Government Accountability Board and the John Doe process, and a package of bills targeting fraud in public benefit programs such as FoodShare.

"I think there's a ton of issues we can work on — some of which might be partisan, unfortunately, but plenty of which are bipartisan," Vos says.

It is difficult, however, to lead on statewide issues from the Legislature, and Walker could be an asset if he somehow can repair his image. How can he do that?

"You have to start re-establishing those connections and making it clear to people that you care what's happening to them," Mayer says. "And that is going to take some work."

"I think it's a fair statement to say everything he has done in the last 18 months he has done to advance his presidential ambitions. Now he has to undo some of that and persuade people that he is — to use an overused sports metaphor — 'all in' in Wisconsin," he says.

But even if Walker is invested, his time in Wisconsin may have passed.

"He's going to run into people whose time is now," Wagner says. "People who might want to run for governor or move up in leadership — they're all going to be telling voters what they're for and

what they're going to do should voters be willing take a chance on them," he adds.

"There's going to be more pressure than Gov. Walker is used to not run for re-election, and he showed in this presidential run that he's not very skilled at taking friendly fire," Wagner says.

It remains to be seen whether Scott Walker has any political capital left to lead effectively or whether too much damage has been done and he'll be eclipsed by those seeking his job.

Christian Schneider is a columnist and blogger for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

If the perception in Wisconsin is that Walker isn't running for a third term, state Republicans may begin trying to draw contrasts between themselves and the incumbent in order to bolster their own gubernatorial prospects.

Even in an era
of rising political
correctness,
the decision to
fire Marquette
professor
John McAdams
nearly stands
alone

A case of academic freedom

By Charles J. Sykes

Allen Fredrickson photos

As the fall semester began at Marquette University, one of its most senior faculty members sat at a Shorewood coffee shop, looking every inch a rumpled academic. John McAdams has taught at Marquette since 1977, but this year he has no classes to teach, no papers to grade, no office hours. McAdams is a man without a campus.

Since December, the political science professor has been banned from Marquette, stripped of his classes and suspended from his associate professorship.

In January, Marquette informed McAdams that it intends to fire him in the wake of a blog post he wrote that was critical of another instructor on campus.

McAdams spent the summer catching up on his reading and finishing his latest book, “The New Class in Post-Industrial Society,” which he describes as an “analysis of the elite liberal left.” In May, he helped expose a mural celebrating convicted cop killer Assata Shakur at Marquette’s Gender and Sexuality Resource Center. (It was later removed.) But he also spent much of the summer preparing for a hearing of a faculty committee that will recommend whether he be stripped of tenure.

“I’d much rather be there,” he says. “I’d much rather be teaching.”

At 69, McAdams could simply have gone quietly, as perhaps Marquette thought he would. But that’s not his nature. “First of all, I enjoy a good fight,” he says. “It is also a matter of principle. That is, some people need to be taught a lesson — people who think they can run roughshod over people’s academic freedom.”

How far will he take his fight to get his job back? “As far as necessary,” he says, “including a lawsuit.”

So McAdams finds himself at the center of what is shaping up to be one of the most unusual academic freedom cases in the country. Even in an era of rising political correctness — trigger

been the growing intolerance of what he calls the “authoritarian left” on campus and its attempts to narrow the limits of acceptable discourse.

The latest controversy started last fall when an undergraduate student told him of a galling incident of ideological censorship. After an Oct. 28, 2014, philosophy class, the student approached his instructor to tell her that he was disappointed that she had quickly passed over the issue of gay marriage in class, since the student wanted to argue against it. The instructor, graduate student Cheryl Abbate, told him that he would not be permitted to make “homophobic” comments, which would be “offensive” to any gay students in the class.

Advised that he could complain about the gag rule, the student took the issue to the College of Arts and Sciences dean’s office, which referred him to the Philosophy Department’s chairwoman. According to *The College Fix*, the student was merely seeking to have the school acknowledge that the instructor was wrong to tell him he couldn’t bring up gay marriage “and ensure that students in the future will be allowed to speak in similar classroom situations.”

Unable to get any such response, he took his story — and an audio recording of the conversation with the instructor — to McAdams. (See accompanying transcript.)

On Nov. 9, McAdams published a blog post on the incident under the headline: “Marquette Philosophy Instructor: ‘Gay Rights’ Can’t Be Discussed in Class Since Any Disagreement Would Offend Gay Students.”

“I doubt the administration at Madison would have done this.”

