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NOVEMBER 2009

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public financing
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to be radicals
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disappointing legacy
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WISCONSIN INTEREST

Mugged by Reality

Crime hits liberal Madison
BY DAVID BLASKA





Editor > CHARLES J. SYKES

Who do you trust?

“How much of the time,” pollsters asked Wisconsin residents in September, “do you think you can trust the state government in Madison to do what is right?”

Here is a number to think about: Only 1.86% said “just about always.” More than 68% of the respondents in the poll jointly conducted by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute and the UW-Madison political science department said they could trust state government “only some of the time” or “never.”

This suggests that the state’s politicians from Gov. Jim Doyle on down have picked a rather inauspicious time to radically expand the size and scope of government. When voters opted for hope and change, they evidently were not thinking of more bureaucrats, regulations, mandates, and taxes.

The yawning disconnect between voters and their government may account in part for Doyle’s death-bed conversion to term limits. Trailing clouds of miserable poll results,

broken budgets, broken promises, and a deteriorating state economy, Doyle now heads into the taxpayer-funded political twilight.

As Marc Eisen points out, Doyle has been an effective and ruthless politician but a mediocre governor, who ultimately has been more interested in rewarding loyalists and punishing enemies than pursuing any coherent agenda. Eisen’s piece, however, is not intended as a conservative critique: He points out that even liberals now view the Doyle legacy with disappointment.

Also in this issue: Alan Borsuk takes an in-depth look at the mysterious frontier of politics: the young voter; Mike Nichols provides an autopsy of the state’s attempt at the public financing of campaigns; and last, but hardly least, is David Blaska’s brilliant tragicomic send-up of the collision between Madison liberals and the harsh realities of urban crime.

WPRI > MISSION

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 a belief that competitive free markets, limited government, private initiative, and personal responsibility are essential to our democratic way of life.

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WI

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Liberal Madison confronts the reality of crime.

Photos and photo illustrations by James Mueller

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Autumnal follies

Consider the plump budget, the slow high-speed train and class-conscious Legos.

As John Keats would have appreciated, autumn in Wisconsin is a season of mists and mellow fruitfulness; it is, unfortunately, also the season when Wisconsin legislators, weary from the task of taxing and spending, turn to the minutiae of the bored politician.

Solons spent their time on a resolution that urged us to refrain from calling the swine flu...“swine flu,” lest we offend the porcine community, and on urgent legislation to permit NFL team buses to blow through red lights on their way to Lambeau Field, lest linebackers suffer the indignity of waiting among the unwashed of Ashwaubenon.

It’s here somewhere, I’m sure.

State bureaucrats spent much of the fall trying to explain such irritants as the missing DNA of 12,000 Wisconsin felons from the state’s criminal database; massive fraud in the Wisconsin Shares program; and why state government’s attempt to consolidate its computer servers had cost \$90.9 million—seven times more than the Doyle administration had estimated.

In a burst of common sense, the state’s tourism folks also quietly shelved the widely mocked “Wisconsin: Live Like You Mean It” slogan and logo, which seemed to depict a state taxpayer being held upside by his ankles until all of the change in his pocket fell out.

All in all a bad season for logos. The Wisconsin Tourism Federation shamefacedly changed its acronym after it was mocked on a blog called “Your Logo Makes Me Barf,” which pointed out that the initials WTF had other (and unfortunate) connotations.

Some dates to remember.

June 29, 2009: Gov. Jim Doyle signs a new state budget that raised taxes and fees by more than \$2 billion, raised spending by \$3.6 billion, let property taxes jump by another \$1.5 billion, and left the state with a structural deficit of upwards of \$2 billion.

Sept. 22, 2009: The Tax Foundation drops Wisconsin from 38th to 42nd in a ranking of state business climates, largely on the basis of the higher taxes.

Sept. 24, 2009: *Forbes* magazine ranks the state even lower, saying that Wisconsin is now one of the three worst states in the country for business. In the *Forbes* list, Wisconsin dropped from 43rd in 2006 to 48th in a measurement that included costs, labor supply, regulatory environment, economic climate, growth prospects and quality of life.

Oh wait, this stuff costs money.

If you require someone to buy something better than what they already have, it will generally cost them more money. That’s clear enough, unless you are a member of the Wisconsin Legislature.

In a sop to the state’s trial lawyers, the Legislature mandated that minimum accident coverage rise from \$50,000 to \$300,000. Despite warnings from insurers that requiring dramatically higher minimum coverage would cause rates to rise, the new state budget gave Wisconsin some of the highest mandatory car insurance standards in the country.

As surely as day follows night, car insurance rates went up, and consumers raised hell. But when confronted with the financial consequences of their actions, legislative Democrats professed both ignorance and innocence.

Assembly Majority Leader Tom Nelson told constituents that the higher rates had nothing whatsoever to do with the Legislature’s decision, but were all the fault of the greedy insurance companies.

Economics 101, anyone?

Government first.

In October, Gov. Jim Doyle boasted that \$680 million in federal stimulus spending had “created or retained 8,284 jobs” in Wisconsin. Three-fourths of the jobs were government jobs.

As the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute blog explained, “The key word here is ‘retained’...because the state spent merely displaced state general funds, which had been used to pay for state government prior to the economic downturn.” We believe the technical term is “shell game.”



Choo-choo to nowhere.

Chicago failed to win the 2016 Olympics despite the personal plea of our Nobel Prize-winning president, but that did not dampen the governor's enthusiasm for a high-speed train linking Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison and the Twin Cities.

Doyle's dream train, however, encountered a speed bump of inconvenient truth when the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, in conjunction with a UW-Madison journalism class, issued a report concluding that the plan was, well, half-baked. "It would reach downtown Milwaukee, but stop nearly six miles shy of downtown Madison," the center noted. Despite the massive price tag, "nobody knows how many people would ride."

And, adding insult to injury, the center pointed out that Doyle's high-speed train wasn't really high speed at all. "The description 'high speed,'" it noted, "is a misnomer. State transportation officials say the train likely would average about 70 mph the first few years. In other words, about the speed most people drive on the freeways right now.

Our out-of-touch legislators.

Who are these guys who blithely jack up the minimum wage and craft regulations that micromanage virtually every aspect of business? In his recent report on term limits, WPRI's own Christian Schneider painted a brief sketch of one of the Legislature's most powerful members, Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker:

"For nearly two decades, Decker hasn't had a boss, hasn't had to make a payroll, hasn't had to pay for his own health care, hasn't had to worry about the threat of government intervention killing his job, and hasn't had to fund any of his own retirement benefits—all while drawing a middle-class taxpayer-funded salary....

"The last two elections, he's been opposed by a local oddball who had his name legally changed to 'Jimmy Boy' in order to sell 'Jimmy Boy's Frozen Pizzas.' Decker, a Democrat, won each election with roughly 68% of the vote. Yet freshmen entering college today weren't alive the last time Decker held a job outside of state government."

Those oppressive Legos.

Elsewhere in these pages Sol Stern chronicles the ideological pedagogy of Milwaukee's Robert Peterson. In addition to his

efforts to propagandize the young, Peterson is an editor of the journal *Rethinking Schools*, which has featured a cover story warning of the dangers posed to sensitive young minds by the plastic building blocks known as Legos.

In a story headlined "Why We Banned Legos," the progressive educators recount their horror as they realized that as the kids in their classes built stuff, the unwary tykes



"were building their assumptions about ownership and the social power it conveys—assumptions that mirrored those of a class-based, capitalist society—a society that we teachers believe to be unjust and oppressive. As we watched the children build, we became increasingly concerned....

"We agreed that we want to take part in shaping the children's understandings from a perspective of social justice. So we decided to take the Legos out of the classroom."

I'm guessing they've also eliminated dodgeball.

Be civil, you bigoted redneck.

And as fall, that bosom-friend of the maturing sun, mellowed into winter, our chattering classes continued to lecture us on the need for more civility in political discourse.

The *Journal Sentinel* tsk-tsked over the "hooliganism" at the summer's town hall meetings, and Mike Tate, chair of the state Democratic Party, added his call for moderation and restored comity by labeling taxpayers who showed up at rallies as "extremist elements" who "frankly don't believe in this country."

Tate further declared: "They don't want to see more people have access to quality affordable health care; they don't want clean air and water. They fundamentally don't understand how the American government, economy and capitalism work."

In a fundraising letter, he went on to compare soccer moms who attended the tea parties to "red-baiting McCarthyites...Know-Nothings and the KKK." Inexplicably, Tate's comment failed to appreciably raise the tone of the debate...as the mellow season turned into what promises to be a long and chilly winter.

Charles J. Sykes, the WI editor, is the author of six books and hosts a daily radio show on AM60 WTMJ in Milwaukee.



How teachers learn to be radicals

They look to MPS's Robert Peterson and his 'social justice' political agenda. By Sol Stern

Sol Stern is author of *Breaking Free: Public School Lessons and the Imperative of School Choice*. He is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a contributing editor to *City Journal*.

Imagine you are a parent with a child in fifth grade in an inner-city public school. One day your child comes home and reports that the teacher taught a lesson in class about the evils of U.S. military intervention in Latin America.

You also learn that after school the teacher took the children to a rally protesting U.S. military aid to the Contras, who were then opposing the Marxist Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

The children made placards with slogans such as: "Let them run their land!" "Help Central America, don't kill them." "Give the Nicaraguans their freedom." Your child reports that the teacher encouraged the students to write about their day of protest in the class magazine and had high praise for the child who wrote the following description of the rally:

"On a rainy Tuesday in April some of the students from our class went to protest against the contras. The people in Central America are poor and bombed on their heads."

A fantasy? An invention of some conspiracy-minded right-wing organization? Not at all. It happened exactly as described at a bilingual Milwaukee public school called La Escuela Fratney. The teacher who took the fifth-graders to the protest rally and indoctrinated them in international leftist politics is Robert Peterson.

Unfortunately there was no parental protest about this blatant use of their children's classroom for political indoctrination. In fact, Peterson's teaching philosophy and the class trip he arranged are hardly considered aberrant by the city's education officials. Peterson has taught in Milwaukee Public Schools for almost three decades, was named Wisconsin Elementary Teacher of the Year for 1995-96, and is on the executive board of the Milwaukee teachers union.

Peterson is also a moving force and one of the lead editors of *Rethinking Schools*, a small

Milwaukee publishing conglomerate that turns out books, pamphlets and a quarterly journal, all urging teachers in the nation's public schools to use their classrooms for "social justice" instruction.

What social justice instruction means is more or less what Peterson did with his Milwaukee fifth-graders.

Let's give Peterson his due. There is no subterfuge in his teaching program or its intended political purpose. In an essay in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, an anthology that's one of the handbooks of the social justice movement, Peterson declares that he takes his inspiration as a classroom teacher from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by the Brazilian Marxist educator Paulo Freire.

Freire's opus never refers to any of the great education thinkers of the past; not Rousseau, not Piaget, not John Dewey, not Horace Mann, not Maria Montessori. He takes his inspiration and his "scholarly" citations solely from a different set of historic figures: Marx, Lenin, Mao, Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro, as well as the radical intellectuals Frantz Fanon, Régis Debray, Herbert Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser, and Georg Lukács.

To Freire (and Peterson) there is no such thing as neutral education in a capitalist society. And no wonder, since Freire's main idea is that the central contradiction of every capitalist economic system is between the "oppressors" and the "oppressed" and that revolution should resolve their conflict.

The "oppressed" are, moreover, destined to develop a pedagogy that will lead to their liberation. And that pedagogy, in Freire's words, "proclaims its own political character."

It is thus the sacred mission of socially conscientious teachers like Peterson to partner with their co-equals, the students, in what Freire

calls a “dialogic” and “problem-solving” process until the roles of teacher and student merge into “teacher-students” and “student-teachers.”

At that point teachers and students work together to undermine the “false consciousness” of the dominant ideology, eventually overthrowing the capitalist system and establishing the socialist alternative.

Peterson writes that from the time he started teaching in the Milwaukee public schools in the 1980s he “worked on applying Freire’s ideas in my fourth and fifth grade bilingual inner-city classrooms. My approach contrasted sharply with the numerous ‘educational reforms’ being tried elsewhere.”

Instead, Peterson says, he followed the Freirian pedagogical approach of “teachers themselves modeling social responsibility and critical engagement in community and global issues,” including supporting the Nicaraguan revolutionaries.

By applying the Freirian dialogic method in the classroom, he writes, the students will “interrogate their own realities, see them in a different light, and act on their developing convictions to change their own social reality.”

