

A photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is smiling and looking slightly to the left. A microphone is in front of him. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with warm lighting.

WI

NOVEMBER 2

WISCONSIN INTEREST

Swept away!

CHARLES SYKES, JOHN NICHOLS,
PATRICK MCILHERAN AND STEPHEN HAYES
ANALYZE THE BIG GOP WIN

What next?

WPRI's plan for progress

BY GEORGE LIGHTBOURN

EXCLUSIVE: Christian Schneider reports the inside story of the Johnson upset



Editor > CHARLES J. SYKES

Now what?

This is what a revolution looks like.

In November, notes progressive pundit John Nichols, Wisconsin Democrats suffered “the worst defeat of any state party in the nation.” Voters issued pink slips with abandon: This was the only state where Democrats lost the governorship, a Senate seat and both houses of the state Legislature. Not since 1938 have Republicans gained this many seats in the Assembly. And, as icing on the cake, the state GOP also captured two new seats in the U.S. House.

Wisconsin politics has been turned upside down. Before Nov. 2, Democrats controlled every lever of power in the Badger State. Next year, they will control none. Powerless and virtually irrelevant for the last two years, conservatives now hold the governorship and have strong majorities in both legislative houses.

The upheaval poses both an opportunity and a challenge. Unlike Washington there is

no divided government in Wisconsin, and for conservatives, no excuses. They own it.

So welcome to Madison. Now what?

In our cover story, George Lightbourn (president of our publisher, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, and a former state secretary of administration) offers a memo “on how to restore Wisconsin’s greatness.” Drawing upon the institute’s *Refocus Wisconsin* project, Lightbourn lays out a roadmap for Gov.-elect Scott Walker and the GOP majority.

Also in this issue: Christian Schneider provides an exclusive behind-the-scenes view of the extraordinary campaign that propelled Ron Johnson into the U.S. Senate; Mike Nichols looks at the political disconnect in Milwaukee over education; and a bevy of our finest columnists weigh the magnitude of Wisconsin’s political earthquake.

WPRI

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

Through original research and analysis and 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 affecting 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.

To find more information regarding The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, any article in this publication or questions and comments, please go to www.wpri.org.

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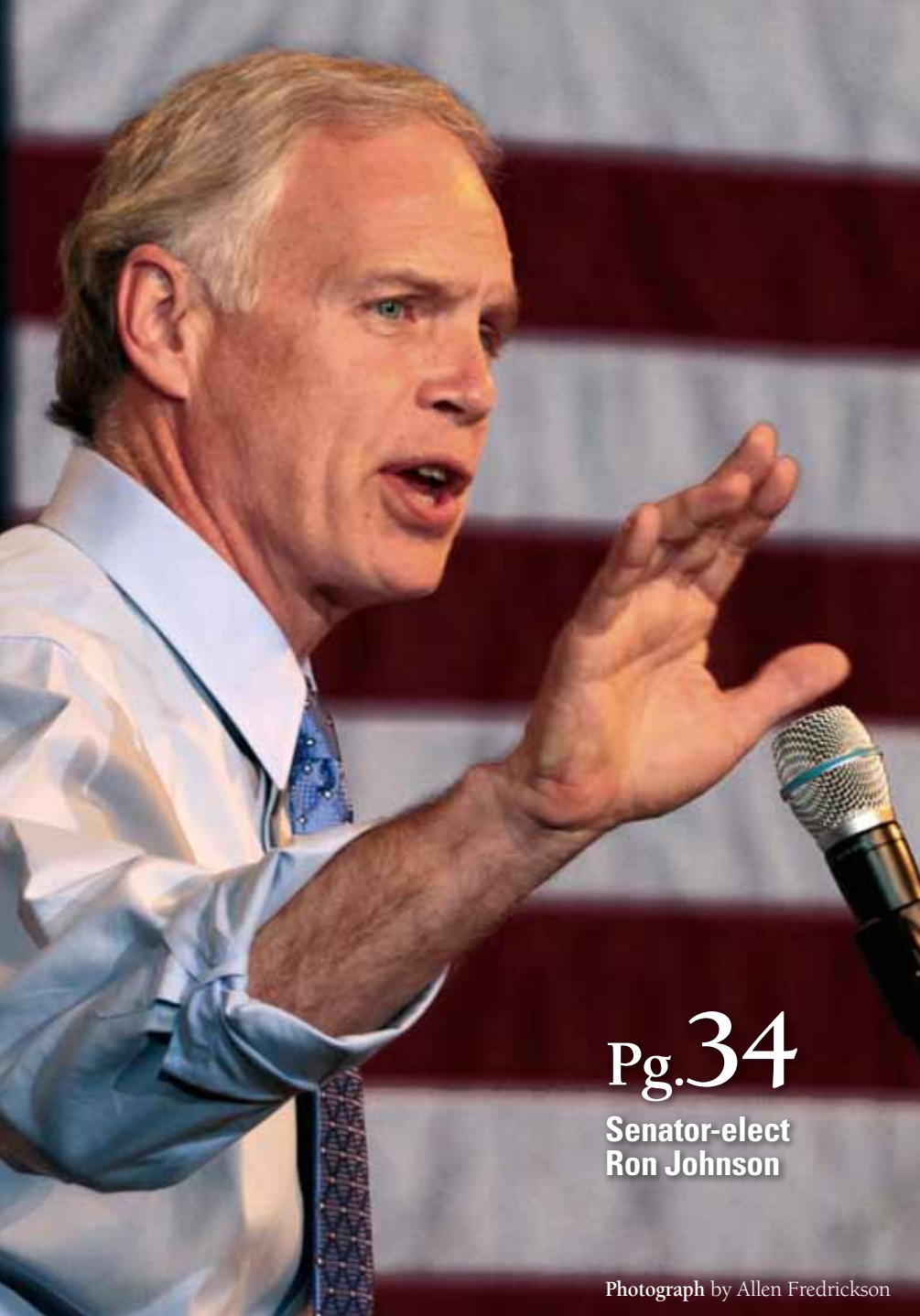
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Senator-elect
Ron Johnson

Photograph by Allen Fredrickson

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Fall reckoning

The voters exact vengeance upon the disdainful Democrats.

Before the vote on Nov. 2, humorist P.J. O'Rourke quipped that it wasn't an election, it was a restraining order. For Democrats in Wisconsin it was an apocalypse.

They lost the governorship; a Senate seat; two congressional seats; both houses of the state Legislature, and, just to run up the score, the office of state treasurer to a guy who ran on a platform of abolishing the job.

The Democrats' legislative leadership was decapitated. Both the speaker of the Assembly and the Senate majority leader were defeated for re-election.

It was, in short, a political bloodbath of epically gory proportions, and the postmortems and recriminations linger on into a fall that seems somehow brighter and more hopeful.

Predictably, pundits worked the usual clichés (voter angst, anger, the economy) harder than a rented mule. But herewith we offer some observations on the wipeout that was:

The Doyle Factor.

As he rallied legislative support for health care reform, President Obama famously reassured wavering Democrats that things would be different from 1994 because "You have me." You know the rest. But in Wisconsin, Democrats had Jim Doyle, and that was even worse.

As low as Obama's popularity had sunk by Election Day, he was an American idol compared with the two-term governor, who was described by the Democratic polling group, PPP, as "one of the most unpopular people holding his position anywhere in the country." On the eve of the election, Doyle's approval rating was just 27%, marginally above the popularity of the Chicago Bears.

No matter how strong a campaign Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett ran to succeed Doyle, noted PPP, "it's rare for a party to hold the governor's office when its incumbent is so unpopular."

The Mike Tate Factor.

The youthful chair of the state Democratic Party set the tone for the campaign last year when he reacted to the first stirrings of voter discontent by lashing out at the voters. As

it turned out, insulting them was not a brilliant campaign strategy.

Last September, the party chair reacted to a massive Tea Party rally by calling attendees "extremist elements" who "frankly don't believe in this country." Rather than taking the brewing taxpayer revolt seriously, Tate compared dissenters to "red-baiting McCarthyites, the Know-Nothings and the KKK."

No leading Democrat made any attempt to distance himself from Tate's comments, and by the time Sen. Russ Feingold half-heartedly tried to court Tea Partiers, his appeal, rather predictably, fell flat. So did Tate's strategy of trying to win the hearts and minds of the voters by calling them ignorant, violent rednecks.

Postscript: The day after his party lost everything but their library cards, Tate extended the olive branch by attributing the electoral tsunami to the "Republican campaign of dissembling, of fear-mongering, of division [that was] was rocketed along by an unprecedented flood of shady money." And the voters, presumably, are still dumb bigots.