— John McAdams

warnings, speech codes and the battle against “micro-aggressions” — the decision to fire McAdams nearly stands alone. As far as anyone knows, no other major university has tried to fire a tenured professor for something that he wrote on a blog. “I have spoken to experts across the country,” says Richard Esenberg, president of the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty and himself an adjunct professor of law at Marquette. “No one does this.”

The case will be costly to Marquette in both dollars and reputation, but it also will be a defining moment for the Jesuit school. “Marquette has to decide what kind of university it wants to be,” says Esenberg, who is providing McAdams with legal assistance. “Is it committed to free and open discourse? Or does it want to become ground zero in the battle over increasing intolerance on America’s campuses?”

Poking the bear

McAdams is hardly a stranger to controversy on campus. In addition to being a respected political scientist and a nationally known expert on the John F. Kennedy assassination, McAdams for years has published a blog called “Marquette Warrior,” which has been an irritant to the school’s administration because of his trenchant criticism of political correctness and what he sees as the school’s failure to uphold Catholic values. One of his favorite themes has

in the post, McAdams put the incident in the wider context of academic intolerance. “Abbate, of course, was just using a tactic typical among liberals now,” he wrote. “Opinions with which they disagree are not merely wrong, and are not to be argued against on their merits, but are deemed ‘offensive’ and need to be shut up.” (Abbate has since transferred from Marquette.)

As McAdams later recounted, “The post created a firestorm of controversy. First, people who were appalled at the instructor’s actions weighed in,” and then came the backlash from the left and Marquette’s administration, which felt McAdams had been unfair in criticizing the instructor.

The next month, Richard C. Holz, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, informed McAdams that he was suspended and banned from campus. The letter gave no specific grounds for the action, but it soon became clear that McAdams was being disciplined solely for what he had written on his blog.

Marquette’s administrators — and McAdams’ leftist critics — were, in effect, accusing the veteran professor of cyberbullying a graduate student. McAdams claims that his blog was factually accurate, his language was restrained and that the grad student was acting as a faculty member. Technically, Abbate was not a teaching assistant but rather held a “lectureship.” McAdams explains: “For practical purposes, she was the professor. She contrived the syllabus.”

Analysis

bus. She taught the class. She assigned the grades. She conducted all of the classes. It was her class.”

The decision to suspend McAdams drew sharp criticism from both the right and left. One of Marquette’s most prominent liberal academics, Daniel Maguire (who has tangled with McAdams in the past), called the decision “bizarre, demeaning, and unjust.”

“In almost half a century in the academe,”

Maguire wrote in an email to Marquette President Mike Lovell, “I have never seen a similar punishment imposed on a professor in this ‘blunt instrument’ fashion.”

But if members of the Marquette community thought that McAdams’ suspension was simply a one-time overreaction, they were quickly disabused. In late January, Holz sent McAdams a letter telling him that “we are commencing as of this date the procedures for revoking your tenure and dismissing you from the faculty.”

McAdams admits that he was shocked. “I was appalled. I was thinking, ‘How the hell do they think they can do this?’”

Even though he had poked the bear for years, he admits that he did not expect the administration to take such a draconian step. “No,” he says. “Because, it’s never happened before. Usually protections of academic freedom are pretty strong.

“I mean, Holocaust deniers routinely have their academic freedom protected,” he says. “9/11 truthers routinely have their academic freedom protected. There’s a guy in Florida who believes that the Sandy Hook massacre was a government operation to gin up support for gun control. He’s been widely denounced. Fair enough. But no one has tried to take his tenure away from him.”

Marquette, however, seemed oblivious to the implications of its decision to fire a tenured professor for something he had written. In a masterpiece of academic doublespeak, Lovell issued a statement insisting that the attempt to fire McAdams had nothing to do with academic freedom:

“The decisions here have everything to do with our guiding values and expectations of conduct toward each other and nothing to do with academic freedom, freedom of speech, or same-sex marriage. ...”

McAdams was not impressed. “In real universities,” he later wrote, “administrators understand (or more likely grudgingly accept) that faculty will say controversial things, will criticize them and each other, and that people will complain about it. That sort of university is becoming rarer and rarer. Based on [the administration’s] actions, Marquette is certainly not such a place.”

The decision to fire McAdams drew national attention, and much of the criticism was withering. *The Atlantic* magazine called the move “an attack on academic freedom” and ridiculed Marquette’s

argument that McAdams should be held responsible for harassing and insulting emails that Abbate received from critics. By that logic, writer Conor Friedersdorf noted, no academic could criticize anyone because he or she could be stripped of tenure based on “nasty emails” written by third parties. “Only myopia can account for failure to see the threat to academic freedom.”