All this might seem abstruse and theoretical to the average parent or taxpayer. But make no mistake about it: The teaching for social justice movement that Peterson so perfectly represents is spreading its tentacles to urban school districts all over the country.

The movement is already well entrenched in many of the nation’s education schools, where the overwhelming majority of our future public school teachers get their training and state certification.

Education researchers David Steiner and Susan Rozen published a study five years ago on the syllabi of the basic “foundations of education” and “methods” courses in 16 of the nation’s most prestigious ed schools. The mainstays of the foundations courses were works by Freire, Henry Giroux (a leading critical pedagogy theorist), and the radical education writer Jonathan Kozol, a supporter of social justice teaching.

For the methods courses, ex-Weatherman William Ayers’ *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher* tops the bestseller list. Neither list included advocates of a knowledge-based and politically neutral curriculum, such as E.D. Hirsch Jr. or Diane Ravitch. Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has sold over a million copies

since its publication 30 years ago. When I checked Amazon in October, Freire’s *Pedagogy* was listed as the number-one bestseller among education books. Almost all those sales are for teacher-training courses.

It cannot be repeated often enough: Ideas have consequences, and bad ideas have bad consequences. The Freirian theories that have led to the spread of social justice teaching are incapable of “liberating” the children of America’s so-called oppressed.

His inspiration is a best-selling Brazilian Marxist who sees education as a means to overthrow capitalist oppression.

As E.D. Hirsch has exhaustively shown, the scientific evidence about which classroom methods produce the best results for poor children points conclusively to the very methods that the critical pedagogy and social justice theorists denounce as oppressive and racist. By contrast, not one shred of hard evidence suggests that the pedagogy behind teaching for social justice works to lift the academic achievement of poor and minority students.

Social justice teaching is a frivolous waste of precious school hours, grievously harmful to poor children who already start out with a disadvantage. School is the only place where they are likely to obtain the academic knowledge that could make up for the educational deprivation they suffer in their homes.

The last thing they need is a wild-eyed experiment in education through social action.

Academic freedom should not protect Robert Peterson and his social justice colleagues when they insist on bringing their leftist version of the good society into public school classrooms and take advantage of vulnerable children.

Legislators should ask their state education boards to write a new set of guidelines that forbid teachers from indoctrinating students with their own politics, whether left or right. This ought to be the teacher’s new Hippocratic Oath: Do no harm. ■



Crime

*comes to a pleasant
Madison neighborhood*

Photos and photo illustrations
by James Mueller

Worried residents meet, take action—and face pushback from liberals.

BY DAVID BLASKA

I live in a lovely neighborhood.

We greet each other as we walk our dogs, pooper scoopers in hand. We mow our lawns, paint our houses, and keep the noise down. Like Mom taught us, we're considerate of one another.

But some of my neighbors' neighbors, a few blocks south of me here on the leafy southwest side of Madison, 10 miles south of the Capitol, don't have it so good.

Crime is up 30% in the last three years. Home values have declined at twice to three times the average citywide drop. There are more deadbolt-locked doors, high fences, and fierce dogs.

These streets don't look mean. Mature trees shade the neighborhoods—Greentree, Orchard Ridge, Meadowood, Prairie Hills, Maple Prairie, Park Ridge. Here and there one can still see the original foursquare farmhouses, somewhat incongruent amid the ranch-style homes built between the 1950s and the 1970s. Church spires are the only features to rise above the tree canopy.

Fabled UW-Madison coach “Hockey Bob” Johnson raised his family here. I moved next door to the home of the late FBI agent who tracked down the Army Math bombers on the UW campus. That old guard pioneered their freshly minted suburban neighborhood in the mid-1950s, when they could look across their fences at cows at pasture.



Raymond Road is our main street and supports a refurbished strip mall anchored by the ubiquitous Walgreens drugstore. In an ominous sign, the meat market moved out recently. There and scattered near other main thoroughfares is that Holy Grail of Madison's institutionalized left: the duplexes and fourplexes of "affordable housing."

It is those places that have become ground zero of unwelcome change in my neighborhood.

Kids get knocked off their

bicycles and their iPods swiped. Drinking parties are broken up by police bullhorns. SWAT teams entertain bystanders as they surround an apartment house. Heroin dens get busted. Shots are fired into the shopping center in broad daylight. Homes burglarized.

One woman off Hammersley Drive—"Don't call me a racist! I'm married to a black man"—marvels: "The young people walking across my lawn are using the 'F word,' waking up my kids, walking in the middle of the road, not moving for us to drive by, and are loud and disrespectful. They throw garbage and refuse to pick it up, and they come into my driveway to look into my cars."

Farther south, on Mayhill Drive, a householder says: "I walk my dog down the street, and people I do not know call me a bitch. I wake up in the middle of the night to find grown men drinking beer in my front yard and leaving their Corona beer bottles on the grass."

Some deprecate such concerns as not constituting actual crime. Not the adherents—Madison Police Chief Noble Wray among them—of the Broken Windows Theory.

The Broken Windows Theory holds that that the

troubles on the southwest side of Madison are a continuum. The filthy language, littering, vandalism, intimidation lead to illegal drug traffic, gangs, burglaries and shootings.

The metaphor is that a window broken today will lead to tomorrow's crack house and the next day's murder. Social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling explain: "Window-breaking does not necessarily

occur on a large scale because some areas are inhabited by determined window-breakers whereas others are populated by window-lovers; rather, one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing... Virtually all of the evidence we have from studies of the police suggests that restoring order is associated



Madison Police Chief Noble Wray: 'He worries about broken windows.'

with a drop in crime."

Some of my more stalwart neighbors have resolved to stop the downward slide before it reaches the tipping point. To do that they've first had to fight Madison's historic liberalism with its mistaken notions of crime, its causes and its fix.

"It's like *Lord of the Flies* out here," observed one young father of several blocks dominated by fourplex rental housing. He was talking about the children who roam, feral-like, in a reference to the classic novel exploring how teenage boys without adults descend into savagery.

He made the remark at a crime-fighting strategy session held at the Madison West Precinct police station this June—we're big on meetings here on the southwest side of Madison. We've been meeting up a storm ever since a shooting death at one of those all-night parties two years ago prompted 750 residents to fill a Catholic

school gymnasium to tell Chief Wray and Mayor Dave Cieslewicz that enough was enough.

In those two years we have explored some pretty big-picture issues: the role of government versus the individual, rights versus responsibilities, liberal versus conservative, and the role of race in our society.

Much of this debate has been reflected in my blog, sponsored by the weekly Madison paper, *Isthmus*. This old print journalist enjoys the Internet format because it is vibrant and two-way. I state my case and then volley with my readers, who comment and engage me in colloquy. It's like the town hall meeting that Dave Obey never had, complete with heckling, only online.

In the process, I have learned that Wisconsin political guru Brian Schimming was right: On the crime issue, you can always count on liberals getting it wrong. Let me enumerate their arguments.

1 Problem? What problem?

Denial, as the new senator from Minnesota would say, is not just a river in Egypt. It's a liberal trait, tinged with paranoia.

A local bicycle advocate (two-wheelers are the most powerful pressure group in Madtown) offered this dark conspiracy theory:

"I am left wondering if this whole crime issue has been trumped up by Blaska et al. purely for the purpose of imposing some otherwise unneeded conservative 'reforms' on the city of Madison. Such a ruse would certainly be consistent...."

Wait a minute, I'm getting a tweet from Karl Rove.

Early this summer, an *Isthmus* columnist pooh-

poohed our concerns with crime and quality-of-life issues, suggesting that they were overblown and that everybody needed to "take a deep breath."

The irony was that five days after those words were published, 17-year-old Karamee Collins Jr. took his last breath, deep or otherwise, thanks to the bullet fired into his back.

'I wake up in the middle of the night to find grown men drinking beer in my front yard,' says a resident.

The "Lord of the Flies" meeting had barely adjourned before young Karamee was gunned down on a nearby street corner shortly after 10 p.m. The lad managed to crawl to a nearby residence, ring the bell, and die in front of the horrified residents.

Three 16-year-old boys were soon taken into custody, two of them charged with first-degree murder as adults. Four lives ruined and a neighborhood traumatized.

Just the day before, police held a press conference in a neighborhood park appealing for help in solving a string of nine shootings up to that point that injured three people.

But it takes more than gunfire to stop the liberals.

2 Cultivate the cult of victimhood.

Don't blame criminals for crime. No, that's being judgmental. And who are we to judge? The liberal credo holds that people are not causative agents but passive victims—the sum total of their societal inputs. Better to blame some long-ago historical event like slavery. Or cite a macroeconomic force so dense it would seize up Barack Obama's TelePrompTer.

Stu Levitan, the chair of Madison's Community Development Authority Housing Operations Committee, went on Blaska's Blog to attribute crime and the breakdown of social order in Meadowood on "the

lack of employment opportunities, affordable health care, and adequate mass transit.”

Lack of affordable health care? The gangbangers are sending each other to the emergency room to promote “the public option” in Nancy Pelosi’s health care plan!

The left has long believed that poverty causes crime, never considering that it’s the other way around. Back in my reporter days, when I covered the Republican National Convention in 1988, a black delegate from Kansas City got it right: “Poor people have poor ways.”

If they are victims, it is a case of self-victimization. Of not planning, not studying, not working, not saving, not observing the law.

3 Adults should shut up.

This has to be some of the residue from the Woodstock Generation. Trust no one over 30, right?

There is a basketball hoop at the corner of one park, virtually under the eaves of neighboring homes, where the thump of the ball is drowned out by the vociferous exhortations of the M-F word. Can’t the city do something?

My online editor countered that young people have always acted inappropriately: “As long as there have been parks, there have been teenagers engaging in behavior in them that is unappreciated by the elder population.”

I parried that, as long as there have been adults, those adults have taught the teenagers the inappropriateness of their conduct. That is what helps teenagers become adults. At least, until the present day.

“It’s easily ignored,” was another comment to my blog. Yes, these young people are accustomed to being ignored, especially since so many of them do not have

active fathers.

The Broken Windows Theory tells us that such indifference sends a powerful signal that no one is in charge, that no one cares. That one may now feel free to indulge still other urges. At what point do we intervene? At the sentencing hearing?

4 Don’t trust the pigs.

The irony is that young Karamee Collins met his doom only weeks after the Common Council voted down an enhanced youth curfew that—had it been enacted—would have enjoined the accused 16-year-old killers from being footloose at that hour.

Instead, Madison’s liberal council actually made the curfew even less restrictive!

More space dust from the Woodstock Generation. Liberals feared that the pigs—er, the police—would wantonly pull over young lasses hauling their cellos home from band practice.

The *Isthmus* critic asked: “Does our community really believe the best way to confront at-risk kids who are out

at night without adult supervision, engaging in no criminal activity, is to put them in the back of a squad car?”

For one thing, I got to think the back of a squad car might be one of the safer places in Meadowood. If Karamee Collins or his attackers—all of whom have been tied to gangs—were

sitting in the back of a squad car the night of June 9, his evening might not have ended with a bang. For another, it affords some quality time with a responsible adult, even if it is the hated police officer.

In our parents’ generation, police were the keepers of order, a slightly better armed agent of the community who walked the streets and settled matters right then

‘We do have a strong migrating population from Chicago that really does impact this city from a crime standpoint,’ says Chief Wray.

and there while the fathers were busy in the factories or at well-deserved rest watching Uncle Miltie with a bowl of popcorn and a bottle of Schlitz.

Today, the police are but one cog in the criminal justice system, their primary focus not to keep order in the community but to apprehend criminals after the crime has been committed—and to do so in such a way as to withstand the onslaught of endless appellate court second-guessing.

5 Give us your poor, all of them.

Liberals like to talk about people coming to Madison “for a better life.” In most cases, they are walking into the welcoming arms of open-minded, nonjudgmental Madison.

But listen to what Karen Sielaf, who has volunteered to lead neighborhood picnics, holiday parties, neighborhood clean-up days and safety walks, has to say:

“Given the problems we’re having today, I can’t say these efforts have been fruitful. Having lived in my neighborhood for 13 years, I no longer feel safe walking on our streets alone at night,” she confided.

Similarly, Chief Wray told me: “We do have a strong migrating population from Chicago that really does impact this city from a crime standpoint.”

Meadowood community police officer John Amos makes the same point: “Gangster Disciples and other groups are coming up here, and they are used to ‘taking care of business’ in a different way. The level of violence and the threat of violence is greater than normal.”