The Overreach Factor.

Wisconsinites got a double dose. In Washington, Democrats rammed through the stimulus package, a \$3.5 trillion budget, and Obamacare. Not to be outdone, their counterparts in Madison decided to use their new majorities to push through a \$3 billion tax increase, hammering businesses, investors, and job creators across the state, even as unemployment edged above 9%.

Back in June 2009, I wrote: "Not content with wealth redistribution, the budget also taxes telephones, iPod downloads, nursing home beds, smokers, and sick people... Under this budget drivers will not only pay higher gas taxes but also will see their car insurance jump by 40% because of provisions put in at the behest of trial lawyers."

At the time I wondered: What could they possibly be thinking? That they could ride the wave of Obama's popularity? That campaign cash from various special interests like the casinos, lawyers, and unions would protect them? That voters wouldn't notice or would forget

by 2010? Were they hoping the economy would roar back and that they would all be forgiven?

Or maybe they just couldn't help themselves: They had waited so long for this binge and owed so much to so many special interest groups they just...couldn't... stop... themselves from spending, gouging, and partying.

Since the same story played out in Madison as in Washington, the reaction in Wisconsin was magnified. The reckoning came Nov. 2.

The Boondoggle Factor.

The billion-dollar high-speed train became a shiny symbol of that overreach, a boondoggle as costly as it was pointless. Gov. Doyle and his would-be successor Tom Barrett embraced the train long and hard, touting the gusher of free money from the federal government.

Despite the hype, the public never warmed to the train, which would actually go only about 71 miles an hour, cost more than \$800 million, and create about 50 permanent jobs. Even people who were bad at math thought that was a bad deal. Economist Robert Samuelson called the plan "a perfect example of wasteful spending masquerading as a respectable social cause."

In a campaign that turned on the economy and fiscal responsibility, the train was a perfect example of the sort of spending that you should avoid if you are broke.

Two days after Walker's decisive win, the state Department of Transportation suspended work on the project.

The Disconnect Factor.

For 18 years, Sen. Russ Feingold bragged that he visited every one of the state's 72 counties for "listening sessions." When it came to Obamacare, though, the meetings morphed into "I'm-not-listening-to-you" sessions, and voters noticed. The voters also weren't buying the "maverick" thing anymore.

It's the Economy, Stupid, Factor.

Milwaukee has the fourth-worst poverty rate in the country and one of the worst racial disparities in employment; Wisconsin lags behind the country in per capita income.

But late in the campaign, Democrat Tom Barrett was campaigning on stem cells and abortion.

Remember when it was Republicans who were the ones who tried to use social wedge issues to win elections? No, it didn't work for them, either.

The Quality Candidate Factor.

Despite the wave of red nationally, Republicans didn't win everywhere. But in Wisconsin, there were no Christine O'Donnells, and no civil war between the Tea Party and the mainstream Republican Party. Instead, in Scott Walker and Ron Johnson, conservatives had two of the strongest candidates in the country.

It was a political bloodbath of epically gory proportions.

Walker had made himself a hero by holding the line for eight years in heavily liberal Milwaukee County, while Johnson, a political newcomer, captured the imagination of an electorate looking for a fresh face.

Further down the ticket, Republicans had fresh faces from Paul Ryan to Sean Duffy to newly elected state Sen. Leah Vukmir. Not only did they all win, but Walker, Johnson, and Ryan now seem poised to become national stars on the right.

Democrats across the country ran hard against Ryan's "Roadmap for America," playing the scare-granny card hard in an attempt to discredit his budget plans. They failed; and if the election marked the definitive end of Social Security reform as the third rail of politics, it will give Ryan crucial momentum in gathering support for a fiscally sound budget as the new chairman of the House Budget Committee.

Ryan in 2012? Or is it too early to make Christmas lists? ■

Charles J. Sykes, the WI editor, is the author of six books and hosts a daily radio show on AM620 WTMJ in Milwaukee.



Befuddled Democrats

The left's response to the Tea Party was wrong from the start

BY RICHARD ESENBERG

I am not now — nor have I ever been — a member of the Tea Party. As a lawyer, I may be too cynical to embrace any mass political movement. As an academic, coming from a world in which the quality of one's thinking is (at least for conservatives) judged on the degree to which it is “nuanced,” I find political passion difficult. I have written here before that the government cannot save us. Neither can politics.

I am not even sure what the Tea Party is. It seems too diffuse to view as a single political organization or even as a group of organizations. It is too disparate to identify with a single set of ideological propositions.

To the contrary, the various Tea Party movements seem to have come together more around what they want to stop. They do not want an ever-expanding state. They oppose European levels of taxation. They distrust ambitious plans to centrally manage things like health care and carbon emissions. They do not regard illegal entry into the country as something that enhances our diversity.

In short, the Tea Party united behind opposition to liberal elite opinion. It set itself against not only the political left but against the values of the professional classes whose symbiotic relationship with the state and preference for “socially sophisticated” values has turned the northeast deep blue.

The Tea Party sought to assert the truths of the corner bar and backyard fence over those of the faculty lounge and the boardrooms of those who specialize in moving money around rather than in the creation of wealth.

A great many people were caught up in this opposition, and, as a result, the voters went medieval on the Democrats in this year's midterms. The Democrats, perhaps because they are Democrats, still don't understand why.

The political left's response to the Tea Party was wrong from the start. It fed the perception that liberals reject the values of ordinary folk by indulging in snickering references to "teabagging" — a term for a sexual practice that is unknown to most Americans.

Tea Partiers were denounced as racists threatened by a black president and perhaps even wishing him harm. One major news organization beat this drum with a photo from the rear of a well-armed Tea Partier until it turned out, from a different perspective, that the man was black.

As the rallies grew, the derision stopped and was replaced by befuddlement. President Obama could not understand why the Tea Partiers opposed his rapid expansion of the state and a stimulus package that, while unpaid for, at least put money in some pockets — for a while. The Tea Party "amused" him. "You would think they'd be saying 'thank you.'"

As the polls turned, the amusement gave way to "understanding" anger that was "misdirected." This has been a common Democratic trope throughout my ever-lengthening adulthood. Democrats believe they lose because voters are stupid.

After all, they come offering gifts of redistribution. How can people possibly object to taking other people's money? You'd think they'd be saying thank you.

The irony in this is that it is those ungrateful hoi polloi who have a more sophisticated understanding of the way economies work and societies thrive. They are built on initiative and cultural capital that has always rested uneasily with too much state assistance and regulation.

Americans, as opposed to much of Western Europe, have always sought to strike a balance weighted more heavily to initiative and cultural capital than the latter. It has seemed that President Obama wants to materially alter that balance.

The voters, led by the enthusiasm of the Tea Party, have made clear that they do not believe in that change. There is, it turns out, nothing the matter with Kansas or, as we have just seen, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and

The
Tea Party
united behind
opposition to
liberal elite
opinion.

just about everywhere else but California and New York.

Perhaps the Tea Party movement can be best explained by its antithesis. In a blatantly political use of taxpayer funds, the Obama administration put together an infomercial with the iconic actor Andy Griffith praising the way in which the new health care bill would affect Medicare.

Ol' Andy gives us the impression that there is no greater pleasure in life than pulling up a comfortable chair next to your bloodhound and "going through" what the government proposes to give you.

I understand people love their Medicare. But there was something sad and infantile in Griffith's delight ("it's music to my ears") at the way in which the government proposes to take care of us. Obama's mistake was in promising too much. The Tea Party's victory was in saying "no, you can't." ■

Richard Esenberg is a visiting assistant professor of law at Marquette University. He blogs at sharkandshepherd.blogspot.com.

Milwaukee's story

By Mike Nichols



Stephanie Findley was not just some carpetbagger looking for a job when she decided to run for the Assembly earlier this year.

She had a job — a few of them, actually. She worked as an office manager for Milwaukee District Council 48, a large and politically active labor group. She owned a small business, Fast & Accurate Business Solutions. She taught classes at the Spanish Center in Milwaukee and at Bryant & Stratton College.

A single mother who says she was already pregnant when she walked across the stage to get her Milwaukee Public High School degree some 20 years ago, Findley had overcome poverty and earned a master's degree from Cardinal Stritch. She was also active in the Democratic Party, was head of the City of Milwaukee's Election Commission and volunteered for too many organizations to count.

She was a 20-year resident of the 10th Assembly District, which has long been the province of retiring lawmaker Annette Polly Williams — a woman many still call “the mother of school choice” — when she decided to run for the seat herself. Findley, after all, had many of the same struggles and worries her neighbors did — including the high cost of health care, taxes, and the quality of MPS schools.