The case also drew the attention of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. “If Marquette can fire a tenured professor for criticizing a fellow teacher on a blog, then tenure at Marquette is worthless, as are freedom of speech and academic freedom,” declared Executive Director Robert Shibley. “While this is more than likely just an excuse to get rid of McAdams, the fact that McAdams’ supposed offense was criticizing a teacher for squelching dissenting opinions in class only makes Marquette’s utter contempt for dissenters more obvious.”

Esenberg is baffled by Marquette’s treatment of McAdams. “They banned him from campus and, for a while, refused to tell him why,” he says. “They suspended him without following their own procedures and have been extraordinarily difficult and evasive during the process to date.”

Indeed, it is not clear that Marquette realized it was plunging into a public relations, legal and financial morass. Esenberg believes McAdams has a strong legal case. “Marquette, like most other private research universities, contractually promises its tenured faculty that they cannot be fired for speech that would be constitutionally protected,” he says. “John is asking Marquette to live up to its part of the bargain.”

In fact, McAdams’ case appears exceptionally strong, based on Marquette’s own written policies.

According to Marquette’s Faculty Statute, a tenured professor can be subject to “discretionary” dismissal only for “serious instances

of illegal, immoral, dishonorable, irresponsible, or incompetent conduct.” But the university’s rules make it clear that a tenured professor cannot be fired for anything that is protected by academic freedom:

“In no case, however, shall discretionary cause [for dismissal] be interpreted so as to impair the *full and free enjoyment of legitimate personal or academic freedoms of thought, doctrine, discourse, association, advocacy, or action.*” (Emphasis added.)

In case that is not explicit enough, the statute that lays out the causes of termination reiterates the school’s commitment to protecting academic freedom: “Dismissal will not be used to restrain faculty members *in their exercise of academic freedom or other rights guaranteed them by the United States Constitution.*” (Emphasis added.) In other words, even though the school is a private institution, Marquette’s professors are contractually entitled to the full



“Some people need to be taught a lesson — people who think they can run roughshod over people’s academic freedom.”

— John McAdams

Shut up, she explained

This is a partial transcript of the Oct. 28, 2014, recorded conversation between a Marquette University undergraduate and his instructor, Cheryl Abbate, that was the basis for professor John McAdams' Nov. 9, 2014, blog post.

Student: Regardless of why I'm against gay marriage, it's still wrong for the teacher of a class to completely discredit one person's opinion when they may have different opinions.

Abbate: OK, there are some opinions that are not appropriate, that are harmful, such as racist opinions, sexist opinions, and, quite honestly, do you know if anyone in the class is homosexual?

Student: No, I don't.

Abbate: And don't you think that that would be offensive to them if you were to raise your hand and challenge this?

Student: If I choose to challenge this, it's my right as an American citizen.

Abbate: OK, well, actually you don't have a right in this class, as — especially as an ethics professor, to make homophobic comments, racist comments, sexist comments —

Student: Homophobic comments? They're not. I'm not

saying that gays, that one guy can't like another girl or something like that. Or, one guy can't like another guy.

Abbate: This is about restricting rights and liberties of individuals. Um, and just as I would take offense if women can't serve in XYZ positions, because that is a sexist comment.

Student: I don't have any problem with women saying that. I don't have any problem with women joining anything like that.

Abbate: No, I'm saying that if you are going to make a comment like that, it would be similar to making a —

Student: Absolutely.

Abbate: How I would experience would be similar to how someone who is in this room and who is homosexual who would experience someone criticizing this.

Student: OK, so because they are homosexual, I can't have my opinions? And it's not being offensive towards them because I am just having my opinions on a very broad subject.

Abbate: You can have whatever opinions you want, but I can tell you right now, in this class, homophobic comments, racist comments and sexist comments will not be tolerated. If you don't like that, you are more than free to drop this class.

breadth of First Amendment protections.

Marquette spokesman Brian Dorrington says, "The university has been complying and will continue to comply with those statutes. Until the process runs its course, this is a personnel matter and we have no further elaboration."

The exile

It was a hot day in September, and the Shorewood coffee shop was full. McAdams was in a mood to reflect on the university's efforts to end his career. The decision to fire him is a defining moment for Lovell, who's in his second year at Marquette. Why did he pull the trigger?