The particular conceit of this Berkeley of the Midwest is that it can solve the world’s problems on a mid-sized municipality’s budget in an already high-tax state.

Dennis Lochner, who owns a hardware store in the Meadowood Shopping Center, was quoted in the Wisconsin State Journal: “As a community, we facilitate

freeloaders and bad lifestyles.”

New arrivals can sup from a smorgasbord of subsidized goodies—the state’s BadgerCare health care, the federal Food Stamp program, Social Security disability payments and Madison-issued “bus passes for the working poor”—except that you don’t have to be actually, you know, working.

6 Celebrate Section 8, the gift that keeps on taking.

The mother’s milk of “come and get it” is the Section 8 housing voucher.

I thought about that after one neighborhood association president complained about a loud party that did not end until 4 in the morning on a weekday. Police had to break it up.

About 60 merrymakers—apparently without needing to report to work that morning—were playing music, drinking in the street, smashing bottles, using drugs, and arguing. Parties in the hood always seem to devolve that way. Which raises the question:

Don’t these people have to get up in the morning for work?

You don’t have to turn this page upside down for the answer. On the smorgasbord of subsidized goodies, none is more generous than the federal Section 8 housing voucher program.

The program combines the worst of both worlds: Uncle Sam’s deep pockets, administered by the city of Madison’s bleeding hearts. Section 8 picks up 70% of recipients’ rent which, in Madison, averages \$810 per month in housing vouchers to 1,478 renters this July.

“Too many people use the excuse of being poor so they can get free money everywhere and benefits,” one landlord told me.

“They were my worst tenants,” recalls Nick Dorneanu. “The worst traffic, loitering, drugs—the most police calls. We have too many people coming



from Chicago with the high-crime attitude trying to get low-income housing so that way they can have extra money for their drug habits.”

It is a pattern that criminologists have observed elsewhere.

Memphis, Tenn., demolished its public-housing projects and gave the former residents Section 8 rent-subsidy vouchers, encouraging them to move into stable neighborhoods. It was part of a nationwide experiment “to free the poor from the destructive effects of concentrated poverty.”

Guess what? The neighborhoods destabilized. Memphis University researchers discovered a one-to-one causal relationship between the Section 8 diaspora and dysfunction, the July-August 2008 *Atlantic* magazine reported in “American Murder Mystery.”

But, wouldn't you know it, both Dane County and the city of Madison prohibit discriminating against “lawful sources of income” such as Section 8. In addition, landlords must rent to ex-convicts and cannot check for illegal aliens by seeking a Social Security number. Then city officials complain about landlords not doing enough screening.

7 Community standards are a bad thing.

Think back to the 2004 reelection of George W. Bush. Remember how liberals puzzled over the phenomenon of “values” voters? Neighborhood leaders on the southwest side codified “values” when they formulated a neighborhood code of conduct. It reads, in part:

- The premise of the code is to promote personal responsibility, respect, and civility. This code is part of an overall strategy to address inappropriate behavior and foster a community climate that supports a positive quality of life and a safe community.
- Purposes of the code are: To insure that all members of

the community are treated with dignity and respect.

- They can confront bad behavior in their neighborhoods and be supported in doing so by other residents and police when necessary.

Or as Park Ridge neighborhood association president Brian Frick says: “No resident should have to lower his

standards to a level set by newcomers. If someone wants to live in these neighborhoods, it is his duty to raise himself to the level that is acceptable in the community—not the other way around. They don't set the rules; we do.”

But “community standards” are fighting words to liberals. “Who are you to set rules for the neighborhood?” some asked. I gave them my name.

The only thing we're doing is codifying rules that seemed to work in our parents'

generation.

“The police can't be everywhere at every minute,” says David Glomp, a neighborhood association board member. “We need to step up and confront behaviors that are bothersome to us. It's our quality of life.”

8 So's your mother!

At yet another meeting in a public school gymnasium, a unionized public school teacher, one Alyssa Kass, demonstrated her command of moral equivalence. One of the Code of Conduct provisions prohibits loud noise after 10 p.m. weekdays and 11 p.m. on weekends.

“Where is the prohibition against leaf blowers at 7:30 in the morning?” she demanded.

Clever, that. Of course, who runs leaf blowers? Old white men, she inferred.

Indeed, the *Wisconsin State Journal* disparaged the progenitors of the Code of Conduct as “all older, white men.”

But schoolteacher Kass wasn't done yet: “Just because someone is different doesn't mean people are bad,” she said, demonstrating a flair for tautology. Not to mention



injecting the race issue like a plague bacillus.

9 Racist!

Calling someone a racist is the left's way of short-circuiting an honest discussion. It's the ultimate political flame, today's McCarthyism.

When Ald. Thuy Pham-Remmele argued her proposed curfew would help prevent children from "going over to the dark side," the only minority member of the Common Council was accused of racism.

A guilty white liberal told the *Wisconsin State Journal* that: "When people talk about teenage boys wearing their pants low enough to show their underwear, you're really targeting the African American community.... Underlying all of this is a discussion about race and class."

Umm, that would be yours truly. On a ride-along in a Madison police squad car, I spotted a teenage boy with pants down around his knees. "Let's make a bust right here and now," I exhorted. Madison has an ordinance banning lewd and lascivious behavior. Good luck making that case in court, the officer explained.

The low-pants thing is said to derive from doing time in prison and the lack of belts. The parent in me says someone whose pants are falling down, who emulates jailbirds, and whose mouth is functioning as a sewer pipe cannot have good self-esteem. It's the broken windows thing. He's in quick need of a good fatherly swat upside the head, and I'm happy to oblige.

At a neighborhood meeting, our facilitator, Madison parks commissioner Emanuel Scarborough, promised to address "the elephant in the room." That being the issue of race.

Yes, let's say it here: Most of the new troubles seem to occur where poor black people predominate. But the issue is behavior, not race. We don't mind living next to the Huxtables. Or next to Chief Wray, who appears to be black, now that I think about it. Or next to any other hard-working black family.

I'm telling people to read the book Bill Cosby and the psychologist Alvin Poussaint wrote in 2006, called *Come On, People: On the Path from Victims to Victors*.

They point out that in 1950 there were twice as many white people in prison as black. Today, the number of blacks exceeds whites behind bars.

"These are not political criminals," they write. "These are people selling drugs, stealing, or shooting their buddies over trivia."

Sure, discrimination and racial profiling occur, Cosby and Poussaint acknowledge, "but there

is less than there was in 1950." Indeed, "there are more doors of opportunity open for black people today than ever before in the history of America."

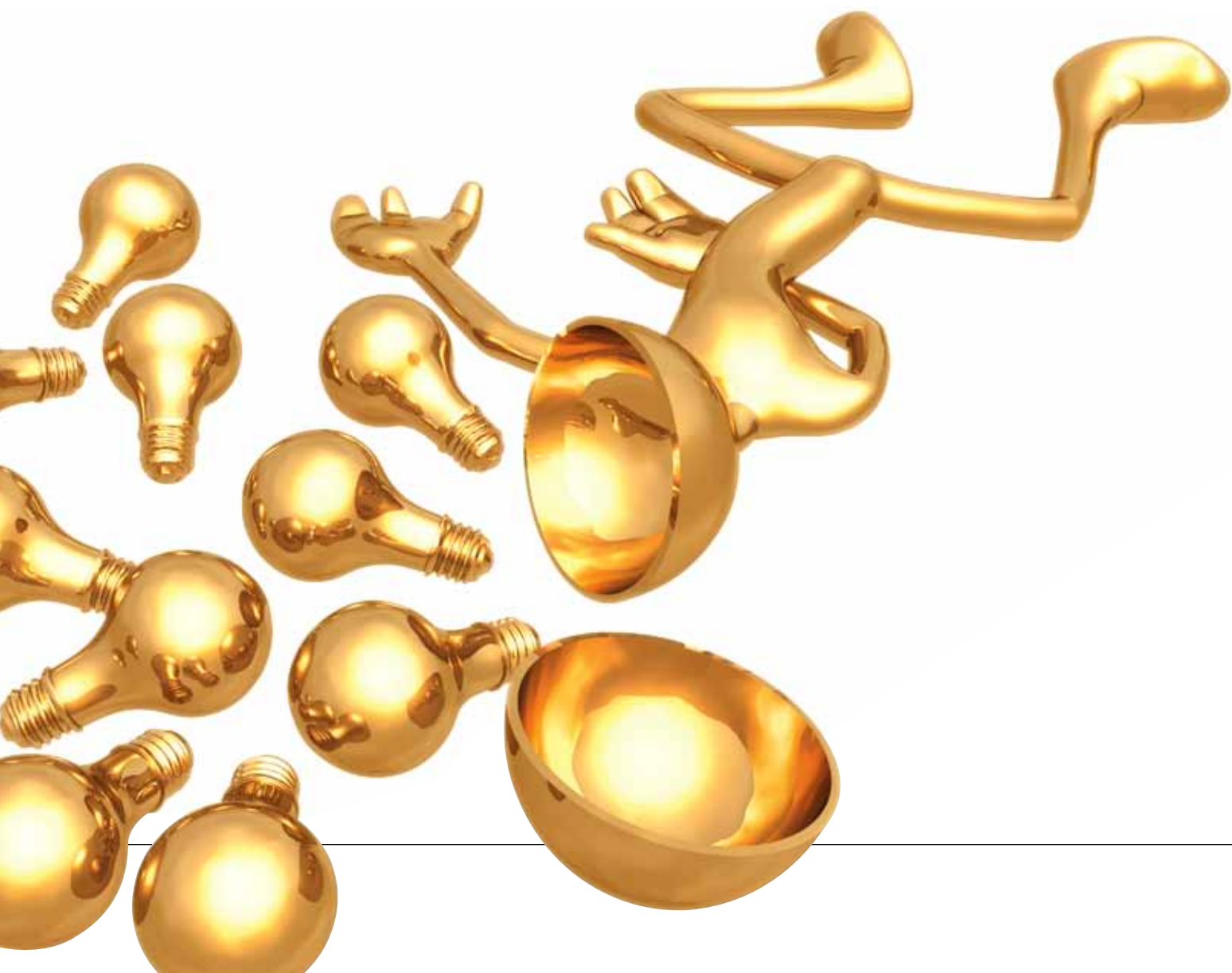
At another meeting, across the street at the Meadowood neighborhood center, a liberal asked, in essence, how does a white person speak to a black person. At that meeting, I pointed to my mouth: "With this."

What do these liberals want me to do: Hold people of different races to lower standards of conduct? Isn't that the epitome of racism? ■

The parent in me says someone whose pants are falling down, who emulates jailbirds, and whose mouth is functioning as a sewer pipe, cannot have good self-esteem.

David Blaska is a former Democrat, former aide to Gov. Tommy Thompson, former Dane County Board member, former *Capital Times* reporter and editor and a former farmer. He is the proprietor of Blaska's Blog: <http://www.thedailypage.com/blaska/>.

ANATOMY OF A FAILED IDEA



Once upon a time public financing was going to clean up political campaigns in Wisconsin. Arguably, it made things worse.

By Mike Nichols

Long before he became a prominent, well-paid lobbyist skilled in influencing lawmakers and helping direct big contributions to their campaign funds, Marty Schreiber was the acting governor of Wisconsin. He was also the person who, on Oct. 11, 1977, signed into law what was then known as Assembly Bill 664.

Only 38 at the time, the young governor was unabashedly giddy as he praised the legislation setting up the new Wisconsin Election Campaign Fund.

The new system of taxpayer-financed campaigns, he gushed in a letter to legislators, was “the most significant political reform measure implemented in Wisconsin since the Progressive reforms of the turn of the century.”

Supported by a \$1 check-off on state tax forms, the fund was meant to supplant campaign donations to candidates from political action committees, ensure those of modest means had money to run and prompt “more competitive races.”

Stating that the day was “long past when candidates should be allowed to buy elections,”

Schreiber also lauded new spending limits that, as the result of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling *Buckley v. Valeo* a year earlier, could be imposed in races that included the public dollars.

The campaign fund was, in short, going to “fundamentally [alter] Wisconsin’s political system.”

And today?

The fund is, in the words of one elections observer, “dead as a doornail.” Legislators recently voted to fund Supreme Court races through a new “Democracy Trust Fund,” but the separate fund set up in 1977 still exists for everybody else, and dozens of candidates still take the taxpayer money. Yet it does nothing to limit spending or promote competition and little, at best, to limit special interest involvement.

