

## Fouled up beyond all recognition

*Fall came upon us with a burst of autumnal color and the joy that accompanies the end of a dismal baseball season and the return of football. But the season's festivities were somewhat dimmed by political gridlock, government shutdowns and bureaucratic FUBARs.*

### The Washington Monument syndrome

Normally, partial government shutdowns are dreary affairs, accompanied by the usual wails of distress from the entitled federal workforce and its associated interest groups. But this one left us with at least one iconic moment. This fall, the Washington Monument syndrome was officially replaced with the World War II Memorial syndrome.

Under orders from the Obama administration, the National Park Service erected barricades and told veterans and tourists that the open-air memorial had been closed. Anyone who followed the remarkable story of the Honor Flights from southeastern Wisconsin would not have been surprised by what happened next.

Undeterred by the attempted closure, a group of WWII veterans on an Honor Flight simply pushed their way through. The next day, when more veterans appeared, Park Service officers turned their backs and allowed them to once again storm their own monument. As one vet explained, "Normandy was closed when we got there, too."

Apparently immune to the awful optics, the Obama administration doubled down by wiring shut the barricades and closing off other open-air memorials, including the Vietnam Memorial.

For years, bureaucrats and politicians alike have relied on the so-called Washington Monument syndrome, defined by our friends at Wikipedia as "a political tactic used in the United States by government agencies when faced with budget cuts or a government shutdown. ... The name derives from the National Park Service's alleged habit of saying that any cuts would lead to an immediate closure of the wildly popular Washington Monument."

The point, of course, was to spark indignant demands for restored spending. But this fall, it didn't quite play out that way. Instead, it became a symbol of obtuse, vindictive political pettiness.



### A matter of trust

Such stunts are unlikely to improve the public trust in government, which seems to be at an all-time low.

A new Gallup poll, for example, finds that fewer Americans than ever trust their government to handle problems — either foreign or domestic.

Coming just a few months after President Obama famously urged the country to ignore the voices telling them to distrust tyrannical government, the numbers mark a stunning fall from grace for the president's government-is-your-friend-and-should-run-your-life narrative.

Back in May, Obama warned graduates at Ohio State:

"You'll hear voices that incessantly warn of government as nothing more than some separate, sinister entity that's the root of all our problems, even as they do their best to gum up the works; or that tyranny always lurks just around the corner. You should reject these voices. Because what they suggest is that our brave, creative, unique experiment in self-rule is just a sham with which we can't be trusted."

That narrative was, of course, central to the progressive project of growing the welfare and regulatory state and seemed to be in the ascendancy after the 2012 election. But a steady dose of scandals, political gridlock, government dysfunction, ideological over-reach and economic stagnation eventually takes its toll. And now comes Obamacare.

### The train wreck comes to town

Apologies are in order. Critics of Obamacare had long asked whether we wanted to turn over our health care to the folks who run the DMV. But this turns out to be unfair to the DMV.

The Oct. 1 rollout turned out to be a SNAFU inside a FUBAR, wrapped in a meltdown. Even with more than two years to plan, hundreds of millions of dollars invested, and the highest possible political stakes, the system crashed on launch.

"We have not been able to enroll anyone today," a

spokeswoman for Progressive Community Health Centers in Milwaukee admitted. As in nada, bupkis. *The New York Times* reported that other navigators here weren't able to sign up a single person. "That I know of, none of our people got through on the system," said Legal Action of Wisconsin's Matthew Hayes. At the end of the first week of Obamacare, CNBC reported that 99 percent of applicants had "hit a wall."

## A steady dose of scandals, gridlock, dysfunction, stagnation and Obamacare takes its toll.

And this is just the beginning. Eventually, the feds will get around to fixing their software. Fixing the flawed policy will take a lot longer.

### Wisconsin rising

Well, yes, we could do with good news too. Fortunately, the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia had some for Wisconsin. In early October, the Philadelphia Fed issued new numbers that put Wisconsin first in economic outlook for the next six months. Missed that story? You're not alone.

Some of the same media outlets that ran banner headlines about the same report, from the same source, earlier this year have since decided that the Philly Fed report is no longer newsworthy or trustworthy. The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, which ran a breathless front-page story when the index ranked Wisconsin 49th in the country, simply spiked the stories about the index when the indicators started to rise.

Not surprisingly, Gov. Scott Walker is touting the new numbers: "This is just another sign that Wisconsin's economic future looks bright," he said. "We are creating jobs at levels that haven't been seen in over a decade and are setting records this year in job growth."

### Twilight of the unions

Unions didn't fare much better than the bureaucrats this fall.

Buried in coverage of the news that Kenosha's teachers union has been decertified was this gem of a quote from a WEAC official: "It seems like the majority of our affiliates in the state aren't seeking re-certification," said Christina Brey.

Given a choice whether to join the unions, teachers across

the state decided that, all things considered, they'd rather not. With apologies to the Capitol protesters, this is what democracy looks like.

### An Act 10 update

Speaking of what Act 10 hath wrought, local governments and school district around the state continue to reap the benefits of the law that freed them from collective bargaining constraints. Marshfield is one example: The school district there has saved \$1.4 million simply by changing health insurance providers and increasing deductibles. "These tools we have been given have been quite effective for us being able to curtail and control the costs," Pat Saucerman, business director for the Marshfield School District, told the *Marshfield News-Herald*.

"I'm stunned by this," Saucerman said. "Twice now we have had plan design changes that have reduced the cost for us. ... Marshfield has become the poster child for the right way to do this as it relates to health insurance costs."

### They must really like us

Wisconsin was also on the itinerary of the great, the famous and the officious. With Desperate Housewife Eva Longoria in tow, first lady Michelle Obama came to Watertown to plug the benefits of drinking... water. (Get it? Watertown? Water?)

Meanwhile, Gina McCarthy, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, visited Madison and its new downtown "green" library. Her visit prompted the Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce to suggest a modification to her itinerary, given her agency's ongoing war on coal, which provides 60 percent of the electricity used here. "Ms. McCarthy should visit a factory," WMC said, "to explain to shop floor workers why we need an incredibly expensive and job-threatening rule that EPA's own analysis says will have a negligible impact on carbon levels."

### Congrats

And finally, our congratulations to former Lt. Gov. Margaret Farrow for winning the inaugural Margaret Thatcher Award at October's Right Women Awards Dinner. An iron lady, indeed, and an inspiration for the rest of us as we brace for another long winter, followed by yet another election year. ■

---

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