McAdams has no doubt that the move is in retaliation for his past criticisms. "Sure," he says, "it is absolutely retaliation. I think they were terribly, terribly offended at how uppity McAdams was, how insolent McAdams was and 'How dare he criticize us?' I think it may be it's a little bit of arrogance that says, 'Who the hell does McAdams think he is?'"

He also thinks the decision reflects Marquette's parochialism, by which he means Lovell's "failure to understand the norms that prevail in secular academia about things like academic freedom. I doubt the administration at Madison would have done this.

"In other words, I think they are unsophisticated about this. They think they can invoke something like 'Catholic mission' and

get away with things that a state school or even a secular private school would not try to."

McAdams remains troubled by what he sees as the slide of Marquette into what he calls "Catholic Lite" but also by the growing climate of intolerance in higher education.

"I think we've got to distinguish between old-style liberals and leftists and the politically correct types," he says. "Old-style liberals wanted to argue and stand up and make their case. New-style liberals don't necessarily want to make their case; they simply want to shut people up."

Even as he gears up for possible litigation over the firing, Esenberg expresses hope that calmer heads may yet prevail. "Firing a professor for speech is something that serious universities do not do, and it is hard for me to believe that Marquette really intends to go ahead with it," he says. "Someone over there needs to exercise some judgment."

Meanwhile McAdams waits.

Knowing the hostile environment he would face, would he want to return to Marquette if he wins his fight? "I would," McAdams says without hesitation. "And continue to make trouble. Just to spite the authoritarians."

Charles J. Sykes is Wisconsin Interest editor, founder of the Right Wisconsin website and a talk show host on AM-620 WTMJ in Milwaukee.



Allen Fredrickson photo

ON THE FRONTLINES OF REFORM
WITH WRITER SUNNY SCHUBERT

Despite personal loss, Sen. Darling stays the course

Those who know state Sen. Alberta Darling consistently describe the River Hills Republican as one tough lady.

This year proved how right they are.

As co-chair of the powerful Joint Finance Committee, the 71-year-old Darling put in weeks of 18-hour days, shepherding what she called “a very tough budget” through the Legislature.

She and her colleagues managed to find more money for K-12 education — one of her top priorities — as well as health programs for the poor, while still holding firmly against tax increases.

She helped craft a deal that will keep the

Milwaukee Bucks in Wisconsin and create a glittering new sports and entertainment complex in downtown Milwaukee.

She led lawmakers in a reform of the state’s antiquated prevailing wage laws, which raised the cost of most public works projects. She helped make Wisconsin the nation’s 25th right-to-work state by stopping unions from forcing employees to join against their will.

And while Darling regrets having to cut \$250 million from the University of Wisconsin System, she is confident that other budget provisions give the system the flexibility to make the cuts as painless as possible.

And she did it all with a broken heart.

Lady

Bill Darling — her college sweetheart and husband of 48 years — died in March while awaiting a pancreas-kidney transplant. He was 71.

The couple had gone to Florida in December when Bill, a diabetic since his college days, made “the list” for transplant surgery. Their daughter lives in Miami, so it gave them time to be with her and two of their three grandchildren while they waited for the phone call telling them the organs were available.

But the call didn’t come until February, and by then it was too late. Bill Darling, a physician himself, had developed an infection from which he never recovered.

During those weeks of waiting, the senator kept up her work through emails and conference calls. At one point, she told her husband, “I think I should give up the chair” of Joint Finance.

“But he said, ‘Don’t give it up. We’ll be home by Easter.’ ”

Her blue eyes glisten with tears.

“I was home by Easter. But I came home without him.”

“He was my best friend, my biggest supporter, my playmate. We met in college, and he threw my 19th birthday party. We were together ever since,” she says.

Without him, she admits, “I’m not doing very well.”

She makes a sweeping gesture that manages to take in not just her Capitol office but the whole state. “This job, it keeps me together. When I’m here, when I’m working or when I’m meeting with constituents, I’m OK.”

“It’s the nights and weekends, when I’m alone, that hurt.”

But, like survivors everywhere, Darling keeps going forward, one step at a time.

She was raised in a family of Lithuanian immigrants who fled Eastern Europe after World War I; her grandmother came to the United States alone at age 14.

Alberta Statkus was born in Hammond, Ind., but the family soon moved to Cicero, Ill., where they lived in the same home as her grandmother and aunt.