Thirty years after Schreiber’s paean to publicly financed campaigns, the fund hasn’t just failed to live up to its authors’ vision. It has, in fundamental ways, helped undermine it.

And still—despite the recent suggestion of the state’s most prominent elections expert, Government Accountability Board Director Kevin Kennedy, that legislators just get rid of the campaign subsidy—it

has persisted in draining more than \$1.3 million from the state's general fund since 2002.

Marty Schreiber wasn't the sole architect of publicly funded campaigns. The initial draft listed no fewer than 50 bipartisan sponsors, including a future mayor of Milwaukee, John Norquist; two future governors, Tommy Thompson and Scott McCallum; a future congressman, Tom Petri; and a future ambassador, Tom Loftus.

It was Schreiber, though, using his so-called Frankenstein veto to cross out words and sentences, who decided to fund it through the check-off that gave taxpayers the ability to direct their tax

dollars out of the state's general coffers to candidates.

Today, an analysis by *Wisconsin Interest* shows that virtually the only people who use the fund are either Assembly-seat challengers who have no chance of winning or incumbents in safe seats.

True to the original intent of the bill, challengers use the money about twice as often as incumbents, but they almost never prevail. And when they do there is little evidence it has anything to do with the use of tax dollars. Of the 129 challengers taking grants since 2002, only six have defeated sitting incumbents, and all of them did so in races with no spending limits.

Those spending limits that Schreiber extolled only come into play when both candidates accept public funding—and nowadays that never happens. Of the

26 candidates who took taxpayer money in 2008, not one had an opponent who also used public dollars.

Schreiber's vision of a lasting reform that would limit spending was, the statistic suggests, a pipedream—as was his vision of unfettered, real competition. Challengers who have taken the grant in recent years haven't just lost. They've been pulverized. Since 2002, the average vote for the 126 losers who accepted a grant was a paltry 39%.

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Mike McCabe, executive director of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign and the man who labels the fund dead as a doornail, resists the conclusion that Schreiber's vision was doomed from the start.

"It did pretty much live up to its billing for a decade," he said. "It worked well for 10 years, and it can again."

McCabe, a tireless advocate of public financing, notes that the \$1 check-off was never adjusted for inflation. Grant amounts and spending limits that were adjusted initially have, meanwhile, been frozen since the late 1980s. Public financing, he says, simply isn't ample enough to be meaningful.

For example, today, Assembly candidates can receive no more than \$7,760 and, when limits are imposed, spend only \$17,250—about a third of what is usually burned through in relatively competitive districts.

Senate candidates can receive up to \$15,525 in public financing and, when limits are imposed, spend

only \$34,500.

Candidates for governor can receive up to \$485,000 in public money, and spend about \$1.1 million—a pittance compared to the \$32 million spent by Jim Doyle and Mark Green and outside interests in the 2006 gubernatorial election. The last gubernatorial candidate to take the money was Ed Garvey, who was blown away by Tommy Thompson in 1998.

It is “suicide” for candidates to accept the spending limits, says McCabe.

The low spending limits “killed public finance,” according to Gail Shea, a former Elections Board official.

Raising the spending caps among other proposed changes (for example, publicly funding state Supreme Court races, which the high court supports) could do much to save the program, advocates say. More and bigger public financing, the implication is, would help combat all the problems Schreiber wanted to solve.

A closer look at the history of the public fund suggests, then again, that expansion might only worsen them.

One of the things Marty Schreiber wanted to avoid was the specter of incumbents taking money from taxpayers while stocking their war chests for future campaigns.

“It is contrary to the intent of this bill to allow

public funds to be used to build campaign surpluses,” Schreiber said in his veto message. “Furthermore, such a policy depletes the fund.”

He tried to make sure that “if a candidate received a \$2,000 grant and had \$3,000 left in his treasury after the campaign, he would return \$2,000” to the fund.

Tax dollars taken from the fund by candidates have always had to be spent on specific things like printing or ads—or returned. Even if the tax dollars were properly spent, however, candidates in the early years had to repay the fund, i.e. taxpayers, with their private donations if they had cash left over at the end of a campaign. Candidates

didn’t like that, and elections administrators didn’t particularly like chasing them for the refunds.

To get more people to use the fund and accept spending limits (or perhaps just to give the upper hand to incumbents), a change was made. In 1985, then Sen. Lynn Adelman introduced an amendment that separated the taxpayer dollars from the private donations candidates collected—something that Schreiber had feared would allow candidates to “use public funds to build campaign surpluses” through “subterfuge.”

It was a prescient fear. After the amendment was adopted in 1985, candidates were free to spend tax dollars on ads or pencils and either save private contributions for their war chest or give them to somebody else—exactly what some bigger fundraisers have done since.



Public financing

Spencer Black, the longtime Democratic representative from Madison, has repeatedly taken the public subsidy while building up big surpluses in his campaign account. First elected to the Assembly in 1984, Black has been reelected a dozen times. Up until 2000 (when opponents just gave up and stopped running against him), he applied for the tax dollars almost every time he ran.

Records from the first few elections have been lost by the state, but he was given more than \$18,000 in taxpayer dollars in 1992, 1994 and 1996 alone, according to the Government Accountability Board (GAB). Those were years in which Black built his campaign fund up from a surplus of \$39,000 in 1992 to more than \$100,000 by 1997.

Adelman, now a federal judge, declined to comment on his long-ago amendment. The GAB's Kennedy says that the change reflected "the practical realities of keeping the fund viable."

It was also, of course, counter to Schreiber's founding vision—and not just in Black's case. Black, who didn't return calls from *Wisconsin Interest*, is far from alone in using tax dollars to campaign while using private donations for other things.

State Rep. Gordon Hintz of Oshkosh took more than \$19,000 from the fund for races in 2004, 2006 and 2008 and ended his last campaign with a surplus close to \$40,000. The Democrat has never had to comply with spending limits because his Republican opponents have always declined the money.

Indeed, Republicans take about one-fourth of the

public funding that Democrats accept.

"I never check it off on my income taxes, and I don't believe the government should be involved in funding any campaign," said Julie Leschke, whom Hintz defeated in 2006. "In my opinion, it's not ever a wise use of tax dollars. It's too distant from taxpayers. Taxpayers have no knowledge of who gets it and how it is used."

Mark Reiff, the Republican whom Hintz steamrolled in 2008, raised another issue: "Do we really want the

public to be funding everyone's whack-job ideas?" Hintz, for his part, acknowledges the system could work better. But he stressed that the public fund does accomplish something: Any

candidate who takes the full amount of public money available is barred from taking PAC money.

"Anytime that we can reduce the perception that outside special interests have a disproportionate influence on things, the better it is," Hintz argues.

Left unmentioned is the fact that significant limits on PAC money already are imposed on all candidates in Wisconsin, not just those who take public dollars. (For instance, Assembly candidates can accept no more than \$7,760 from PACs and candidate committees.)

The public fund, meanwhile, has no legal authority to regulate issue ads or independent expenditures that started to dramatically affect campaigns in the late 1990s. Nor does it address another common phenomenon of modern politics: incumbents funneling their contributions to other politicians or

REP. BLACK HAS
REPEATEDLY TAKEN
THE PUBLIC SUBSIDY
WHILE BUILDING UP
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campaign committees even as they accept public dollars.

Black, for example, received \$4,155 from the public fund on Sept. 30, 1996. This is the same year he gave a total of \$4,775 in cash or in-kind contributions to other politicians or committees, including \$1,200 to the Dane County Conservation Alliance—a special interest committee registered with the state.

On Sept. 30, 2004, state Rep. Mark Pocan accepted \$5,574 from the public fund. According to his campaign reports, on that very same day he made a \$1,000 contribution to the Unity Fund—the Democratic Party of Wisconsin campaign account that was used, at least in part that year, to support Democratic candidates at the national level.

Hintz received his most recent public funding, about \$6,000, on Sept. 27, 2008. In the month that followed, he gave \$1,000 to the Democratic Party of Wisconsin.

Pocan pointed out that politicians do sometimes receive campaign help from their parties, and recalled that the Unity Fund payment provided him with things like voter identification and access to phone banks. A review of his 2004 campaign finance reports shows no evidence that he received anything of value in exchange for the \$1,000 that year, however. If he did, according to GAB rules, the payment should have been listed as an “expenditure” rather than the way it was, as a “contribution.”

Public campaign dollars are “separate money,” Pocan also said when asked about the Unity Fund, and his

contribution to the Democratic Party was, therefore, “not part of the \$5,500” he took that same day from the state.

Still, the simultaneous funneling of money elsewhere raises fundamental questions about whether some politicians really need public dollars—and whether their use of those dollars, instead of making the system more competitive, has helped make it more byzantine, more sophisticated and more of an insider’s game.

Politics in Wisconsin is, at the very least, not a game

for outsiders. Spencer Black hasn’t received less than 87% of a vote since 1992 and now has more than \$146,000 in his campaign account.

In 2002, Republican Steve Nass accepted \$7,013 in public funding

and went on to beat Leroy Watson 87% to 13%. In 2006, the Whitewater-area representative took \$5,963 and beat a self-described “naturalist,” Scott Woods, 66% to 34%.

The average vote for the 47 winners who have accepted money from the fund since 2002: 63%.

If the fund helps anyone, it seems, it is incumbents, the legislators who have the power to make the laws and amend them. Or get rid of them, but don’t.

Lawmakers did make some key changes to the public financing system after the caucus scandal in 2001. But the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign’s McCabe and others argue it was a mere charade that insiders knew would never pass constitutional muster in federal court—and didn’t. Getting rid of the fund, in the meantime, has also proved impossible.

Testifying before the Joint Finance Committee earlier



Public financing

this year, Kevin Kennedy—despite his personal belief that public funding has a role in modern campaigns—encouraged budget-cutting legislators to “examine the viability of this program in its current state.”

“If you are looking to take money away from our agency,” he says he told them, paraphrasing his own comments, “why don’t you take this money?”

It never happened.

Mere talk of the U.S. Supreme Court possibly overturning key provisions of the McCain-Feingold

campaign finance legislation is, instead, spurring discussion of renewed public financing at the state level.

Legislators have passed the so-called Impartial Justice Act—that

increases the check-off to \$3 and directs some of that money to the new “Democracy Trust Fund” for state Supreme Court candidates. At press time, Gov. Jim Doyle was expected to sign the bill.

The new fund for Supreme Court races differs significantly from the Wisconsin Election Campaign Fund—the check-off alone is unlikely to provide anywhere near the money Supreme Court candidates could qualify for, up to \$1.2 million apiece.

Indeed, the percent of people checking the box on their income taxes has decreased from a high of 20% in 1979 to less than 5% in 2008. Check-off programs alone simply don’t produce much revenue, meaning legislators who want to increase public financing would have to find cash elsewhere—and lots of it.

Wisconsin taxpayers, as a result, might need to kick in millions from the state’s General Fund for a

single contested state Supreme Court race under the Impartial Justice Act—and they would be doing it at a time when public support for taxpayer-financed campaigns has diminished. A 2006 Wisconsin Policy Research Institute poll found that 65% of Wisconsinites oppose using tax dollars to finance political campaigns.

Back in 1977, a different governor, Marty Schreiber, lauded the sort of public financing that would allow candidates to compete “without relying on

huge special interest contributions.” In 1978, he put his money—or lack thereof—where his mouth was.

Schreiber and Lee Dreyfus, his Republican opponent in the

1978 gubernatorial race, both accepted tax dollars to campaign and the spending limits that came with them. Schreiber also got trounced.

He gives no hint of regret.

“If the question is, ‘Did I hoist myself on my own petard by developing a process of campaign financing?’” he says, “there are probably a hundred reasons I lost that campaign.”

He resists the suggestion he was “naïve” back in 1977, saying he would not use that term.

“Was I a dreamer?” he asks instead.

He answers his own question by saying that, back then, he wanted to find a way to ensure that everyone who wanted to compete could compete.

“I had never projected,” he adds, however, “that a 30-second TV ad would be what it is.”

PUBLIC FINANCING
'WORKED WELL FOR
10 YEARS, AND IT
CAN AGAIN,'
SAYS MIKE MCCABE.

Perhaps he never envisioned either what would become of Marty Schreiber himself—and how different he appears after a couple decades as a lobbyist.

In 1988, Schreiber launched Martin Schreiber & Associates, a successful “public affairs consulting” and lobbying business. He and other individuals affiliated with the firm have contributed more than \$73,000 to candidates and various committees since 2000.

They do much more than that, though. The firm promises to help clients “coordinate media campaigns” and develop and manage PACs and conduit funds, which are pooled contributions from individuals, to achieve a group’s political objectives.