“Education is one of the major issues in the district,” she says. “People are very frustrated by the education system in Milwaukee. They feel trapped.”

Tired of politics as usual, she seemed like the perfect fit —

until Milwaukee County Supv. Elizabeth Coggins and elements of organized labor hostile to school reform taught her a bitter lesson about how Milwaukee politics really works.

Findley grew up believing in elections. She would stay up late in high school watching returns come in. “I was on my parents about going to vote,” she recalls.

Still, what happened in the September primary is a tough pill for her to swallow — and one that helps explain the disconnect between Milwaukeeans and many of their politicians on education issues.

“I still have some bitterness about how this came down,” Findley says after losing a three-way primary to Coggins.

The fall elections could hardly have come at a more ominous time for Milwaukee, the fourth-poorest large city in America. More than 60,000 children in the city live in poverty, and most of them can't read. That's not hyperbole.

Only 6% of black students in Milwaukee Public Schools score at a level considered “proficient” in reading in either fourth or eighth grade, according to National Assessment of Educational Progress tests. Yet Wisconsin has failed repeatedly to show sufficient backbone on school reform to qualify for billions in federal “Race to the Top” money the Obama administration is handing out to more innovative and engaged states. The essential problem, say observers: MPS.

Findley gives the district an overall grade of D and rates its performance as “only fair.” Many of her neighbors are

Stephanie Findley learned the hard way that while the public favors school reform, the political system is rigged to kill it.

even more critical. Almost half (47%) of 492 Milwaukeeans surveyed say MPS is doing a poor job. One out of five (21%) give the district a grade of F, while another 44% give it a C or a D.

Education is supposed to be the lifeline in the city.

“There is so much going on in this world, drugs and violence, I want my kids educated to the full extent,” says Jasmine Calhoun, a mother of two young children, as she stands outside Auer Avenue School in one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods on a crisp fall morning. “I can’t afford private school.”

The lifeline, however, appears to those who need it most to be untethered.

Worry and fear for another generation of Milwaukee’s children, indeed

for the city itself, are not emotions with any particular political affiliation. Regular Milwaukeeans — mostly Democrats (45% in the

June poll) or self-described independents (24%), if they profess any political bent at all — support myriad school reforms that would increase accountability and flexibility.

Hardly anybody — about one in 10 people — identifies themselves as a Republican in the city. Still, twice as many Milwaukeeans favor the formation of charter schools as oppose them. Almost seven out of 10 think more money would help MPS, but they don’t want it spent the same way it currently is. Fifty percent favor basing teachers’ salaries, in part, on student academic progress on tests (versus 36% in opposition).

City residents are wary of tenure, at least the way it

currently exists. Four out of five, meanwhile, support requiring students to pass exams before graduating or moving on to certain grades.

Kevin Pearson — a guy who says his father was driving a truck at the age of 14 and wanted something better for him — is one of them.

“Until the seventh grade, I couldn’t read,” says Pearson, an MPS graduate who sent three of his own children through the city’s schools and is now a 49-year-old carpenter. “I don’t think you should pass a student along to get him out of your class just so he can be someone else’s problem.”

Pearson knows the immeasurable value of a dedicated teacher. He still vividly remembers two teachers who “gave up their lunchtime to teach me how to read at Peckham Junior High.” He is also grateful to the school administrator who

caught him smoking a joint when he was a high school freshman, told him he was a role model to other kids and to conduct himself as such. From then on, Pearson says, he did. Three years later, he passed an exam required to graduate

from MPS’s Washington High School.

“That’s the way it was when I graduated, and it should be that way today,” he says of the graduation test.

Not all city residents agree on all the specifics, of course.

But there is strong support for school choice, which allows students from low-income families to use tuition vouchers and attend private schools in Milwaukee at no cost to their families.

According to the June polling directed by UW-Madison political scientist Kenneth Goldstein for the *Refocus Wisconsin* project (which is sponsored by this magazine’s publisher, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute), more than 70% of



‘People are very frustrated by the education system in Milwaukee,’ says Findley. ‘They feel trapped.’

Only 6% of black students in Milwaukee Public Schools test at a level considered ‘proficient’ in reading.

Milwaukee respondents said that school choice should be expanded to low-income families statewide.

In a second poll in July that included 200-plus Milwaukeeans, more than twice as many city residents expressed direct support for government helping pay the tuition of low-income children in private schools as were opposed.

It is a different story among elected officials, and what happened to Findley goes a long way toward showing why.

Findley has a nuanced view of education issues. Unlike most of her neighbors, she believes there is an adequate amount of funding for MPS and questions the way it is spent. She is not a proponent of all reforms. She says she is somewhat supportive of charter schools (which are usually run by MPS) and has come around on the issue of school choice.

“At first,” she says, “I was strongly against choice, until the children said, ‘What about us?’”

“All I care about is the kids — no matter what school they go to — receiving a quality education.”

She has concerns about the financial management and curriculum of some choice schools, but says that high schools like Messmer and St. Joan Antida — where her daughter

attended high school as a non-choice student — excel.

Findley wouldn’t necessarily describe herself as pro-voucher, but says she is “open” to them — a position that, popular as it is among city residents, prompted a vehement backlash from some factions of the labor movement and, she believes, ended up being used against her by a veteran political opponent who ran against her in the primary.

“Beth Coggs, bless her heart, she played lowball with labor on the voucher issue,” says Findley.

Elizabeth “Beth” Coggs is the daughter of two figures revered in Milwaukee’s African-American community — onetime legislators Isaac and Marcia Coggs. She is also a longtime Milwaukee County Board member who, up until at least the November election, lived in the 1300 block of North 18th Street, an area that is not part of the 10th Assembly District.

There’s a good reason Coggs did not run for office where she lives, some believe. “If she had run for Assembly in the district in which she lives, she would have had to have run against her cousin, Leon Young,” points out Sherman Hill, the former executive director of the Harambee Ombudsman Project. He ran against both Coggs and Findley in the primary.

While Young is Beth Coggs’ state representative, another relative — Spencer Coggs — is her state senator. A third, Milele Coggs, is a Milwaukee alderperson, who became part of a confrontational exchange with a poll worker the night of the primary when she demanded to see results from races that included Beth Coggs’ contest against Findley and Hill. The poll worker called 911 and contended that Milele Coggs hit him with her car while backing out of the parking lot — something Milele Coggs, who was not charged, denied.

If there was anxiety in the Coggs camp about the primary, it was likely due to Findley and what appeared to be her deep ties to the Democratic Party, labor, its money and its votes.



District Council 48, the group for which Findley works, is composed of all American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employee locals in Milwaukee County. Forty-eight is, in turn, part of the Milwaukee Area Labor Council, AFL-CIO. At the start of her campaign, Findley had deep support right up the labor ladder.

Richard Abelson, executive director of Council 48, gave her \$50 in June. The Wisconsin political action committee of the Service Employees International Union contributed \$500 around the same time. Sheila Cochran, chief operating officer of the Milwaukee Area Labor Council, chipped in \$100 in August, around the same time that SEIU Local 150 funneled another \$500 her way.

By late August, AFSCME's Washington PAC had given Findley \$500, and the District Council 48 People Fund Committee had given her another \$500.

Findley is a true-blue Democrat who can be deeply critical of Republicans. Labor supporters, however, did not get the one essential thing they appear to have wanted in return for their support: fealty to the public school system that so many residents of Milwaukee say is failing their children.

Findley became tainted in the eyes of labor. Her problem: It became apparent that school choice backers liked her as well. The Fund for Parent Choice — a conduit that includes contributors such as former MPS Superintendent Howard Fuller, school reform leader and former MPS administrator Deborah McGriff and longtime school choice advocates Susan and George Mitchell — gave Findley's campaign \$3,600.

Joe Williams, a former *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reporter who is now executive director of Democrats for Education Reform in New York, helped with a fundraiser, according to Findley's finance reports. And the American Federation for Children Action Fund — a school choice group for whom former Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Scott Jensen acts as

a consultant — spent considerable money canvassing in the district, according to reports filed with the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board.

To some labor leaders, it became clear, Findley's receptiveness to school choice was an act of treason.

"To be clear, many union candidates accept voucher schools as a legal reality, but they prefer public education and say so in labor interviews, as Findley did and won major union backing," Dominique Paul Noth, communications director of the Milwaukee County Labor Council, wrote in the *Labor Press*, which he edits.