That house was a hub for Cicero’s immigrant community. People came day and night, seeking help finding jobs, places to live

and health care as they negotiated the path to U.S. citizenship.

“My parents really believed in the American dream. They said, ‘You can be anything you want if you’re willing to work hard.’ They refused to teach me Lithuanian. They said, ‘We are Americans; we should speak English,’ ” she says.

Her grandmother was also a staunch Republican. “She — my whole family — really believed in the Republican philosophy of self-reliance,” Darling says.

In addition, having lived in Eastern Europe, they had learned

the hard way not to put too much faith in government, because government can turn on you.

Her father went to college and became a successful businessman, moving the family to Peoria, Ill. Darling became the first woman in her family to attend college when she entered the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

She earned a degree in secondary education, married Bill and taught high school English while he finished medical school. She planned on being a stay-at-home mom after their daughter, Liza, and son, Will, were born.

But soon she found

herself volunteering for more and more organizations, especially those focused on improving the lives of children and building a stronger community.

She joined the board of the American Red Cross in Milwaukee, which is where she first met a kindred spirit, Scott Walker, who had left Marquette University to take a job with the organization.

In 1990, a seat opened up in the 10th Assembly District, where the Darlings lived. She ran for office, and the vast network of friends she had made during her volunteer years came through. Two years later, the 8th District Senate seat came up, and she won it.

Since then, she has won every election, including a brutal \$8 million recall effort in 2011 after the passage of Act 10.

From the get-go, Darling has supported Wisconsin’s school choice program, first for low-income children in Milwaukee and now for all children statewide.

In doing so, she has earned the enmity of the once-powerful



Allen Fredrickson photo

Alberta Darling was first elected to the state Senate in 1992.

teachers union. Most recently, the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association staged a protest at Auer Avenue School in Milwaukee, decrying a state budget provision allowing the Milwaukee County executive to take control of the city's worst-performing schools.

At Auer Avenue, Darling notes dryly, not a single child tested "proficient" in reading in 2013-'14, yet the union continues to block reforms. "We are going to get better schools in Milwaukee," she says firmly. "We're going to take on the toughest schools in the toughest neighborhoods in Milwaukee and make them better."

Wisconsin's recent education efforts — curtailing unions through Act 10, expanding school choice and empowering the takeover of failing schools — are getting nationwide attention, Darling adds.

"We spend a lot of money on education, and that's a good thing. But we've also been very reform-minded so we get more for our tax dollars. When I talk to legislators and educators from other states, we are seen as reformers. I call it 'the Wisconsin revolution.'"

Similarly, she says, upcoming proposals to reform higher education by merging certain technical colleges with UW's 13 two-year campuses may get taxpayers more bang for the buck.

"Our attitude is the university system and the tech system should be market-driven. They should prepare people for the world of work," she says. "We're trying to give them the freedom to match the university system to the world of work."

Another priority is improving the state's economy. "We have to remove a lot of the rules and regulations on businesses. I'm convinced that's why we aren't doing as well as our neighbors," she says, noting that despite recent corporate tax rate cuts, Wisconsin's business taxes remain higher than those in Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota.

And the state's high income and property taxes also discourage businesses from starting up in Wisconsin, she says.

Improving the business climate also means reforming the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp., under fire since its inception. "We're going to reform WEDC," she says. The agency "has to get out of the business of picking winners and losers."

She is less optimistic about the chances for ending Wisconsin's Depression-era minimum markup law, which inflates the cost of gasoline and nonperishable food by prohibiting merchants from selling below cost.

"I support removing the minimum markup; we're one of the only states that have it," she says. "But a lot of people, includ-

ing a lot of Republicans, think small businesses need to be supported, and the minimum markup law still does that."

The senator bristles over questions about the gender gap that shows more men than women supporting Republican policies. "There is no 'war on women' in Wisconsin, absolutely not," she says.

"As a woman, I'm not one-dimensional. Abortion is not the only issue. Women need to be educated, they need to be healthy, they need good jobs. That's what Republicans are focused on."

Defunding Planned Parenthood, the state's largest abortion provider, is just not as big an issue as liberals make it out to be, she says. "Planned Parenthood is an outlier. We don't need Planned Parenthood. You can get birth control through BadgerCare and Medicaid."

Darling says, "We have one of the most effective health care delivery systems in the country. We are in the top 10 in terms of funding the uninsured. We have increased the number of insured by 140,000."

"What we need now is more women to be wealthier, to be better educated, to be leaders."