At least two clients—the Forest County Potawatomi Community PAC and the Wisconsin Beverage Association PAC—list Schreiber & Associates employees as either the treasurer or assistant treasurer. The impact of PACs, then again, often pales in comparison to money spent by so-called special interests elsewhere.

The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign notes, for instance, that the Potawatomi tribe reportedly funneled at least \$1 million to the Greater Wisconsin Committee. The GWC, in turn, spent more than \$4 million on issue ad activity that benefited Gov. Jim Doyle during the 2006 election.

Schreiber, for his part, declines to talk about the

big-picture questions of whether the fund worked and can work again, whether it needs to be tweaked or discarded altogether. He simply says it is an issue he has not studied in some 30 years—a span of time in which campaigns have changed, perhaps, almost as much as Marty Schreiber himself.

Nowadays, Schreiber appears to question what the term “special interest” even means. “Anyone who has an interest different from anyone else’s has a special

interest,” he says.

Mark Reiff, like many Republicans, has come to the conclusion that “anyone who thinks they are going to keep special interest money out of politics is kidding themselves.”

The best you can do is make sure everyone knows where money

is coming from, and what it’s being spent on, he says. After all, the U.S. Supreme Court is not inclined to quash the First Amendment rights of so-called special interests.

Perhaps the most lasting lesson of Schreiber’s grand experiment is this: Political campaigns are a complicated and unpredictable business, and noble efforts to reform them sometimes backfire or just plain fail to deliver on their high-minded promise.

At least until taxpayers, once and for all, stop checking off that little box. ■

Campaign spending in 2008 legislative races

By Assembly candidates	\$7.9 million
By Senate candidates	\$3.8 million
By leadership committees*	\$1.3 million
By interest groups	\$7.0 million
Total	\$20 million
Public funding for candidates	\$169,000

* Assembly and Senate Democratic and Republican campaign committees.
Sources: Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, Government Accountability Board.

Public financing represented less than 1% of the money spent in the 115 Assembly state senate races in 2008

Mike Nichols, whose columns appear in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, is a syndicated columnist and author.



WHAT DOES YOUTH WANT?

BY ALAN J. BORSUK

Pretty much what older people want, with a few key exceptions.

The loser now will be later to win, the noted social commentator Bob Dylan predicted in 1964 in his generation-defining "The Times They Are A-changin'."

In Wisconsin, both Republicans and gay rights activists can take encouragement from those words.

And both can be encouraged by the results of a statewide public opinion poll conducted in September for the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute by the UW-Madison Political Science Department.

Less than a year after Barack Obama won Wisconsin in the 2008 presidential race by 17 points and Democrats captured the state Assembly after 14 years of Republican control, favorable opinions on Obama have softened, and the political affiliation of the poll respondents suggests a modest swing to the Republicans.

Furthermore, while younger voters voted heavily for Obama and Democrats in 2008, the WPR poll shows little substantial difference among younger, middle-aged and older voters on party affiliation. Democrats

continued to draw more favorable responses than Republicans, but the results suggest Republicans are gaining ground.

For example, in the November 2008 exit polls, Wisconsin voters age 18 to 29 preferred Obama over Republican John McCain by 29 points, a 64%-35% margin. But in the WPR poll, less than a year later, sentiment on Obama was remarkably similar across age groups.

Among the 700 randomly selected Wisconsin adults for the telephone survey, 57% said they strongly approved or somewhat approved of the president's performance. And the comparable figures by age group were 59% for the younger group, 58% for those 36 to 64, and 54% for those 65 and over.

Ken Goldstein, the UW political scientist who directed the poll, says the results raised interesting questions about electoral dynamics in 2010 and 2012. Will the strong support of Obama among young voters in 2008 convert into a continuing asset for Democratic candidates? Or was the Obama surge a product of the particular circumstances of the 2008 election?

Although younger people historically vote in lower numbers than older people, they have been a potent



force in Wisconsin politics. In 1998, a large turnout of younger voters in Dane County was key to Democratic Sen. Russ Feingold’s narrow victory over Republican challenger Mark Neumann (now a candidate for governor).

In 2006 and 2008, college towns around the state with active young voters elected Democrats to the state Assembly—a key factor in Democrats capturing control of the Assembly in 2008. Those college towns include Oshkosh, Platteville, Whitewater, Eau Claire and La Crosse. Young people turning out to oppose the gay-marriage ban in 2006 are credited for winning those seats for Democrats.

Indeed, the WPRI poll reveals a huge difference of opinion between younger and older voters that augers well for the future recognition of gay marriage.

“It’s just amazing how big the differences are,” says Charles Franklin, a UW-Madison political scientist who is co-founder of the Pollster.com website.

In November 2006, Wisconsin voters approved by a large majority (59.4%) a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a bond between a man and woman. But Franklin says rapidly changing public opinion on gay rights, spurred by the open-mindedness of young people, almost assures that the 2006 ban will be reversed at some point down the road.

In the WPRI poll, 42% of people 18 to 35 favored legalizing gay marriage, compared to 24% of 36-to-64-year-olds and 15% of those 65 and older. Civil unions, but not marriage, were favored by 29% in the younger group, 33% in the middle group and 34% in the older

group. But 40% of the older group opposed either possibility, compared to 36% of 36-to-64-year-olds and just 28% of adults 35 and younger.

Goldstein says the age split was in line with other polls and research. “There’s just been a sea change in American public opinion” on gay marriage and related issues, he says, adding, it’s happening “much more quickly among young voters.”

THE POLL REVEALS A HUGE DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BETWEEN YOUNGER AND OLDER VOTERS THAT AUGERS WELL FOR THE FUTURE RECOGNITION OF GAY MARRIAGE.

While strong differences exist among younger adults

and middle-age and older adults when it comes to politics, there are more similarities than commonly acknowledged. The WPRI poll illustrated both sides of the coin.

First, two dramatic differences that transcend partisanship and speak to longstanding, perhaps immutable elements of what it means to be younger:

- Younger adults are just plain less interested in politics.
- They get their news in sharply different ways than older people.

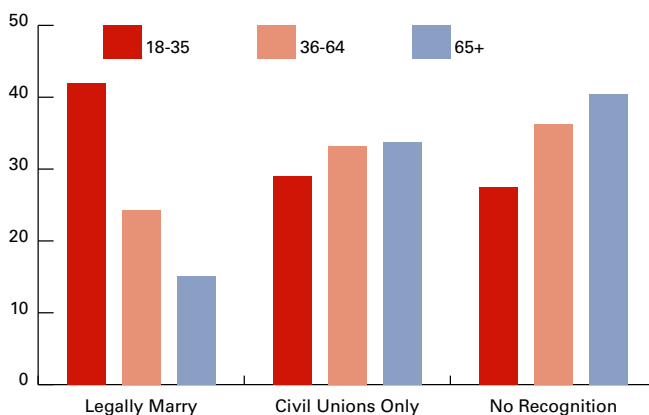
Asked if they follow politics “most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all,” 30% of voters between 18 and 35 answered “most of the time,” while 58% of those 36 to 64 put themselves in that category, as did 71% of those 65 and over. That’s a huge difference between young and old.

The disparity is one reason many political campaigns focus on older people and issues like protecting Social Security and Medicare.

“Usually, when a campaign tells you they are going to win because of the enthusiasm of younger voters, they are guaranteed to lose,” says Franklin. “Those folks are especially disengaged with politics. It’s partly a lifestyle thing.”

But as people age, get married, buy homes, start families and pay taxes, their political interest goes up.

Do you support legal recognition of gay couples?





Historically, Franklin says, the percentage of people who vote rises steadily as age increases, falling only when people reach their 80s.

Surprisingly, political awareness for young adults is trending downward, according to Katherine Cramer Walsh, a UW-Madison political scientist. “They’re definitely less politically interested...than people were in prior generations,” she says.

There are a lot of theories why. Among the ones Walsh cites are the way political campaigns gear their messages to older voters and how today’s media climate reduces the chances of people picking up political information. (Americans no longer sit en masse to watch the 6 o’clock network news.)

Walsh also says a case can be made that even if young adults aren’t interested in conventional politics, they engage in what some call “lifestyle politics,” showing their position on issues by what they buy, how they use natural resources, and what causes they affiliate with.

Still, John Blakeman, chair of the Political Science Department at UW-Stevens Point, says that Wisconsin is a relative bright spot when it comes to young adult political involvement.

He cites research that puts Wisconsin consistently above the national average for younger voter turnout in presidential elections, including the second-highest turnout in the U.S. in 2004. Overall, Blakeman says, political participation among younger adults is highest in the upper Midwest and lowest in the South.

The rosier picture for youth voting in Wisconsin “speaks to the political culture here, which tends to value voting and other forms of political participation pretty highly,” Blakeman says.

But the Wisconsin voter turn-out has to be put in the perspective the new poll supplies: The picture is still one of relatively low political awareness.

“On a really good day, about half of [young voters] are going to turn out to vote,” Blakeman says. “You can understand that politicians would probably pitch their message elsewhere.”

Not surprisingly, the second dramatic difference between younger and older people lies in their media habits.

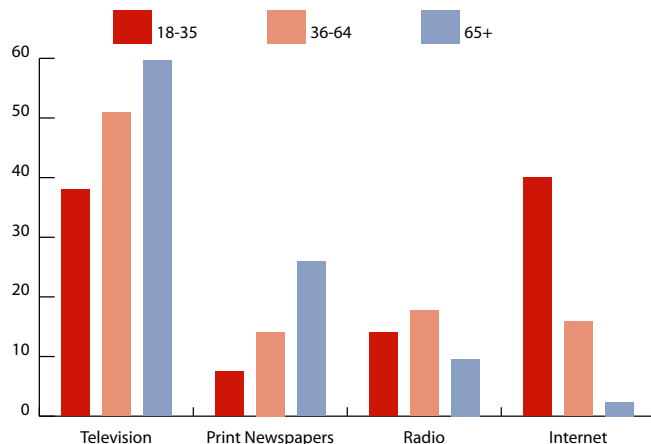
Asked how they get most of their news on a typical

weekday, 40% of the WPRI poll respondents who were 35 and younger cited the Internet, surpassing even television (38%). Radio was the answer for 14% and newspapers for only 7.5%.

Among the 36-to-64-year-olds, television was the main news source for 51%, while the Internet was cited by 16%. Only 2% of voters 65 and over cited the Internet—a whopping 38 points lower than among young voters. Sixty percent of seniors says television was their main source. Even in the older group, newspapers were the answer given by only 26%—a clear sign of the troubles the newspaper business is having.

Has the sea change in media consumption affected the way political campaigns are conducted, especially in trying to reach younger voters?

Where do you get most of your news from?



“Absolutely,” says Mike Tate, chair of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin. New strategies—including Internet fundraising and using social networking sites to organize—began showing up in 2004 and became pivotal to success in the 2008 campaign, Tate says.

Kristin Ruesch, communications director for the Republican Party of Wisconsin, shares this assessment. “We’re targeting our efforts toward younger voters where they do get their news, and that is online,” she notes. “Using Facebook, Twitter, email, blogs, you name it—that’s where we’re trying to reach out and, hopefully, have an open discussion of what issues matter to them.”

Tate says politicians are even willing to risk ridicule to bring their messages to television hosts such as David



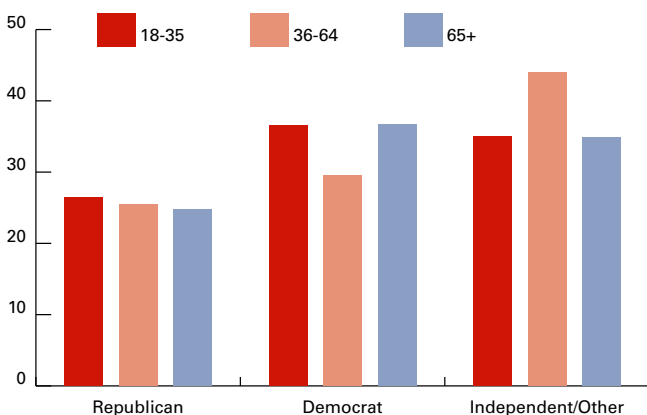
FRANKLIN ADVISES THAT IT ISN'T WISE TO THINK OF YOUNG PEOPLE AS INTRINSICALLY DEMOCRATIC, REPUBLICAN, LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE.

Letterman, Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart, who, through the use of comedy and sarcasm, have become major shapers of youth opinion.

