

The Democrats' season of weirdness

A brutal winter gave way to the spring of an election year, ending a merciful reprieve from our cycle of nonstop balloting. March brought the first signs of seasonal rebirth after our frozen hibernation, along with the return of political ads and a dose of March Madness.

About the ice

In politics, as in sports and opera, timing is everything. In the midst of one of the coldest winters since forever, Wisconsin Congressman Mark Pocan took to the floor of the House of Representatives to warn his colleagues of the dangers of warmer winters:

“In my home state of Wisconsin, farmers could face more pests and widespread disease with higher humidity and warmer winter temperatures. Ice fishermen are already noticing fewer days they can be out on our ice-covered lakes.”

His remarks suggested that Pocan had perhaps been spending too much time in Washington, D.C. The reference to the ice was particularly unfortunate. Had he returned home, he might have noticed on the flight back that the ice cover on the Great Lakes was, in fact, the most extensive in at least 35 years. In his hometown, ice on Madison's lakes was the thickest in nearly a decade and a half.

Our favorite correction

Perhaps in the grips of cabin fever, the media worked themselves into a frenzy over the release of musty e-mails from the now defunct John Doe investigation into Gov. Scott Walker's former Milwaukee County staff. Our favorite correction of the year comes from our brethren at *The Progressive* magazine, who claimed that the e-mails revealed Walker's top aides engaging in an illegal scheme to “cage” Wisconsin voters in the weeks ahead of the 2010 gubernatorial election.

“Voter caging,” explained the *Progressive* story that lit up the left-wing Twitter-verse, “is an illegal campaign practice used to purge voters from the rolls. Neighborhoods with large minority concentrations are most typically targeted by caging operations.”

Actually, no.



Within days the magazine had to eat a veritable smorgasbord of crow, admitting that every detail in the article was, well, completely untrue:

“Editor's note: Upon further research, the e-mails referenced in this story appear to relate to the use of software called ‘Complete Campaigns,’ which is a ‘back office program for processing campaign donations,’ and not a voter ‘caging’ scheme.

“*The Progressive* regrets this error.”

We imagine they did.

About that John Doe

The courts will, of course, have the last word on the investigations targeting Walker and conservatives, but Rick Esenberg, president of the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, had this coda for the failed effort to nail the governor:

“For three years, hostile prosecutors tossed Scott Walker's life inside and out. They had access to all 27,000 of these “damning” e-mails and yet here is what they charged Walker with.

“Nothing.

“John Chisholm did not decline to charge Scott Walker because they are BFFs. Walker wasn't charged because he didn't commit a crime.”

But hope beats eternal in the human breast, or at least at MSNBC.

White privilege

Despite the privations caused by budget cuts and the reforms of Act 10, a panoply of Madison governmental bodies found themselves so flush with cash that they could subsidize a White Privilege Conference in March. The event was billed as “a conference that examines challenging concepts of privilege and oppression and offers solutions and team-building strategies to work toward a more equitable world.”

This apparently is a new priority in the capital city. At least rhetorically. As blogger David Blaska noted:

“We are all swimming in the water of white privilege,”

the white president of the Madison school board apologized in a newspaper op-ed this month. ‘We white folk pretty much get to set the rules in Madison.’ Such as when the school board turned down a charter school proposed by Urban League President Kaleem Caire that was designed to address minority achievement.”

Because the school would have been nonunion, it was killed by the city’s power elite, for whom union privilege apparently trumps even white guilt.

Train wreck

Former Sen. Max Baucus, the Montana Democrat, famously predicted that unless the Obama administration got its act together, Obamacare could turn into a train wreck. If only he knew.

Glitches turned into broken promises, delays, waivers, carve-outs, unilateral rewrites, lagging signups, cringe-worthy promotional attempts... and a political nightmare for Democrats.

Oddly enough, despite a massive public relations campaign that featured such memorable gems as keystone appeals for young men to sign up for “brosurance” and an appearance by the president himself in a remarkably unfunny comedy show called “Between Two Ferns,” young invincibles were not buying what Obama was selling.

Thus did the president learn that there were, in fact, limits to being cool.

The war on work

Winter was a season of warnings: A new report from the Heritage Foundation found that proposed Environmental Protection Agency regulations targeting coal will cost Wisconsin more manufacturing jobs than any other state. The foundation’s research predicted that after the new regulations go into effect in January 2015, Wisconsin stands to lose 11,702 manufacturing jobs.

That would be on top of losses that would result from the imposition of a \$10.10 minimum wage, another top priority of the Obama administration and state Democrats. The Congressional Budget Office put jobs losses from the wage hike in the range of 500,000 to 1 million nationally. The Employment Policies Institute estimated that Wisconsin could lose more than 27,000 jobs.

Then there was Obamacare.

Because of the perverse incentives in the Affordable

Care Act — higher taxes, mandates and penalties, coupled with subsidies for lower wages and nonwork — the CBO estimated that the health care reform would reduce the number of full-time workers by more than 2 million in coming years.

And, as winter turned to spring, there was no sign the Obama administration was any closer to green-lighting the Keystone XL pipeline, which could actually create tens of thousands of new jobs.

Democrats have pledged to make jobs a central theme of the 2014 campaign. We wish them good luck with that.

And, finally, some good news

Hank the dog found a home with the Milwaukee Brewers, a priceless Stradivarius was recovered by police, and Wisconsin appeared to be turning an economic corner. While Walker seems likely to fall short of his goal of 250,000 new jobs in his first four years, a new federal report showed some cheering momentum:

The Bureau of Labor Statistics report showed that unemployment in the Badger State had dropped from 6.9% in January 2013 to 6.1% in January 2014.

Wisconsin not only gained more nonfarm jobs year to year than its neighboring states, it ranked ninth nationally (tied with Arizona) for the number of jobs gained and boasted the 11th highest growth rate.

The BLS numbers found that January to January, Wisconsin ranked 22nd in total private sector job growth and fifth highest in the number of manufacturing jobs created

Of surpluses and tax cuts

Reflecting the improving economy, as well as budget reforms, Wisconsin enjoyed a nearly billion-dollar budget surplus this year. This was remarkable in itself, but quite as extraordinary was the failure of the political class to immediately spend the found money.

Instead, the GOP legislature and governor gave most of the money back to the taxpayers by cutting property and income taxes by \$541 million. The cuts brought the amount of tax relief under Walker to more than \$2 billion.

We consider that a good start. ■

Editor Charles J. Sykes’ latest book is A Nation of Moochers: America’s Addiction to Getting Something for Nothing (St. Martin’s Griffin).