Darling believes the Legislature is slowly getting over the extreme partisanship of the past few years.

"I think a lot of people have realized that we can have differences of opinion, but we don't have to have enemies. I have a lot of friends on the Democratic side of the aisle. Eighty percent of the bills we pass are bipartisan," she says.

But the biggest bill, the state's biennial budget, is "never going to be bipartisan," she adds.

She notes that bipartisanship flourished when Wisconsin had a Republican governor — Tommy Thompson — but Democratic majorities in the Legislature. "When the majorities became really small, then it became very partisan. I think the whole state would be better off if we had more Republicans and Democrats working together."

She wants to remain part of that effort to move the state forward. "I'm going to run again in 2016," Darling says.

"If Bill were alive, we were going to retire after this term. We were going to travel, to take some time for ourselves," she says. "But now ... I have a hole in my heart and a need to make a difference. I still have a lot on my plate to accomplish."

Those who know her would say Alberta Darling is tough enough to make it happen.

"My parents really believed in the American dream. They said, 'You can be anything you want if you're willing to work hard.'"

Sunny Schubert is a Monona freelance writer and former editorial writer for the Wisconsin State Journal.

Capitalizing on Consolidation



Tom Lynn photo

Most of Wisconsin is aqua and darker. The darker the blue, the more layers of government.

By Greg Pearson

Thomas Meaux looks over a map in his Port Washington office that shows counties across the United States in shades ranging from white to dark blue.

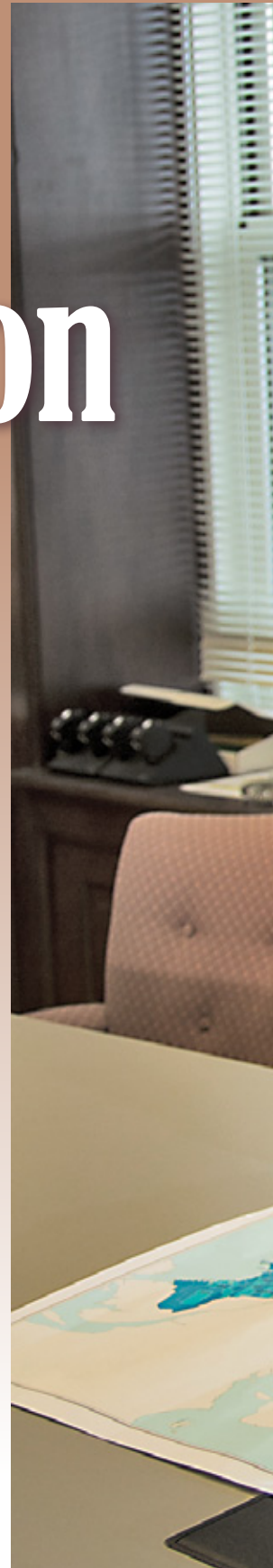
"This was my inspiration," says Meaux, Ozaukee County administrator.

The map charts the layers of government in each county using data compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau. The darker the blue, the more layers of government.

States such as Texas, Alaska and Nevada have large swaths awash in white. Aside from two northern counties — Florence and Menominee — Wisconsin is swimming in shades of aqua and darker.

Even though his county is one of the lighter shades of blue in the

Local governments are merging services to become more efficient, streamline efforts and save tax dollars





Thomas Meaux, Ozaukee County administrator, looks over a map in his Port Washington office that shows counties across the United States in shades ranging from white to dark blue. The map charts the layers of government in each county using data compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Tom Lynn photo



North Shore Fire Chief Robert Whitaker says, “You save money; you get a better service.” The North Shore Fire Department was established in 1995 and serves Bayside, Brown Deer, Fox Point, Glendale, River Hills, Shorewood and Whitefish Bay.

state, Meaux’s mission these days is to further reduce its layers of government.

Ozaukee County and its neighbor, Washington County, expect to merge their health departments by the end of the year, and Meaux hopes the counties will coordinate on more consolidations.

Wisconsin ranks 20th in population but 10th in layers of local government. With each layer — whether it’s the city or town, county or school system — comes the bureaucracy to make things function.

“They have their own this. They have their own that,” Meaux says. He believes consolidation can eliminate some of those layers, some of that administration and, of course, some of the cost to taxpayers.

There are 440 school districts in Wisconsin — 11th most in the country, according to U.S. census data. Many of the state’s 72 counties have huge boards — none bigger than Marathon County, which has a population of about 135,000 and 38 county board

members. County boards in Wisconsin average 22.4 members, well above the national average of 6.2.