But for all the gaping differences between young and old voters, the WPRI poll found that on most matters the generation gap didn't really exist. Here are examples:

- There were relatively small differences on political affiliation. Thirty-three percent of the respondents said they were Democrats, 26% were Republicans and 40% independents. Among those 18 to 35, the responses were close to the same: 37% Democrats and 27% Republicans. Among those 65 and older, the percentages were 37% and 25%. In the middle age group, the percentage of Republicans was almost exactly the same, but the percentage of Democrats dipped to 30%, with the portion saying they were independents going up a corresponding amount.
- There were similar patterns when people were asked if they would vote for a Democratic or Republican candidate for the state Assembly if an election were

What is your political affiliation?

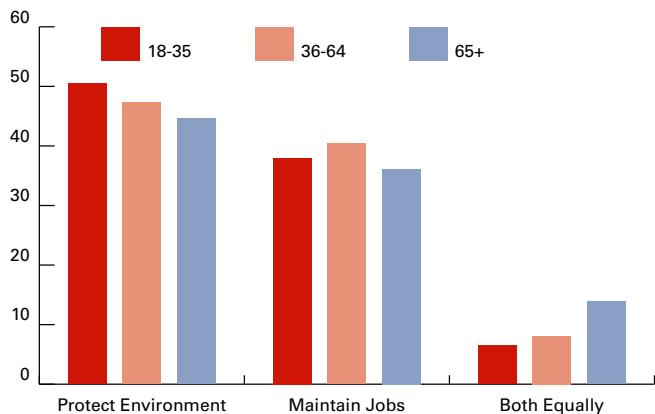


held today. The Democrats led 40% to 35% overall, and there were no major differences among the age groups in levels of support.

- Many people assume that younger voters have stronger feelings about environmental issues than older voters, but the poll results proved otherwise.

Asked whether they would favor steps that protect the environment over steps that maintain jobs, the total sample put the environment as a higher priority by a 48% to 39% margin. There were no major differences by age group.

Should the environment be protected at the cost of jobs?



In another question, respondents were asked if they think global warming is occurring and whether they think the federal government can help stop it. Younger voters were more inclined to say yes to both, but only by a few percentage points.

Fifty-five percent of respondents 18 to 35 believe global warming is a fact, compared to 49% for those 36 to 64 and 50% for those 65 and over. Those saying government couldn't help stop it totaled 23%, give or take a half percent, in all three groups. Middle-aged voters were a bit more likely to say global warming was not occurring, but there were not wide differences by age in the number who held that view—20% among those 18 to 35, 23% among those 36 to 64 and 18% among those 65 and over.

- Younger respondents were just as opposed as older ones to the notion that government should see to it



that everyone has a job and a good standard of living. The overall poll results were 27% in favor of that position and 65% opposed.

- Younger voters were neither more optimistic nor more pessimistic than their elders when asked if the U.S. is headed in the right direction. Overall, the response was 37% giving the “right direction” as the answer versus 54% believing the U.S. was on “the wrong track.”

VOTERS OF ALL AGES PUT THE ECONOMY AND JOBS AS THE TOP PRIORITY FOR THE GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE.

However, people 35 and under were somewhat more optimistic about the Wisconsin economy improving over the next year. In the younger bracket, 50% expected things to get better, while in the middle tier, only 34% felt that way. Among those 65 and over, the figure was 42%.

And when it came to economic circumstances of their own families, younger people were far more optimistic. Thirty-nine percent said they expected their situations to get better in the coming year, compared to 24% of those in the middle bracket and 18% of the oldest group.

- Asked what should be the top priority of the governor and Legislature, voters of all ages put the economy and jobs first, and by similar percentages (30% to 36% in each age category). However, there were differences by age group in the second-most-frequent response. Perhaps reflecting their personal circumstances, respondents 18 to 35 said making health care and prescription drugs more affordable was their second choice at 21%, compared to only 11% of the Medicare generation of 65 and over.

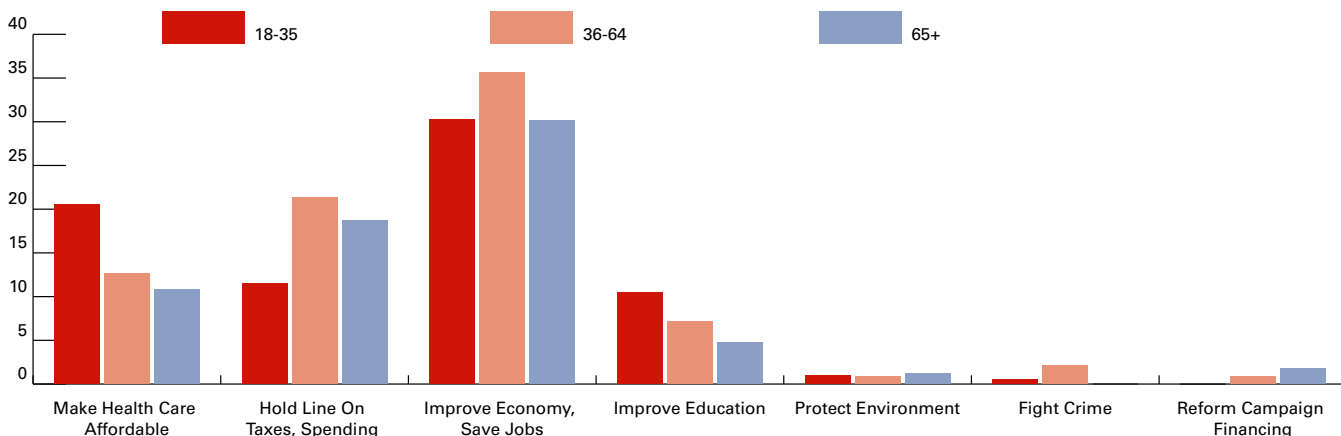
The second choice for older respondents was holding the line on taxes and government spending (picked by 21% in the middle bracket, 19% in the older bracket, compared to only 12% in the younger group).

Goldstein called the similar poll results for different age groups “the dog that’s not barking.” Many people overlook the similarities between age groups while concentrating on the differences, he says.

Franklin says that while younger voters have tended over the years to support Democrats, they are also influenced by political trends. In the 1980s, younger voters favored Republicans and President Ronald Reagan, he points out.

In general, Franklin advises that it isn’t wise to think of young people as intrinsically Democratic, Republican, liberal or conservative. Politics just isn’t that important to them. He argues that because young people are spotty voters and usually don’t get involved in politics, you can’t

What is the top priority for the governor and legislature?





be confident how they'll vote when they do become politically active. The WPRI poll, he says, demonstrates "modest differences across age on most issues, with a few important exceptions."

Both Tate and Ruesch say their parties are intent on doing all they can to appeal to younger voters. On that score, the poll results clearly show that gay rights issues are an advantage for Democrats because of the strong and growing support among young adults for a cause that is strongly opposed by social conservatives in the Republican Party. Other issues are more of a toss-up.

The parties continue to believe that the support of young voters can make a difference in winning. And when it comes to communicating with those younger adults, they know they need to stay current with the latest advances in social networking.

If they want to communicate with younger people, the parties need, as Dylan would say, to start swimming or sink like a stone. ■

Alan J. Borsuk, a former reporter and editor at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, is a senior fellow in law and public policy at the Marquette University Law School.

About the survey

The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute poll was directed by Ken Goldstein of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Political Science. Seven hundred randomly selected adults in Wisconsin were surveyed by telephone between Sept. 27 and 29. The margin of error for answers involving the full sample is 3.8 percentage points. Only people who use landline telephones were included in the poll. Goldstein said analysis in other polls has showed only small differences when people who use cell phones are included.

To review the poll results, including crosstabs, go to the WPRI website: www.wpri.org.

SNAPSHOTS OF RESPONDENTS AGE 18-35

- 38.5%** have a gun in the house
- 57.5%** are married
- 37%** have never married
- 81.5%** grew up with both parents
- 65.5%** have children
- 26.5%** are Republicans
- 36.5%** are Democrats
- 40%** rely mostly on the Internet for news
- 28%** attend weekly religious services
- 28.5%** hardly ever attend religious services
- 60%** grade their community schools as an A or B
- 59%** approve of President Obama's performance
- 39%** don't know enough about the president's health care plan
- 50.5%** approve of Governor Doyle's performance
- 42%** never heard of Scott Walker
- 47%** never heard of Mark Neumann
- 86.5%** are registered to vote
- 47.5%** experienced economic distress in past year
- 69.5%** don't expect to move from Wisconsin in the next five years



The Doyle Disappointment.

By Marc Eisen

Photograph by Lukas Keapproth

It's no surprise that conservatives have a long list of Doyle's failures. Now we find that even **liberals** shake their heads over the missed opportunities.

Judy Wilcox is a stalwart Madison liberal. She did a stint in the Peace Corps, serving in Gambia; put in 12 years on the Dane County Board representing a district where anarchists probably outnumber Republicans; and she retired from state service in November 2008 after 20 years of working on programs first for the disabled and then the homeless.



Judy Wilcox: 'I just expected more from him.'

Wilcox's background makes it all the more surprising when she names the worst governor she worked for: Jim Doyle. A Democrat? "I found it much easier to work with Gov. Thompson," she says. A Republican? Yup.

"I had several sessions personally with Gov. Thompson. He would call people into his office, sit them down and say, 'Let's try to figure this out,'" she recalls. "I always got along with him very well."

In contrast, she says she couldn't get the time of day from Doyle's office when she needed its imprimatur on a housing issue for the feds. "It took repeated phone calls and me harassing them to appoint the study committee," she says. The whole experience—the governor accepted the committee report but didn't approve it—left her "mystified" as to where the governor stood.

Judy Wilcox isn't alone. During the Doyle years I've had seven or eight lengthy conversations with veteran state workers: all serious Democrats, all people who see their job as a calling, and all expressing profound disappointment with Gov. Jim Doyle. They worked in agencies and departments as varied as Transportation, Housing, Administration, Corrections, and Family Services.

Wilcox speaks for these good liberals when she says, "I just expected more from him."

Of course, it's no surprise that Republicans and elements of the business community disapprove of Doyle's performance. Or, for that matter, that

polls show that the recession-battered public has turned against the governor.

But state employees too? Liberals and loyal Democrats in state service? In some ways their disapproval is even more telling because they saw the Doyle administration up close on a daily basis. And didn't like it.

Their judgment represents a particularly deflating outcome for Wisconsin Democrats: They waited 16 long years to regain control of the executive branch, only to elect a governor who couldn't articulate a coherent liberal vision for running state government in the 21st century.

"He didn't care about that," says a Department of Administration retiree. "That's not what governing was for the Doyle administration. It was about exercising power as opposed to actual governing."

I'll return to that point, but let's first cut Jim Doyle some slack. He's occupied the East Wing in a bummer time. As Tim Cullen, who was the Democrat's Senate majority leader in the '80s, says: "You govern in the times you're handed."

'Brain dead' may be too strong a term to describe the Doyle team, but its failure to address the big issues is stunning.

He governed during difficult economic times. He inherited a tough Republican legislature. One thing he gets credit for is playing defense."

Doyle's role as the Democrat's goattender on issues like abortion and gay rights is praised even by otherwise disenchanting liberals.

On the program side, Doyle will be remembered for his incremental but substantive expansion of health insurance to low-income people through BadgerCare Plus and other measures. Not all is peaches and cream, though: There is already a waiting list for applicants, and whether the state can afford the expense is an open question.

Doyle's Wisconsin Covenant program—it promises a college spot and financial aid to high-achieving high school graduates—also draws applause. But details are so few that it's hard to predict its success. The price tag and the degree of student interest won't become clear until 2011, when the first class of high school students who signed the covenant reaches college age.

Still, education is a priority for Doyle, and observers give him measured praise for protecting school aid in an era of depleted coffers. Not that school officials got all that they wanted, but those observers say that the governor treated school aid far more gently than other programs that got the knife.

But most of all, Jim Doyle will be remembered as a hellaciously good politician. Begin with the fact that Doyle ousted sitting incumbents at each stage of his career—Dane County district attorney, Wisconsin attorney general and now governor.

"The man has never lost a single election," says Jim Haney, his former press secretary in the AG's office (and not the business leader of the same name).

"You have to put Jim Doyle down as one of the most successful politicians in recent Wisconsin history," says Haney, who's now a college administrator at UW-Stevens Point. (I wound up talking to Haney because the Doyle team—never the friendliest of folks when it comes to dealing with reporters—refused interview requests on the basis that it was too early to discuss the governor's legacy.)