The Labor Council "had first supported" Findley, wrote Noth, until she started "playing both sides to win" or, perhaps, just acted "foolishly."

He wrote that there was displeasure with brochures distributed by AFC that, without permission, included pictures of labor leaders. But there were also clearly larger ideological issues and enough pressure to cause Findley to tell labor leaders she was returning school choice money given directly to her campaign.

"There was not any formal withdrawal of support" of Findley, says the Labor Council's Cochran. "I think there was some disappointment with what was going on with how the race ended up."

Exactly what the "disappointment" was over is murky because Cochran declines to get into specifics. But she did concede there was concern among some about the school choice money in the race.

"It just raises red flags with folks," she says.

Assembly races in Milwaukee are not big-spending affairs. Campaign finance reports filed by Hill shortly before the primary show he spent less than \$1,600. Findley received and spent around \$12,000, according to campaign reports that indicate the donation from the Fund for Parent Choice was



'Beth Coggs, bless her heart, she played lowball with labor on the voucher issue,' says Findley.

not actually returned to choice supporters.

Findley says she tried to return the money but the fund wouldn't take it back. The fund's administrator, Renee Bartelt, puts it differently.

"On August 31, Findley's campaign cut a check to the Fund for Parent Choice for \$3,600, returning the contributions to the conduit," wrote Bartelt in an email to *Wisconsin Interest*. "I tried to deposit the check to the conduit's bank account, but the check bounced due to insufficient funds."

Either way, it appears clear, Findley felt pressured to appease labor interests opposed to school choice.

Coggs, meanwhile, gathered in the money and support of both the Milwaukee and statewide teachers unions. According to campaign finance reports filed in late October, she raised about \$15,000, over half of which she personally contributed or loaned to her campaign. Only \$400 of Coggs' contributions came from residents of the 10th Assembly District she was running in.

Her biggest contributors other than herself: her cousin Leon Young, who contributed \$500 from his campaign fund, and three PACS. The Wisconsin Education Association Council PAC in Madison, the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association PAC in Milwaukee and the United Transportation Union PAC located in Ohio each gave her \$500. Both WEAC and the MTEA, in addition, endorsed her.

Coggs did not respond to requests for an interview, nor did she reply to emails asking for her positions on education issues. A story in the *Milwaukee Courier* shortly before the primary, however, described her as "elated, appreciative and

thankful" to get the WEAC and MTEA endorsements.

John Norquist, the former mayor of Milwaukee and a Democrat, speculates that Coggs will not be particularly supportive of school choice. He also provides a blunt analysis of union opposition.

He says the unions oppose school choice not because it hurts students, but because it hurts unions. "And they have a legitimate interest in looking out for themselves," Norquist adds. "If they could organize private schools, they would stop opposing vouchers."

It is no secret that teachers unions do not support voucher schools. What's more interesting is how much influence they appear to wield over other labor organizations that initially supported Findley, subsequently abandoned her, and then, in the Noth article in the *Labor Press*, rubbed salt in her wounds.

"Coggs' reputation and campaigning deservedly carried the day with 67% of the vote," wrote Noth in the *Labor Press*.

Forget the fact that the candidate with a long history of controversy and negative publicity as a Milwaukee County supervisor didn't even live in the district she is now going to represent and raised almost no money there.

Findley, a candidate with strong Democratic and labor ties as well as a deep history in the district, was described in the same *Labor Press* article as having suffered "an equally deserved loss" and was essentially portrayed as being either naïve or duplicitous.

Findley says the article in the *Labor Press* hurt.

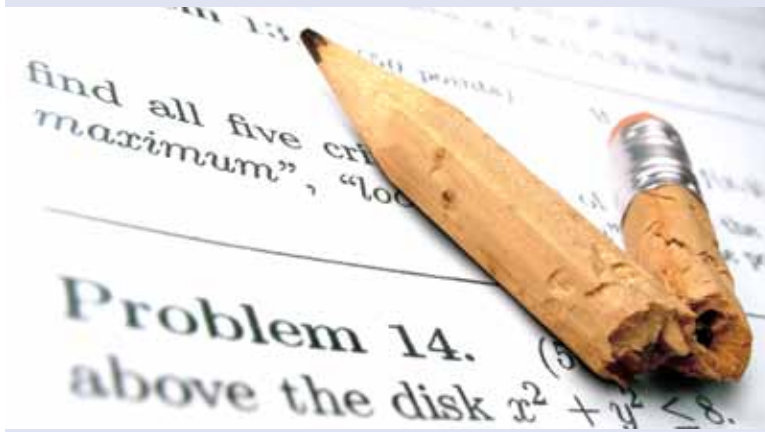
"I was with labor forever. I am still with labor," says the woman who still works for AFSCME's District Council 48, a group that eventually endorsed Coggs in the general election. "To be vilified that way really gave me heartburn."

It is possible for a Democratic politician in the poorer part of Milwaukee to support some types of school reform and remain in office. State Rep. Jason Fields says he believes in "pay for performance" for teachers and says state test results could possibly factor into that. Although he says he has lately gotten some WEAC support, he is also an outright supporter of charter and choice schools.

In Fields' words, "any child who resides in a district where the quality of education is failing deserves an opportunity to



Walker wants change.



succeed,” and MPS is failing. He cites the achievement gap between black students and white students as proof, as well as the drop-out rate in the district.

“I reflect,” says Fields, who ran unopposed this fall for his 11th District seat, “exactly how my constituents feel.”

He is, however, a rarity among city legislators. Findley isn’t the only candidate who either backed away from choice or lost a race in part because of supporting school choice.

State Sen. Jeff Plale lost his Democratic primary to Chris Larson, another Milwaukee County supervisor with substantial support from teachers and teachers unions. Larson then went on in the general election to defeat Jess Ripp, an MPS critic and school-reform advocate.

Former Milwaukee Ald. Angel Sanchez lost a primary battle in the 8th Assembly District to JoCasta Zamarripa, who handily won the general election.

All those races were about much more than education issues, but there is a clear message: Despite high levels of support for school choice among city residents, there are political consequences for Milwaukee legislators who back it. Choice supporters, conversely, might have popular support, but not when it comes time to vote.

Beth Cogs, in the end, won an extremely low turn-out primary and then went on in the general election to handily beat an independent candidate best known for trying to put a slogan on the ballot next to her name describing herself as “NOT the ‘whiteman’s bitch’.” Cogs is now heading to Madison to replace Williams.

Stephanie Findley says she may well be heading off someplace as well.

Like almost 40% of other Milwaukeeans, she says she is likely to move out of the state in the next three years. Concerned about a lack of business, arts and entertainment culture for young, black professionals, Findley thinks she needs to look for a different place to lead her life.

“Especially in the black community [in Milwaukee], things are dire,” says Findley. “A lot of the elected officials who represent the black community now, where are they?” ■

Mike Nichols is a senior fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute.

Gov.-elect Scott Walker appears poised to push education reform.

Walker’s campaign platform called for a new teacher evaluation process tied partly to student progress, for removing enrollment and eligibility caps on choice schools and virtual charter schools, for creating more authorizing agencies for charter schools, and for requiring schools to sign “turnaround contracts.”

In exchange for “a commitment of resources” from the state, the contracts could result in teachers and administrators in substandard schools being replaced. Failing schools could also be closed and then reopened through charters, under plans Walker pushed during the campaign.

Schools, Walker says, should be graded.


Asked what sort of job he believes MPS is doing, Walker responded that the district “has many excellent schools, but too many are failing, and that drags down the overall perception.” He would “probably give MPS a D” because of “the persistent failure of too many” of them.

In an email to Wisconsin Interest, he also wrote that he supports tax credits for individual and corporate donations that would pay for scholarships to help parents send their children to private schools.

Similarly, he thinks tax credits for tuition and other educational expenses for low- and moderate-income parents is a “good idea.”

Both of those ideas, according to WPRI polling, have broad support both in Milwaukee and across the state.

— M.N.



It's Morning Again in Wisconsin

A plan to restore our state's greatness

By George Lightbourn

Dear ~~Gov.-elect Walker~~ *Scott*

Welcome back to Madison.

While you were busy convincing us to elect you, most Wisconsinites were scratching their heads, wondering who would want to be governor. After all, state government is awash in red ink and riddled with partisan bickering. Oh, and in spite of the many people who just voted you into office, most of the public love their elected leaders about as much as they love the flu.

But you don't see it that way, do you? You only see the upside, the possibilities. In that, we are all behind you. Right now Wisconsin is hurting. We are a state with limitless possibilities and a huge upside, yet we are smarting from years of broken promises and missed opportunities.