That discrepancy is the result of Wisconsin setting up county boards to be legislative bodies that establish policy and serve as direct representatives of residents, says J. Michael Blaska, chief of staff of the Wisconsin Counties Association. Most states have a commission form of government for their county boards, meaning those bodies serve primarily to oversee the running of county government. Such boards often have five to seven members, Blaska says.

Wisconsin also has towns that have resisted annexation by neighboring cities and villages — some bearing the same community name (think Brookfield, Cedarburg and Grafton). Consolidation could help streamline government.

Why so many layers of government in Wisconsin? Joshua

Schoemann, Washington County administrator, figures the system was brought here by settlers who came from Northeastern states at



Lynn
photo

the heart of the nation's founding.

The country's early settlers, and those who formed early governments in the United States, were "big advocates of local control," he says. "It made good sense until the population exploded and you're dealing with millions of people instead of thousands."

Meaux and Schoemann estimate that the Ozaukee/Washington health department merger could save taxpayers \$300,000 a year. That figure is on target, according to Kirsten Johnson, Ozaukee County's public health officer, who says most of the savings will be from staff reductions. The consolidation will eliminate a now-vacant position similar to hers in Washington County. Overall staff will be reduced from 34 to 28, although four of those positions are vacant.

The consolidation also will blend services of the two departments. For instance, Washington County has a food safety and licensing program. In Ozaukee County, those duties are now provided by the state. **The merger will enable best practices, allowing county boards to set policy, she says.**

The staff cuts concern Pat Hrobosky, a retired nursing instructor and longtime member of the Washington County Board of Health. She says her county already has dealt with staff cuts that have reduced service.

"We're only doing what's mandated — nothing more, nothing," she says. Referring to county officials, she adds, "I think they have relied on their staff to go above and beyond the call of duty for way too long."

The consolidation will eliminate duplicated services, Meaux and Schoemann say. They expect services to continue at current levels or improve, and they see their counties as good matches for future consolidations. The counties are side by side, serving as bedroom communities for commuters to Milwaukee County to the south. Ozaukee and Washington counties have a mix of rural and urban, above-average income levels and politics that lean Republican.

These united feelings between the two counties weren't always so.

When the Territorial Legislature created Washington County in 1836, the territory included what is now Ozaukee County. A power

struggle developed, and in 1853 legislators from Port Washington and West Bend moved to divide Washington County in two, giving themselves control in the newly formed, smaller counties.

The Washington County Board challenged the change, saying the state constitution required counties to be at least 900 square miles; Washington County then was 663 square miles. Attorneys defending the split took a unique approach, arguing that the eastern border of Ozaukee County extends halfway across Lake Michigan, the dividing line between Wisconsin and Michigan. The state Supreme Court accepted this idea, and what was once one county officially became two.

Those old battle scars seem to have healed. Meaux and Schoemann offer praise for one another and their county boards for buying into the health department merger.

"The opportunities are almost endless," Schoemann says of the potential for more consolidations. "You generally don't see this in government. That's what makes it exciting to be a part of this." Schoemann lists several reasons that this is a prime time to consolidate.

He mentions the "silver tsunami" — members of the populous baby boom generation moving into retirement and leaving jobs open. Those vacant positions can be eliminated, an easier step than cutting existing employees.

Also, state-mandated tax limits make it harder for bodies of government to generate the money needed to sustain current levels of staffing. Schoemann says continuing at its current level of staff and services would cost Washington County about \$1 million more each year. "Without new revenue, you can't go very long at that clip," he says.

Meaux sees department consolidations as similar to any corporate merger, and his language resembles that heard in boardrooms across America. "We're trying to squeeze out redundancies," he says.

Dan Elsass, human resources coordinator and risk manager for the Village of Deerfield in Illinois, previously worked for the University of Wisconsin Extension and authored a study in 2003 that made recommendations about how to approach consolidations based on an examination of nine separate mergers of service involving Wisconsin governmental bodies. The study looked at consolidations that ranged from the formation of the North Shore Fire Department in suburban Milwaukee to the construction of a wastewater treatment plant shared by the villages of Mazomanie and Black Earth in Dane County.