Haney isn't alone in his characterization of Doyle as a great campaigner. Mordecai Lee, a former Democratic lawmaker and now a political scientist at UW-Milwaukee, says, "He's a fabulous politician." He cites Doyle's emergence as a conservative Democrat on taxes as the

masterstroke to his victory in the 2002 election.

"Jim Doyle was the first Democrat to ever say, 'I will not increase general taxes on the middle class, ever, period,'" says Lee. "That took enormous discipline because he had to stand up to the standard constituencies of the Democratic Party."

Doyle's 2002 campaign was a marvel of strategic calculation. He deliberately steered to the right of his Democratic competitors Tom Barrett and Kathleen Falk, winning the primary with a trifecta of conservative-friendly pledges—no new taxes, support for "single factor" taxation long sought by the business community, and an extravagant promise to cut the state workforce by 10,000 or so.

That was enough to convince Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce to train its big guns on the legislative races and stay neutral in the gubernatorial contest, which featured the lackluster Scott McCallum on the Republican line.

After 16 years of GOP rule, Democrats elected a governor who **couldn't articulate** a coherent liberal vision for running state government in the 21st century.

Four years later, Doyle was sagging in the polls, but rallied to route GOP challenger Mark Green. Doyle's first TV ad of the campaign bludgeoned the Green Bay congressman in the killer fashion of today's political advertising: A mother looked into the camera and said that "Washington politicians

like Mark Green" wanted to ban the stem cell research that might cure her daughter's diabetes.

Never mind that the ad distorted Green's position (and even earned a rebuke from the Doyle-friendly Journal Sentinel editorial board); it effectively labeled him as an extremist.

'The Doyle people spent their time trying to **dismantle** WMC,' says Tim Cullen. 'Some people might get a kick out of that, but it doesn't accomplish anything.'

"Doyle stole a page from the Republican playbook," says Lee. "He invented a wedge issue [i.e., an issue that prides a voter group away from the opposition] out of thin air, which is essentially what Republicans have done for two generations." Nobody was talking about embryonic stem-cell research as a political issue until Jim Doyle."

Doyle knows exactly how to beat up and take down an opponent, says Lee. "What an ice-blooded politician he is."

As masterful as his two gubernatorial races were, they sowed the seeds of the problems that have bedeviled the Doyle administration. Take, for example, WMC's questionable decision late in the 2006 election to dump a ton of issue money attacking Doyle even though most polling showed Green on the fast train to Palookaville. Whatever WMC's logic, Cullen says the Doyle team overreacted.

He brings an interesting perspective to the Doyle-WMC dogfight. Cullen was one of the reigning

princes of the Democratic Party before leaving the state Senate to run the Department of Health and Social Services for Thompson. He moved on to become a health insurance executive and then returned to public life in retirement. Today, Cullen serves on the Janesville school board.

The governor, he says, "tried to use the power of the office to get even with WMC instead of saying, 'You guys made a bad bet. I tried to work with you. Now I'm going back to my base and pursue my legislative agenda.'"

"But there was no legislative agenda," he says. "The Doyle people spent their time trying to dismantle WMC. Some people might get a kick out of that, but it doesn't accomplish anything."

Cullen's point is hard to refute. With the state mired in a recession and a staggering 156,800 jobs lost since December 2007, what could be more dysfunctional for Wisconsin residents than the governor battling the state's biggest business lobby? There are no winners here.

But Doyle as the consummate political scrapper has never really been wedded to the sort of agenda that Cullen wanted. State Rep. Mark Pocan, a very liberal lawmaker from Madison, sees the same problem. While he praises Doyle as "rock solid" on progressive social issues, he says, "If anything the governor's biggest failure was the lack of a more productive agenda. There were missed opportunities."

Doyle just didn't like working with the Legislature and couldn't accept that lawmakers had their own standing as elected officials, says Pocan. Doyle's staff was even more disdainful: "They exacerbate the problem of him being an executive with no connection to the Legislature."

Doyle's relative indifference to policymaking played out badly in the bureaucracy, according to the disaffected state employees I've talked with over the years. They complain the governor named lawyers and political apparatchiks to run the departments, as opposed to policy pros and

experienced administrators. His efforts to cut those 10,000 state employees had no guiding vision and blew up in the Department of Transportation in a particularly ugly fashion when staff engineers were replaced by outside consultants.

In 2004, a study that circulated internally found that consultants were costlier to use on road projects than state employees.* When longtime DOT legal counsel James Thiel, in response to a reporter's open records request, released the study to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* he was promptly demoted from a job he had held for 31 years. The lesson for other public employees couldn't have been plainer if the Doyle team had hung Thiel's body from a telephone pole: Don't do anything that undercuts the governor.

With some chagrin, a veteran social services program administrator told me he had been foolish

The lesson for other public employees couldn't have been plainer: **Don't do anything** that undercuts the governor.

enough to openly criticize cost-cutting measures in his program. He says he was reprimanded and his career damaged: "The message was, don't you dare criticize us or we'll go after you," he says. "They were more interested in loyalty than competence."

I heard a similar story a few years ago when I wrote about Cheri Maples, a retired Madison police captain who had no fear of retribution when she talked publicly about her brief, unhappy tour in the Doyle administration.

A 20-year veteran of law enforcement with a law degree and a master's in social work, Maples was

exactly the sort of reality-tested progressive you would have expected the Doyle administration to embrace if it was going to put its stamp on state government.

But once onboard to run the parole and probation division in Corrections, Maples found her hands tied by her political overseers. Her memos and speeches were screened by the secretary's office. Contact with the press had to be cleared. Worse, innovation wasn't encouraged in what she described as a "fear-based" environment.

"Everything was designed to protect the governor from any potential bad publicity and risking his reelection," she told me when I detailed her experiences in the Madison weekly *Isthmus*. "It was insane. If you're so concerned about these details, how can you see the big picture?"

Blocked from plotting a new course for probation and parole, Maples resigned after nine months. As I wrote, her departure illustrated one of the biggest failings of the Doyle administration: its refusal to tap into the small army of progressive-minded thinkers and technicians waiting in academia and government for a chance to retool state policy after 16 years of Republican rule.

"What depressed me the most," Maples said, "is that many of the liberals and progressives in the department said they were better treated by the Thompson administration."

"The big picture" that Maples talks about has never been part of the Doyle agenda. It's not even honored by gesture anymore. All those blue-ribbon commissions and special task forces that would occasionally ignite a governmental transformation during the Warren Knowles, Pat Lucey and Thompson eras aren't even appointed anymore.

"Brain dead" may be too strong a term to describe the Doyle team, but its failure to address the big issues of state government is stunning

* Nothing has changed. The Legislative Audit Bureau reported in May that 125 of the 214 road projects it reviewed could have been built for less money if state construction engineers had been used rather than consulting engineers.

in light of the problems that have festered and grown worse over the last two decades.

Most anyone who spends any time at the Capitol knows what they are: The school aid formula has blown a gasket and is belching blue smoke; the state aid system for local communities is byzantine and maybe lunatic for how it separates spending and tax raising; the funding and maybe governance of the UW System is in crisis; and why is it, by the way, that we send so many more people to prison than Minnesota?

None of these big issues seems to pique the incrementalist Doyle's interest. But even if the governor thought big, the seemingly endless "structural deficits" confronting every biennial budget—typically ranging from \$500 million to \$700 million—have sucked the air out of innovation. As Todd Berry, the president of the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, points out: Reform costs money. It's much easier to achieve it if you can grease the transition with bucks for the losers.

But the cushion for reform no longer exists. Strapped for money and publicly committed to not raising the major taxes, the Doyle administration has looked under every rock and raided every cookie jar to balance the biennial books.

Indeed, the notion that Doyle has held the line on taxes would have come under furious assault had he sought a third term. The new budget closed a shortfall by raising \$2.1 billion in taxes and fees, including a new income tax bracket that will nick the highest earners for \$287 million, and imposing higher fees on everything from cigarettes to birth certificates to securities transactions to boat registrations.

Pocan talks wistfully if only the governor were willing to raise revenue, i.e., taxes, even higher. But I wonder how much stomach the public has for more taxes when their take-home checks are already shrinking. A far more palatable alternative would be a stoked-up Wisconsin economy generating more income and sales taxes like it did in the Roaring '90s, when state coffers overflowed

not because of higher taxes but because of the booming economy.

But as Tom Hefty and John Torinus Jr. chronicled in these pages last issue, the Wisconsin economy has dramatically stalled during the Doyle years,

'Doyle stole a page from the Republican playbook,' says Mordecai Lee. 'He invented a **wedge** issue out of thin air.'

throwing Wisconsin residents into an economic squeeze that has translated to Doyle's declining poll numbers.

It's not a pretty picture. Still, more than one person has told me that Doyle could win a third term if he wanted it. Lee, for one, expects the economy to be turned around by next fall. And he argues that Doyle, the ever-resourceful campaigner with "ice blood" in his veins, would knock off a Republican challenger with the same cool efficiency that he dispatched Green.

I don't know about that. Too many Democratic loyalists look at the Doyle years with profound disappointment. The old Peggy Lee song comes to mind when I think of their disillusionment. She sang in that weary and wistful voice: "Is that all there is?"

I suspect that Jim Doyle, the man who never lost an election, knows that such disaffection would have ended his winning streak. ■

Marc Eisen is a Madison writer and editor.



Rebel

Photograph by James Mueller

ON THE FRONTLINES OF REFORM
WITH WRITER SUNNY SCHUBERT

with a cause.

Virtual schools, viewed skeptically by the educational establishment, have a champion in this veteran teacher.

Kathy Hennings starts her day like any other Wisconsin public school teacher: She's up, coiffed, appropriately dressed and ready to go.

And then she starts her commute: down the hall in her Cedarburg home from the kitchen to her office. She sits down in front of a bank of two linked computers, and starts going through the 20-plus emails she receives each day from the parents of her students.

Then she and her students settle down for another day of learning—21st-century style—in the Wisconsin Virtual Academy, one of 14 Internet-based online charter schools in Wisconsin.

Hennings has 75 students: 30 first-graders and 45 second-graders. They live in rural areas, villages, towns and big cities all across Wisconsin, from Superior to Stevens Point, from Hudson to Milwaukee.

Their reasons for being in Hennings' classes are just as varied as their hometowns.

"Some have parents who are really serious about wanting to spend more time with their

kids, instead of shipping them off to school for seven or eight hours a day," she explains. "Some children might be advanced learners who want to move faster or in different directions than a regular school curriculum might let them.

Other students might struggle with their studies and benefit from working at their own pace. She also draws kids with special needs or attention-deficit issues. "Others didn't feel safe in their old school," she notes. "I have at least two who had bullying issues."

The bottom line is this: A virtual classroom can better accommodate a wide variety of learning styles than a regular classroom can.

"It's all about choice," Hennings says.

That sort of talk that has driven some "brick and mortar" schoolteachers up the wall in the 15 years or so since virtual schools first got a toehold in the educational scene.

In the beginning, the education establishment—notably, the major state teachers union, the Wisconsin Education Association Council, and its political allies in the state Department of Public Instruction—fought virtual schools and online education almost as hard as they fought Milwaukee's school choice program.

The rancor made Hennings "very sad," she says. After all, "I was a teachers union member for many years."

Hennings graduated from UW-Stevens Point with a degree in elementary education in 1971 and started teaching right away. There were a couple of maternity leaves along the way—her

daughters are 31 and 24 now—but she put in 17 years in the Cedarburg schools. She says her big realization was that not even an affluent district like Cedarburg's could satisfy every child's learning needs.

Seven years ago, the Northern Ozaukee School District offered her a job teaching in its virtual school, and Hennings jumped at the chance. "I got hooked on technology back in 1996," she says. "I immediately became very excited at the thought of what computers could do to enhance learning. Becoming a 'virtual teacher' was an easy transition."

For her, perhaps, but not her colleagues. Her union filed two lawsuits attempting to shut down the Northern Ozaukee virtual school, mostly on the pretext that parents tutoring their children were doing too much of the teaching, and that those parents were not licensed teachers.

"WEAC was suing the school, which was us teachers, and yet they did not ever contact us to find out what virtual education was all about," she says, shaking her head. "It was so sad."

Advocates for virtual education, including Hennings, lobbied the Legislature. Lawmakers from both parties "were far more willing to listen to us than our fellow teachers were," she says. Eventually, a bipartisan-backed bill was signed into law authorizing virtual schools.