Successful leaders can see things that others cannot. They unravel problems that befuddle the rest of us.

They map a course of action, and they stay true to it. That visionary quality and tenacity of purpose is what Wisconsin needs from you now more than ever.

It is the quality that sent Ronald Reagan charging headlong toward the collapsing Soviet empire. It is the quality that allowed Mitch Daniels and Chris Christie to strike a new course for Indiana and New Jersey, respectively.

Over the past several months, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute has been talking to Wisconsin residents about what is wrong with our state government. People fall into two competing camps. The first camp — let's call that the camp of the people — is full of residents who know that things are not right, but they have little idea what should be done to fix state government.

The second camp — we'll call it the insider camp, or the problem camp — has a jaded view of state



government. Its residents fully expect that, even though the voters are pushing back hard against the status quo, the new cast of partisans in the Capitol will return to form, issuing a flurry of predictable press releases while hammering out deals behind closed doors. They're confident that within a year state government will look no different than it looks today.

People in the second camp — the problem camp — will reflexively finger the state budget as your biggest challenge. We'd expect that, since the state budget is their livelihood. However, at WPRI we don't agree with their assessment, and we are guessing neither do you.

Budget dysfunction is only symptomatic of what is

wrong in Madison. The underlying problem is that state government has lost its sense of direction and its values.

Wisconsin state government routinely overpromises, underperforms and has worn out the path of least resistance. Solving the budget deficit without addressing the root problem is what government has been doing for decades.

Two years ago, a frustrated America bought into a vague promise of hope and change. Now America has turned to the conservatives for answers, and we are ready with fistfuls of serious, meaty ideas.

This past year, WPRI scoured the countryside tracking down the best thinkers to explain what needs to be done to restore our quality of life. They were not shy.



Gov.-elect Scott Walker

This all-star cast prescribed strong medicine for our ailing state. They called for a new, energized and accountable government, and they detailed a radically different approach to education. For those doubters who believe that no progress can be made without more money, take note: These ideas do not cost a dime.

The *Refocus Wisconsin* team prescribes a new progressivism for Wisconsin government. They show us how to scrape away layer after calcified layer of laws and programs and practices. People across Wisconsin are willing to do the hard work they call for. Your leadership can take us to this new vision for Wisconsin.

As you traveled the state, Scott, you saw that the people understand Wisconsin's predicament. They know that the party's over. As former Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith wrote for *Refocus Wisconsin*, "We have entered a new era of big, muscular government. Political leaders believe that no problem is too complex or costly for government to address." Democrats and Republicans alike have subscribed to this faulty thinking.

The party is definitely over. Fit us for that hair shirt; give us a heaping spoonful of castor oil. We can take it. But please, no more false promises. Better still, how about no promises at all? It's the promises that get us in trouble.

No, this is a different era in Wisconsin — an era that calls for a lot less flash and a lot more competence. If Wisconsin were a football team, we'd be looking for a coach who is good at the basics — blocking and tackling.

No more razzle-dazzle. No more plans to eliminate poverty or to reinvent our economy or to save the environment. Just blocking and tackling.

Our outgoing leader, Gov. Jim Doyle, was the poster boy for the old way of thinking. It is little wonder that his popularity is lower than the December pollen count. Upon signing his last budget — the budget that sent

the deficit soaring to \$2.7 billion — surrounded by fellow Democrats and public employee union reps, the governor pronounced, "When times are better, we can restore what is necessary, and we can make new investments to make our state stronger."

In other words, he was

saying that once we get past this annoying recession, we can get back to the business of growing government and spending more money. Months earlier he had pronounced, "The choices we make will clearly reveal who we are and what we value." Without knowing it, Doyle clearly articulated all that is wrong with state government.

Here are five things that Wisconsin wants:

1. Restore confidence in government.

You have lived here all of your adult life, so you know that Wisconsinites really don't hate government. But they can't recognize the government they have today. It is a lumbering behemoth.

In the 16 years between 1992 and 2008, state and local government spending grew at twice the rate of inflation. Had government spending been held to the Consumer Price Index growth, state and local spending per person would have been \$6,700 instead of the \$8,700 it actually was.



What did we get for that extra \$2,000 spent per person? The public sees little benefit. It sees a government that has failed to produce results.

Refocus Wisconsin polling showed the depth of our disappointment. Done well before the blizzard of negative campaign ads began, the polling showed that 61% of us are either frustrated by or angry with our state government. We (63% of us) believe taxes are higher here than in other states, and we (61%) do not think we are getting value for the taxes we pay.

It is telling that this sour mood came from a population who describe themselves (70%) as being quite happy.

Most disturbing of all, WPRI found that, as a state, our self-confidence has been shattered. With the melancholy of a 19th-century Irish family having to send its sons and daughters away to find their future, Wisconsin families know that their children will have to leave Wisconsin if they hope to fulfill the American dream.

Fully 62% told us that they believe the best and brightest leave Wisconsin. Worse, 86% of the graduating seniors from the UW-Madison Business School — our economic future — said they know the best and brightest leave Wisconsin. We suspect that polling of 19th-century Ireland, at the height of the potato famine, would have yielded similar results.

It is little wonder that Wisconsin does not see a shimmering future. For 30 years, Wisconsin incomes have fallen below the national average. In state after state, children have surpassed Wisconsin children on standardized tests. Meanwhile, our state government routinely fudges the books, looking the other way on

the constitutional requirement to balance the budget.

By nearly every measure, our quality of life is fading, and platitudes from politicians ring hollow. We know the truth.

The tip of the spear might just be public pensions, for that one issue embodies all that is awry in our state. While most people have put their retirement plans on

hold, they see their public-sector neighbors retiring before their 60th birthday with a generous monthly check.

What really riles the bees in the hive of public opinion is the fact that public employees pay almost nothing toward their

retirement. It is all taxpayer funded. Add it up, and the public sees its leaders serving up an extra helping of unfairness in the form of generous, free public pensions.

2. Reestablish a healthy relationship with business.

“The state is looking for me all the time. You’d think the state would be on your side, but they’re looking for me.” This was not a bank robber speaking, but a small-business owner from Milwaukee during a recent focus group. There was more colorful language from these job creators:

- “They hate my guts.... They have no concern for what it takes to run a business.”
- Wisconsin is “just a negative place to do business. We want your money, but we don’t want you here.”
- “It’s ridiculously hard to do business here.”

I’ve heard you say, Scott, that these are the people we depend on to create the jobs that will pull Wisconsin out of the recession. Yet businesses have seen nothing coming out of state government to suggest that they should add jobs here. They feel harassed

*By nearly every measure,
our quality of life is fading,
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We know the truth.*

by a government that they believe is inefficient and unaccountable.

You need not be a classical economist to know that this is not a healthy situation, particularly in an era when the public psyche is fixated on jobs.

Economists on the left and right agree that the number-one condition to maximize growth is this: It must be easy to start and grow a business. But Wisconsin's toxic business climate stands in the way.

Because of its anti-business culture, state government has bizarrely ignored the complaints of business, ostensibly because it makes for good politics among the Democratic majority.

Why else would Gov. Doyle and his party continue to push environmental standards that destabilize the economic playing field for Wisconsin business?

Moreover, why did they ignore what business was telling them about the looming disaster that is Obamacare?

Can you explain to me why redistribution always trumps economic growth with this crowd? Politicians love to celebrate Wisconsin's progressive tax system even though many scholars warn that successful economies are devoted to creating wealth rather than redistributing it.

The gulf between government and business is as troublesome as it is wide. Yet as former Gov. Tommy Thompson showed 23 years ago, the business climate is fixable. Here are steps you can take to get state government back in the economic growth game.

- Shut down the state Department of Commerce and create an independent, private-sector-driven organization held accountable for catalyzing economic growth.

- Change state government's attitude toward business. From top to bottom, state government should give business owners the same deference and service given to the penthouse guests at the Four Seasons.
- Hold listening sessions to take the pulse of business. Listen, listen, listen.
- Change Wisconsin's tax mix. This will mean reducing the income tax, the property tax and, most important, the corporate income tax. Rick Chandler's contribution to *Refocus Wisconsin* shows that this last change will add billions of dollars of investment by Wisconsin businesses. The long-term benefit to all

of Wisconsin should be obvious to all but the uniquely dim.

3. Set a new measure for success in government.

In the *Refocus Wisconsin* project, Stephen Goldsmith wrote that we have been living in an era in which "political leaders believe that

no problem is too complex or too costly for government to address." Our leaders surmised that if they did not swaddle every ugly problem in the comforting blanket of government, they had failed.