During the recession of the early 2000s, Elsass was getting calls from places as far away as California asking about his research. The deeper recession that began in late 2007 kicked up another round of calls. "It's had real legs over the years," he says of consolidation

WISCONSIN BY THE NUMBERS

20th

U.S. rank — Population

10th

U.S. rank — Layers
of local government

11th

U.S. rank — Number
of school districts

22.4

Wisconsin average
county board members

6.2

U.S. average
county board members

38

County board members
Marathon County

“We smaller communities are going to have to look for opportunities to share expenses. I don’t know how we’re going to make it otherwise.” – Michele DeYoe, Delafield mayor

proposals. “Whenever things get tight, people are looking to save.”

Sometimes, consolidation proposals don’t work. Ozaukee and Washington counties recently considered merging veterans services departments. When veterans groups raised concerns about possible cuts in service, the idea was dropped, especially since the savings would have been minimal.

“Do we really want to risk hard feelings for a small gain?” Meaux says. “It was not a big bang for our buck.”

Schoemann says there are three primary factors to consider in a consolidation: saving money, which is the primary goal; maintaining or improving service; and acceptance by the public. Two of those three factors have to be positive for a consolidation to work, he says.

Consolidation proposals can be difficult because affected departments fear loss of control or identity. Other factors as simple as a disgruntled employee or a board member whose spouse works in an affected department can hinder plans, Meaux says.

“It doesn’t take much for it to get derailed. You have to be sensitive to how you treat people,” he says. “Things can happen if we get leadership that can make it work. This isn’t rocket science.” Sometimes the grudges that get in the way of consolidation aren’t even political, Elsass says. “It can be, ‘Our football team lost to you for 10 years straight, so we don’t talk to you about anything.’”

Milwaukee’s North Shore communities have worked at consolidation for years, combining departments such as health and water. The North Shore Fire Department, which serves the communities of Bayside, Brown Deer, Fox Point, Glendale, River Hills, Shorewood and Whitefish Bay, was established in 1995.

With one department now where there once were seven, there is a more efficient distribution of personnel and equipment across the communities, says Carl Krueger, Brown Deer’s village president. All personnel also now receive the same training. “There’s been a lot of benefit over the 20 years,” he says.

North Shore Fire Chief Robert Whitaker, who started as a firefighter in Fox Point shortly before the 1995 consolidation, says the merged department has led to savings in capital expenses and equipment purchases. At the time of the consolidation, the seven communities had 13 pumper trucks; now there are six. Today’s price tag for such a truck is \$450,000. Where there once were four ladder trucks, there now are two. Those cost \$1 million each. Staffing has been reduced from 121 to 106, Whitaker says.

The consolidation has saved the seven communities millions of



Tom Lynn photo

At the time of the 1995 consolidation, the seven North Shore communities had 13 pumper trucks; now there are six. They had four ladder trucks; now there are two.

dollars, according to an October Public Policy Forum report. The communities would have paid a total of \$2.8 million more in operating costs in 2014 had they not combined, the analysis says.

Communities have had to learn to compromise in the operation of the Fire Department. “You save money; you get a better service,” Whitaker says. “On the other hand, the Brown Deer Village Board doesn’t have complete control of the Fire Department.”

Steve Tippel, president of the North Shore Firefighters Union,

says the department was created with limits placed on salaries and other expenses pegged to the Consumer Price Index. State tax limits now added into the mix have further restricted revenue for the department, he says. But reduction in the number of firefighters over the years has been handled through attrition, although the union had to negotiate to avoid a couple of layoffs a few years ago.

Overall, Tippel sees the efficiency of the merged service. “I think by and large the consolidation has been a good thing,” he says.

Lake Country Fire and Rescue was established in 2010, creating one department to serve Delafield and the villages of Chenequa and Nashotah.

Delafield Mayor Michele DeYoe points to a concrete example of savings through merged services. Before the consolidation, Delafield was considering building a fire substation to serve the northeast corner of the city. To reach that area, firefighters from Delafield’s existing station had to drive around the south end of Nagawicka Lake, a route that slowed response time.

With the consolidation, that part of Delafield is served by the nearby fire station in Nashotah. The saving to taxpayers? The cost of constructing one fire substation.

“My personal philosophy is it’s the way to go in the future,” DeYoe says of consolidation. “We smaller communities are going to have to look for opportunities to share expenses. I don’t know how we’re going to make it otherwise.”

DeYoe estimates the fire and rescue consolidation saves a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year. Each community maintains its existing fire station, but savings are found in reduced administrative and equipment expenses.

“Not every community needs a 150-foot ladder truck,” she says.

Greg Pearson is a freelance writer and former Milwaukee Journal Sentinel copy editor.