Last year, Hennings retired from her Cedarburg job and left the teachers union. She promptly signed on as a teacher for a new online school, the Wisconsin Virtual Academy. The academy is a public charter school operated by an independent board under the auspices of the McFarland School District. It uses an interactive curriculum designed by a Virginia company, K12 Inc., which serves virtual schools throughout the nation.

Hennings explains that the academy's curriculum was designed to calm the fears about parents acting as unlicensed teachers, while offering families the choice and flexibility that are hallmarks of online learning.

As she explains it, that flexibility can be exercised

in a number of ways. A student might choose to work ahead in one subject, like history, and then catch up in another subject, like math or science, later on.

Because attention spans and nervous energy vary widely among children, Hennings says, one student might prefer to work in longer blocks of time than another who needs to get up and move around. Accommodating disparate learning needs could be disruptive in a traditional class, but isn't a problem in a virtual class.

"Flexibility is the name of the game," Hennings says.

What is not flexible is the curriculum. Each student following the K12 lesson plans needs a personal computer, which can be provided if necessary. "And then they get boxes and boxes of

*Hennings says of
virtual instruction:
'Flexibility is the
name of the game.'*

books shipped to them, and lab equipment, and art supplies," Hennings says.

"Each lesson is very scripted, very spelled out," she adds. "The lessons are designed to teach them key concepts, and that's what I look for mastery of. They have to show me their work."

The rigid curriculum is designed to ease fears that virtual education is just home-schooling by another name. In contrast to publicly chartered virtual schools, home-schoolers in Wisconsin are not required to follow the state's curriculum standards, nor take the state's standardized tests.

Hennings spent the first month of the new school year calling each family and talking to parents and students. Then she began assessing each student's skills and needs. She identified several students who are particularly good readers and advanced them to second semester in the reading curriculum.

The K12 reading program for younger students “is really heavy on phonics,” she says. “That’s one reason why I like it so much.”

She has also broken her two grades into work groups of seven or eight students each, and conducted online “classes” with them. The first-graders, for example, have been discussing the book *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, which their parents read to them, while second-graders discussed *Clara and the Book Wagon*.

The “classes” are almost the only time all the students are expected to be logged on together, Hennings adds. Classes can be taught via webcams and microphones, so the students can see and hear each other and their teacher.

Hennings says her job is a lot like a regular teacher’s: She is expected to be in her office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, “and I work on the weekends, and I work in the evenings, but that’s very comparable to teachers in a regular classroom. They work long hours and evenings, too.”

Two days every month, Hennings travels to McFarland to meet with her fellow virtual teachers. “It’s very helpful—the exchange of ideas is just incredible.” She says she is paid “very comparably” to regular classroom teachers.

Hennings acknowledges that virtual-school families are different: “One thing all these parents have in common is that they have made the choice to do these lessons at home with their children.” That choice shows a level of commitment not always present in the parents of regular-school students.

Ironically, Hennings says, as a mother she would not have been interested in sending her own children to a virtual school.

“I hear that from parents all the time: ‘Oh, don’t you wish there had been schools like this when your own kids were little, so you could have stayed home with them?’ Well...not really,” she says with a laugh. “They did fine in regular school.”

“But, you know, it was my choice to send them to public school,” she adds. “My husband and I were

fortunate that if we had wanted to, we could have been able to afford private school, too.

“That’s what this virtual school means to me—it’s offering parents and students another way to learn...another choice,” Hennings says. “And I will stand for this to my dying day: It’s all about choice.”

For more information

To learn more about the Wisconsin Virtual Academy, including typical daily schedules or to try a sample lesson, go to www.k12.com/wiva/home.

The academy has 461 students enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade, and 8.5 teachers, all of whom are state licensed. Like any other public school, the academy is tuition-free. Each student’s “home district” pays the McFarland school district, which sponsors the virtual school, \$6,000-plus a year per student.

There are 13 other virtual schools in Wisconsin; some are high schools, others are K-8 schools. They embrace different educational approaches, but all are required to teach to the state’s curriculum standards, and their students take the state’s standardized tests.

For information about each school, follow the links on the state Department of Public Instruction’s virtual schools page: <http://dpi.state.wi.us/imt/onlinevir.html>.

The parent organization for online school families is the Wisconsin Coalition of Virtual School Families. You can learn more about the group at <http://dpi.state.wi.us/imt/onlinevir.html>.

Official enrollment figures aren’t out yet, but almost 3,000 students are expected to attend virtual schools in Wisconsin this year, significantly fewer than the 5,250 slots authorized by the Legislature.

—S.S.

Limited government

for a reason

Conservatives know that American genius flows from the bottom up rather than the top down

BY RICHARD ESENBERG

Reaction to the adulation and almost millennial expectations for Barack Obama might be seen as a political Rorschach test. It's not that Obama kitsch—the chanting schoolchildren and prostrating celebrities kissing their biceps in support of the president—presages the rise of a cult of personality. Americans are blessed with a healthy irreverence for politicians that, God willing, will always restrain our commitment to charismatic leaders and secular saviors.

What is critical, I think, is your visceral reaction to schoolchildren taught songs evocative of a soteriological presidency in which Obama plays the role of Messiah (“He said Red, Yellow, Black or White/All are equal in his sight”). It's your immediate impression of an iconography reminiscent of Socialist Realism—red, white and blue lithographs of The Leader gazing into the future with sorrow at what he has inherited and a hope anchored firmly in himself.

If you're a conservative, you find it creepy.

The reason is not simply partisan. Conservatives don't expect political leaders to deliver the social transformation that Obama offers, and we don't trust those who promise it. “We” are never the ones we have been waiting for. We know that the state can love us but cannot establish, as Obama has promised, “a Kingdom right here on Earth.”

As conservatives struggle with our time in the wilderness, we ought to start with this as a bedrock principle. The great society is not created with government programs or the ministrations of bureaucracy. It is not, as Michelle Obama would have it, “Barack Obama” or the state who will put us to work. The American community is built through individual initiative and voluntary associations. Its genius flows from the bottom up rather than the top down.

Our objective is not simply to keep the state in its place, but to cultivate civil society.

We should not forget that our legacy is success. It is hard to overstate the pessimism that had gripped the country as I entered adulthood. If you had suggested in 1980 that America was about to enjoy 30 years of economic prosperity, dazzling innovation and a peaceful end to communist totalitarianism, few would have agreed.

But that's precisely what happened.

We should remember that our support for limited government is rooted in a particular anthropology—a set of beliefs about human beings. Part of it is recognition of human fallibility. No single individual or organization can ever know enough or be trusted to recognize and to impose the conditions for the good life. Part is recognition of human creativity. Human responsibility and freedom are powerful forces for social correction and improvement.

While this anthropology fuels our suspicion of “top-down” solutions directed by the state, we need, nevertheless, to recognize that government is not the only obstacle to human freedom and creativity. Our objective is not simply to keep the state in its place, but to cultivate civil society.

This means furthering a community in which individuals and voluntary associations—the family, the church, business and charitable organizations—can flourish. Although he failed to implement—and perhaps even to understand—them, George W. Bush's notions of a compassionate conservatism and an ownership society deserve more attention.

Compassion is, of course, a feeling and not a virtue. It can rarely serve as a principle of decision. It is not quite correct to say, with George W. Bush, that “when someone's hurting, government's got to move.” But conservatives cannot be indifferent to the ability of individuals to obtain a stake in our common progress.

Our solutions will never have the ambition of those offered by the left. They will focus on ensuring opportunity and not results. Our respect for the individuals, families and their voluntary associations—the recognition that they are actors rather than objects to be formed and succored by the state—requires that human initiative and responsibility be respected.

Capitalism and democracy require a public that is not only politically and economically free, but morally formed.

The role of the state is to do only those things individuals and private organizations cannot do. It is to remove obstacles to human creativity, not to direct or subsume it.

In crafting policies that serve these objectives, we ought not to succumb to the suggestion that we abandon social issues. As Peter Wehner and Michael Gerson observe in a recent issue of *Commentary*, Republicans must be the party of “both Adam Smiths: the free-market champion who wrote *The Wealth of Nations* and the moral philosopher who authored *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.”

Virtue cannot be compelled any more readily than “economic justice” can be imposed, but a line of conservative observers from Alexis de Tocqueville to Milton Friedman have emphasized that both capitalism and democracy require a public that is not only politically and economically free, but morally formed. Private liberty requires private virtue. The objectives and interests of “values” and “pocket book” voters are more aligned than is commonly supposed.

Of course, these are only guiding principles and not specific proposals. They leave room for vigorous debate, and we ought not to shy from it. Conservatives won as the party of ideas. That is the way that we will win again. ■

Richard Esenberg, a visiting assistant professor of law at Marquette University, blogs at <http://www.sharkandshpherd.blogspot.com/>

The Closer

BY CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER



'Mommy, what does a union member look like?'

Look into Mom's eyes for the answer.

The stereotype of the typical union member is time-tested. Union Man is a pot-bellied factory worker or tradesman making a good living despite never having graduated college. He wears an old flannel shirt and muddy work boots. And much like the Catholic Church hierarchy, in which the bigger your hat, the greater your importance, union status is conferred on those with the largest mustaches.

Union Man believes in the strength of numbers—that the security of his job depends on the security of his colleagues' jobs, even if he knows he works harder than they do. He's suspicious of people who make more money than he does, and Union Man thinks "the rich" aren't paying their "fair share."

As such, Union Man supports Democratic candidates with both his union dues and his vote. And he isn't afraid to vote against his best interests if it means sticking it to management.

In Wisconsin, this stereotype was most recently reinforced by the saga of Mercury Marine, a small-engine factory near Sheboygan that faced falling revenues and a beckoning suitor in Oklahoma. Mercury asked its union for concessions or suffer the closing of the plant. It took the workers three contested votes to reach a deal to save their jobs.

As this charade rolled on, the public gazed, incredulously, at the union members in their natural habitat, tempting the catastrophic closing of their plant with their obstinacy. Thus, the age-old stereotype of the union simpleton as hardhat economic illiterate gained currency.

But not so fast.

In reality, the typical union member is a very different person.

A statewide poll conducted in September by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute (publisher of this magazine) found the typical union member to be female, with a college education, making more than \$75,000 per year. Of the union households responding to the survey, 79% had attended college, with 14% completing graduate work.

Even more intriguing, the typical union household is much more fiscally conservative than traditional stereotypes would suggest. Among union members, 52% listed either "holding the line on taxes and government spending" or "improving the

state's economy and protecting jobs" as the top priority of the Legislature. Traditional union priorities, such as making health care and prescription drugs more affordable (12%), scored much lower than expected.

Among union households, President Obama is still popular, with a 64% approval rating. Yet Gov. Jim Doyle, who is to Wisconsin unions what Hugh Hefner is to teenage boys, actually has a high unfavorability rating, with 49.7% rating him "somewhat" or "very" unfavorably. This is even higher than the 47.4% unfavorable rating Doyle received from the public at large.

So put away the stereotype of the typical union member. Forget about the picketing goon and consider the professional woman who tends to be an economic conservative. How did our perception get so wrong?

For one, unionization in America has been changing rapidly.

According to the census, 20% of workers in the U.S. were union members in 1983. Twenty-five years later, union membership has dropped to 12% of the workforce. Yet membership remains high in public-sector jobs, with government workers five times more likely to be union members than their private-sector counterparts. And within government, education and library service jobs were the most heavily unionized, at 38.7%.

As we know, "education" and "library" jobs have traditionally meant "women." And that is why, after men held a 10-point lead nationally over women in union membership in 1983, it appears professional women may have crept ahead in Wisconsin in 2009.

And these women, despite being unionized government employees, are educated, well paid, and shell out a boatload in taxes. Which may explain, in large part, why they may be more apt to be skeptical of government.

For instance, when asked whether government should guarantee every citizen a job and a good standard of living, 67% of union households objected to the notion—even higher than

The survey found the typical union member to be female, with a college education, making more than \$75,000 per year.

the overall 65% "no" from the general public.

So when you're out at a restaurant and commenting on the typical "union goons," remember: Today's union members walk among us, like chameleons adapting to their new environments. Their changed appearance has thrown our "union-dar" out of whack, so it's much more difficult to tell who might be a card-carrying AFL-CIO member.

And today's union members may be more reasonable than we remember. Before conservatives write them off, it might bear electoral fruit for Republicans to get to know them better.

After all, these are not your father's unions. ■

Christian Schneider, a former legislative staffer, is a fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute. His blog can be read at WPRI.org.

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