We saw this under Gov. Scott McCallum when he enthusiastically signed into law a prescription drug program for seniors when the state bookkeepers told him there would be no money to support the big new program.

We also saw Gov. Doyle's empty commitment to pay college tuition for high-schoolers with a B average. It was a noble concept, a terrific message for our children, but it was nearly unfunded from day one.

Why do our political leaders feel obligated to start so many new programs? Quite simply, all those programs — Family Care, BadgerCare, SAGE, Healthy Wisconsin,

The dysfunction of the budget is only symptomatic of what's wrong in Madison. The underlying problem is that state government has lost its sense of direction and its values.

Grow Wisconsin — are taken as a measure of a governor's success.

You can change that. As of today, state government is a turnaround project. As is true of any turnaround, there first needs to be a solid financial platform before the enterprise can move forward. The new measure of success will be restoring state government to a healthy financial position.

And while you're at it, why not squeeze the fat out of the budget process? Madison is accustomed to a state budget consuming six months. Your first budget should be done in far less time because, when you close the pay window, there is really very little to discuss.

Yes, the insiders will be upset by a budget steeped in reality. However, when you explain what is being done and why, the rest of Wisconsin will be with you.

4. Produce a real budget.

If we had been listening to business leaders, we would have heard them telling us that Wisconsin's dysfunctional state budget is costing jobs. The uncertainty that frames the future — the uncertainty that springs from a lack of trust in the state's financial acumen — makes business leaders pause when they consider expanding here.

Where do you begin to chop this overgrown hedge? The reality is that you need to trim it nearly to the ground if we hope to see healthy growth in the future. This will take time. We would like to believe that you could produce a complete fiscal plan by February, when new governors traditionally deliver their budget address to 264 sweaty legislative palms.

That is probably not realistic this year. Instead, consider dividing the task into two steps. First, get on top of things with a one-year spending freeze. The focus of your first budget should be public employee pension and health insurance reforms. Employees have to begin paying a fair share of their benefits. You will hear the howls, but the more the insiders howl, the more the public will be with you.

AN ALL-STAR CAST OF WRITERS

The *Refocus Wisconsin* project is an effort to highlight the issues threatening Wisconsin's quality of life. Research papers, polling and short films can be found at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute's website, Refocuswisconsin.org. The stories include:

- "Leaving the Middle Behind: Wisconsin at a Turning Point" by John Gurda
- "Desperately Seeking a New Tax System" by Richard Chandler
- "Great Schools? Not Without Great Teachers" by Sarah Archibald
- "Sustaining a Great Public University" by Mike Knetter (former dean of the UW-Madison Business School) and Gwen Eudey



Mike Knetter



Stephen Goldsmith

- "The State Crisis and a Need for a New Charter" by Stephen Goldsmith (former mayor of Indianapolis)
- "Saving Money and Teachers' Jobs in One Simple Stroke" by Scott Niederjohn

- "Sounding the Alarm: A Wakeup Call With Directions" by Frederick Hess
- "Public Education in Wisconsin: Facing Reality" by Rose Fernandez



Rose Fernandez



The essays have also been compiled in a book. Copies are available by emailing wpri@wpri.org or by writing: Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc., P.O. Box 382, Hartland, WI 53029.

This will provide a solid platform for your second budget. As David Cameron took over as British prime minister, he and George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, took time to develop a strategy for reining in government spending. You will need to do the same.

You will also need to practice saying, “Yes, that is a very important program, but we cannot afford it.” You might even think about embossing it on your business card.

Beyond that, the state budget would benefit immensely from introducing an outside perspective. First, convene a temporary group, akin to the Expenditure Commission from the 1980s, to set a long-term spending goal for state government. The commission should be tasked not only with getting government spending back in the box, but also with determining just how much of the Wisconsin economy should be allocated to government.

This will provide a critical element that has been missing: a map for state government’s fiscal future.

Second, establish a permanent Economic Council. Many states have them to give government a perspective from the world of business and finance when shaping state government’s fiscal plan.

Then, when you prepare a budget for your second full year in office, make sure it is honestly balanced, puts funds in a rainy-day account and only spends money on programs that demonstrate quantifiable results, just like every successful business in Wisconsin.

This fresh approach will let the citizens of Wisconsin know that government is under control and that their voice has been heard in Madison.

5. Get serious about education.

Who knows better than you that Wisconsin’s education system is in serious trouble? Metaphorically, it is akin to thousands of children being trapped inside a burning schoolhouse. The alarm has sounded, and politicians have come running, just as they promised they would.

There is the latest “leader,” Jim Doyle, tossing a Dixie cup of water on the inferno and standing back, astonished that his efforts have made no difference. He complains to anyone still listening that we need more Dixie cups.

Such is the sad state of our once-fine public school system. There is widespread acknowledgement of a serious problem. Yet there is no urgency, only a continued call for more Dixie cups, i.e., more money.

Why so little action? One answer rests with the education power base. Government leaders in Madison have proved incapable of making a move without appeasing the education special interests. They have shown little or no motivation to change. They are vested in vigorously defending the status quo.

The second answer is that the editorial writers and the citizenry wrongly equate money with performance. When we polled the public, asking if they believe more money would lead to better learning, 57% of respondents said yes (41% said no). However, we also asked how much they thought their school district spends per student. The most common answer was about \$6,000, less than half the actual amount. Hmm, if the public knew how much they are already funding schools, they might not see the need for more money.

You can start putting out the fire by funding results, rather than hopes. WPRI has argued that “state

*Our leaders surmised
that if they did not swaddle
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government, they had failed.*

government can no longer distribute [school] aids with a stony indifference as to whether the money will improve the performance of students.”

We referred to school finance as “Wisconsin’s version of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell.’” Wisconsin needs to focus not just on inputs, but also on outputs. Overwhelmingly, the public says it is with us.

Sixty-seven percent of the public support using state aid to reward school districts that do a better job of improving student performance. Even two-thirds of Democrats think this should be done!

Our polling also showed that the public is far ahead of the education insiders in its appetite for other big changes. We asked if high school students should pass a test to graduate, and 82% said yes. We asked about tenure for teachers, and 60% felt a three-year waiting period is not enough — 50% wouldn’t mind seeing tenure abolished altogether. In Madison, there is almost no talk about a graduation test and not a peep about tenure.

Similarly, the public says it would support expanding school choice, charter schools and online learning. Wisconsin residents are also fine giving tax credits to low-income families who send their children to private schools.

The list of education reforms supported by the public — but opposed by the insiders — is a long one. With that in mind, here is a list of reforms that our *Refocus Wisconsin* experts say must be done if we’re to move beyond the usual half-measures. Oh, and none of these changes would cost a dime.

- Build a true education marketplace for families by erasing the unjustified limit on charter schools, online schools and school choice. Also, rather than doing charter and choice schools on the cheap, let’s

be honest and have all of the state dollars follow the students.

- Take Colorado’s lead and create an independent state board to authorize charter schools. Parents and teachers should no longer have to go hat in hand to their local school boards asking for permission to start charter schools.
- Expand private-school choice statewide and offer a tax credit to families who send their children to private schools.
- Restore meaning to the high school diploma by requiring students to pass a graduation test.

- Get the best people into teaching by hiking the grade-point requirement at schools of education. Also knock down the teaching barriers that keep out smart people who come from non-teaching backgrounds.

And drop the antiquated residency requirement in Milwaukee.

- Do what President Obama suggested and get serious about classroom accountability. Use the best student test data available (we’d suggest the value-added system developed at UW-Madison) to evaluate and pay teachers and principals. To make this real, it will be essential to differentiate pay between top performers and the not-so-good teachers and principals.

Scott, I think you will agree that our *Refocus*

Wisconsin project is forthright and provocative. It is also a healthy reminder that Wisconsin’s most valuable resource is its people — hard working, honest and eager to try innovation. They are also slow to anger, but what we see in our polling is telling: Patience has its limits.

In one unified voice, the people have said they’ve had it. It’s time to get back to the basics. It’s time to move forward. ■

*School finance is
Wisconsin’s version of
‘don’t ask, don’t tell.’*



Election results
from both sides of
the watercooler.





DON'T MISREAD THE MANDATE

*Just saying 'no' will serve
Republicans well.*

BY PATRICK MCILHERAN

Republicans, not long ago left for dead and scarcely lamented in both Madison and Washington, now find themselves exhumed. Voters are still wincing at the smell, but apparently they prefer it to the stink of looming insolvency that clings to Democrats.

Like anyone pulled from the grave, Republicans should be mightily grateful. But here is the hard question: How do they avoid such a drubbing as Democrats just got and a quick return to the political bone yard in 2012?

The conventional answer begins by saying that Democrats over-read their mandate. They wrongly interpreted the long fade of Reaganism as the public yearning for unchecked liberalism. Hence, the conventional prescription is that Republicans should turn rightward in only the most apologetic way. Congressman Paul Ryan, the Janesville Republican reelected by 75% in a swing district, says this diagnosis and prescription are wrong.

Nationally, he says, Democrats didn't win control in 2006 and a firmer grip in 2008 because everyone fell in love with liberalism. "They won because everyone hated us," he says. Voters hated Republicans because they promised cheaper government and didn't deliver.

Democrats didn't misread their mandate, either. They

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END TIMES FOR PROGRESSIVES? SPARE ME

*Democrats may be inept, but
Walker's another Julius Heil.*

BY JOHN NICHOLS

There is a reason overwhelming electoral drubbings are described in the language of natural disasters: landslide, tidal wave, tsunami. It's reassuring to presume that radical shifts in our politics are organic, or perhaps even divinely inspired. But history says different: Electoral upheavals are products of their moments, and of the interplay of personality, economics and social discord that makes politics worth watching.

So it was that the Depression-era 1936 election produced historic victories for Franklin Roosevelt and for the more-New-Dealy-than-the-New-Deal Wisconsin Progressives. In 1937, Gov. Phil La Follette and Progressive legislators reorganized state government to serve public rather than corporate interests.

Republicans were aghast. They warned of creeping socialism, nominated millionaire Julius Heil for governor, spent lots of money and swept to power in 1938 mid-term elections that saw an even bigger surge for the national GOP than we witnessed Nov. 2. Heil and a Republican legislature got busy "wiping off the books" every piece of Progressive legislation. Heil presumed voters would reward Republicans for what *The New York Times* dubbed Wisconsin's "full turnaround."

But the state's economy remained in the doldrums. In 1940, FDR swept the state, as did Progressive Sen. Robert M. La Follette Jr. Two years later, Heil was out, Progressive Orland Loomis was in, and the groundwork was laid for the

cont. pg. 23



knew there was no mandate for steroidal government, Ryan maintains, either before or after the crash — and polls agree. The progressives who held the Democrats’ reins simply weren’t going to let a good crisis go to waste. “They just had an opportunity, and they took it,” says Ryan.

Do Republicans have a mandate?

Once again, the answer emerges nationally, from President Barack Obama. Airily dismissing Republicans as the “party of no,” the president offered a grandiose vision that the public saw with entirely different eyes: Do you want government that’s spendthrift beyond imagining, that remodels health care without reading the bill, that tries skyrocketing energy costs and looks impotent on fixing the economy?

The voters replied: No!

In Wisconsin, the public came to an equally harsh judgment on the efforts of Gov. Jim Doyle and the Democrats: Do you like budget bills that raised taxes by \$3.3 billion in a recession? Or an economic policy that first repels old-line industries with an unfavorable tax and legal climate — and then chases after them with taxpayer-funded bribes to stick around?

Oh, and how about an expensive starter-kit train to offer sufficiently dignified rides for Madison lawyers and tech entrepreneurs heading for Chicago, while the rest of the state struggles under a crashed economy?

Not merely no, said voters. Get-out-of-my-face no!

“No” works for Republicans. That is their mandate.

It works because Democrats embraced ideas even more

feckless than the Bush administration’s later flailings. No, said the public, you shouldn’t spend a jillion bucks on stimulus. No, don’t buy GM. Just stop, said voters, who went unheard.

What’s more, people grasp that many good things — love, ESPN, ice cream — emerge in society without government having thought them up. So it’s conceivable that if government, at least for now, just stood still until the economy recovers and the public has more money in its pockets, that wouldn’t be the worst thing. What

progressives see as intolerable stasis, most people would interpret as settled conditions.

Granted, the “no” mandate rules out conservative ambitions such as restructuring Social Security, at least soon. But that’s fine.

If there’s a mandate-misreading risk to the new Republican majorities in Madison and

Washington, it is the danger that they will be too reluctant to say no, too prone to the customary Republican error of saying, “Well, all right, but maybe not as fast.”

Now Republicans run Madison, and in Washington they have latitude to frame the two-year debate leading to 2012. They must stand unequivocally, Ryan says, for the proposition that the spending bender is over.

In Madison, one might extrapolate, Republicans must intentionally bring about more modest government. They must remember that their party’s resurrection is probationary. Do so, and they may be entrusted to work for greater change.

“A second chance — how often do you get that?” asks Ryan. Indeed: It’s a gift. ■

Patrick McIlheran is a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel columnist.

★
**‘No’ works
for Republicans.
That is their
mandate.**
★



eventual renewal of liberal politics in the form of the modern Democratic Party.

Scott Walker is better looking than Julius Heil. But Wisconsinites have been here before. Heil rose and fell at a volatile time, economically and politically — and so, it seems, will Walker.

While it may be unsettling for those who prefer the delusion that this year's Republican victories were epic, unprecedented and awesomely awesome, as a seventh-generation Wisconsinite I am required to take the long view.

It provides perspective that says, with apologies to Rebecca Kleefisch, these may not be end times for Democrats. Wisconsin progressives will win again. Russ Feingold might even be back.

Before that happens, however, Wisconsin Democrats must get a grip. The party is the likely vehicle for progressive renewal, as the GOP was until 1934 and the Progressive Party until 1946.

But Wisconsin Democrats did not experience “a correction” Nov. 2; they experienced the worst defeat of any state party in the nation.

Why so?

Perhaps because Democrats did everything wrong in 2010. It would be cruel to recount all the missteps, but here are a few:

- President Obama and Gov. Jim Doyle肘bowed Barbara Lawton out of the governor's race in fall 2009. A year later, polling revealed the gender gap wasn't working for Democrats. Would things have been different with an energetic and engaged Barbara Lawton leading the ticket? Well, duh!
- After Congressman David Obey quit, Democrats suddenly had a lot of ground to make up against reality-TV star Sean

Duffy. Instead of encouraging an open primary that would draw attention and pick the strongest candidate, Obama and Doyle ordained a contender. How did that work out, Congresswoman Lassa?

- The Assembly Speaker got friendly with a lobbyist for the payday loan industry, changed his position on legislation affecting the industry, got kicked out by his wife and moved to a house outside his district. Democrats saw no problem with Mike Sheridan's machinations. Voters booted him from office.

- President Obama spent billions bailing out GM and Chrysler. On election eve, Kenosha's Chrysler plant ended production. Memo to Obama: When bailing out industries, don't tell the companies it's okay to use the money to move jobs to Mexico and China.

- Democrats got gamed by disgraced former Assembly Speaker Scott Jensen, who walked

big money from wealthy conservatives and corporate donors into key legislative races. The money tipped the balance, as did “independent” spending by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Karl Rove that reinforced Johnson's themes.

There are no coincidences in politics. There are just results on election night. This year's results confirmed that a difficult election year was made dramatically worse by a disengaged and dysfunctional Democratic Party.

No other conclusion can be taken from an election that, when all was said and done, left standing just one statewide Democratic candidate: the epic, unprecedented and awesomely awesome Doug La Follette as secretary of state. ■

John Nichols is the associate editor of The Capital Times in Madison and the Washington correspondent for The Nation magazine.

★
***First, Democrats
need to get a grip.
They did everything
wrong in 2010.***
★



Photography by Allen Fredrickson



HOW Johnson WON

**An embedded reporter tells
the inside story of one of the
great political upsets of 2010.**

BY CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER

Editor's note: Christian Schneider, a WPRI senior fellow, spent nearly a decade running campaigns in Wisconsin. This story was written over the span of six months and is the result of dozens of interviews with campaign staff, consultants and Ron Johnson himself. This article is excerpted from a five-part series that can be read at wpri.org.

Simple yet effective, Johnson's ads were the envy of campaigns around the country.

The day after Labor Day, Sept. 7, is cold enough to see your breath. The farmhouses around Oshkosh are already framed with trees dappled orange and red.

The parking lot at the Ron Johnson for Senate headquarters on Oregon Street is filled, as the campaign's statewide staff has grown to 51. Visitors are greeted by a dog named Bourbon, a Shar-Pei owned by Kirsten Hopkins, Johnson's principal fundraiser.

Staffers occupy the rows of cubicles. They all walk with sheaves of paper clutched in their hands, as if the fate of the campaign hangs on those sheets. Johnson's son Ben and daughter Jenna, also working on the campaign, wander the halls. They are easily recognizable, given their ubiquitous position on televisions all over the state. Given, they're not exactly "stars" per se, but this is Oshkosh — they might as well be Tom Cruise and Miley Cyrus.



Johnson, 55, a thin man who wears a constant look of purpose, is sitting at a large wooden desk in his office, getting ready to do a national interview with Sirius XM Satellite Radio. His spokeswoman, Sara Sendek, sits across from him with a pad in her hand. As he discusses pension issues with the host, he scribbles a drawing representing a sun, with lines shooting out of it.

The interview seems to be the standard Ron Johnson interview — he throws out statistics, while seeming a little short of breath. His hands shake a little. But then, Johnson is asked a question about health care, and the whole interview dynamic shifts.

He begins discussing daughter Carey, who was born with a heart deformation 27 years ago. At the time, her specific disease was considered to be 75% fatal. Ron went from doctor to doctor, searching for one who could perform the procedure to save his little girl's life.



And it is golden. Suddenly, by talking about something from his own experience, Johnson has come to life. Like flipping a switch, he has gone from being a candidate to being a dad.

After the interview, we talk about his verbal flubs. Early on, his campaign had been hobbled by some of his public comments. During the British Petroleum oil spill debacle, Johnson had said “I’m not anti-Big Oil.” He called free trade “creative destruction,” implying that people had to lose their jobs to factories overseas in order to create new jobs here in America. He had said that “poor people don’t create jobs.” He expressed his opinion that people should be able to get their primary health care at Wal-Mart. And in an interview with the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* editorial board, he said he believed sunspots were one of the causes of global warming.

I ask him about sunspots. He shrugs. “Sometimes you just say things,” he says. I ask him if he thinks reporters are purposely trying to trip him up now. “Absolutely,” he answers.

The conflict in Johnson is evident — he got into the race because of his disgust with smooth-talking politicians. But now, he’s struggling to become a plausible politician himself. People say they want an outsider, but once a candidate gets *too* outside, it harms their brand. (Ask Republican Delaware Senate candidate Christine O’Donnell, who had to buy an ad denying she is a witch.)

Johnson’s staff has been working with him on committing errors of *omission* rather than errors of *commission*. Nobody will ever criticize you for something you don’t say, they tell him. He is now aware that things he does say can cost him a million dollars’ worth of ads.

While the Sept. 14 Republican primary was a mere formality (Johnson scored 85% of the vote), the news following the primary proved to be a surprise. A Rasmussen poll conducted the day after the primary showed Ron Johnson up 51%-44% on incumbent Russ Feingold. The campaign had expected a post-primary bump, but not *that* kind of bump.



'We spend a lot of time worrying about the press,' said staffer Jack Jablonski, 'and almost no time worrying about Feingold.'

Seeing his numbers begin to slip, Feingold began to step up his attacks on Johnson. The first came in the form of a television ad Feingold ran featuring news footage from a Madison television station that investigated whether Johnson had gotten government assistance to start his business 31 years ago.

It includes a clip of Johnson saying he never lobbied for "special treatment or a government payment," then shows headlines indicating Johnson received \$4 million in "government" loans to aid his business.

At issue was a tool called industrial revenue bonds, which pay tax-free interest and consequently allow a business to pay a lower interest rate on financing secured from the private underwriting market. There is no government guarantee, no government money, and the taxpayers are never at risk — and Johnson's company paid it all back on time.

To counter this attack, Johnson's campaign contacted two former Wisconsin secretaries of commerce, Bill McCoshen (who served under Gov. Tommy Thompson) and Dick Leinenkugel (whose service under Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle killed his own chances of running for the GOP Senate nomination Johnson eventually won.) The two secretaries wrote a letter pointing out that IRBs aren't "government aid," as Feingold's ad suggested.

This was one of the Feingold attacks that the Johnson campaign had anticipated. While it's much publicized when a candidate hires a private investigator to dig up dirt on an opponent, more often a candidate will hire someone to investigate him or herself.

This steels the candidate for the negative information the opponent is likely to use. Johnson's campaign did just this, so it already had a good list of the attacks Feingold was likely to launch.

In fact, the tricky part of running a campaign isn't knowing what will be used against you, it is guessing when those things will be deployed by your opponent.

In July, deputy campaign manager Jack Jablonski assumed



Feingold's next negative attack would be on free-trade issues. The attack came, but not until mid-September, when Feingold began running ads accusing Johnson of supporting international trade agreements like NAFTA, which Feingold said cost Wisconsin 64,000 jobs.

In late September, the Johnson campaign heard that he would be attacked for his involvement in the Catholic school system in Green Bay and the Fox River Valley. For years, Johnson had donated millions of dollars to Catholic schools in northeastern Wisconsin, despite not even being Catholic himself.

When a bill came before the Legislature to lift the statute of limitations for people wanting to sue the church for sex crimes, Johnson opposed it. He thought that it would make Catholic schools a magnet for lawsuits that could bankrupt

them. While Johnson supported tough criminal penalties for pedophiles, he didn't want to see all the good work he was trying to do torn apart by lawsuits based on events from 30 years earlier. He also worried that such "window" legislation could harm other non-profits like the Boys & Girls Clubs.

On Sept. 28, a publication called *Veterans Today* published the video of Johnson's testimony against the bill before the Wisconsin Legislature.

In the video, a bearded Ron Johnson, looking like a skinny Wolf Blitzer, reads through his objections to the bill — a bill, incidentally, on which the Democrat-controlled Legislature agreed with Johnson. It didn't clear either house.

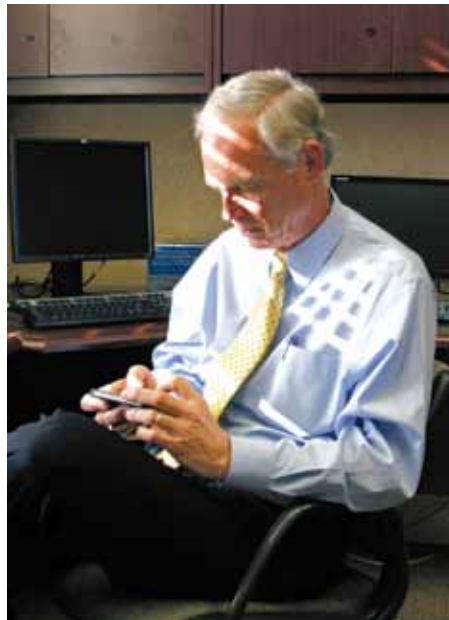
Nevertheless, the Johnson campaign took proactive measures to get ahead of the story. The left-wing blogosphere pounced immediately, posting "Ron Johnson supports pedophiles" entries everywhere. MSNBC host Keith Olbermann had a victim of pedophilia on the air to discuss his disgust with Johnson.

But Johnson's campaign was ready. It issued a fact sheet on the allegations that communications director Kristin Ruesch had drafted back in April while working at the state Republican Party. Johnson called for full disclosure by the Green Bay diocese in any ongoing investigations. Calls were made to media outlets all over the state to explain why this was a non-story.

And it worked. A story by *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* investigative reporter Dan Bice rumored to be following the allegations never materialized. (Bice had done an article on the issue two months earlier.) The story faded.

But the campaign wasn't out of the woods just yet — there was still material out there that could be used against Johnson. Running a campaign is very much like the movie *Carlito's Way* — just when you think you've escaped, Benny Blanco from the Bronx returns to take you out.

And the left-wing blogs kept trying. Their next charge was that Johnson had once hired a sex offender in his plastics plant. Never mind that in Wisconsin, it is against the law to consider someone's arrest or conviction record in a hiring decision. But because Johnson did hire this man, feeling he had been rehabilitated, *that* was used against him. (In any other circumstance, these same liberals would be all for giving ex-cons a second chance at employment.)



None of the attacks stuck. A

Rasmussen poll taken on Sept. 29 had Johnson up by an eye-opening 54%-42% margin. The day before, he had issued two new ads — one featuring the candidate standing in front of a whiteboard writing down the number of lawyers that currently serve in the Senate (57), as opposed to the number of accountants (1) and manufacturers (0). In the initial ad shoot, the numbers were wrong, so the ad had to be re-shot and some CGI blurring added to correct the numbers.

The second ad was slightly more negative in tone. (Campaign rule: If your opponent is running a negative ad, it's called a "negative ad." If your campaign is running a negative ad, it's

called a "contrast ad.") The ad criticized Feingold's vote for the health care bill, noting that before the bill passed, 55% of Wisconsinites opposed a "government takeover of health care."

(The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* labeled the entire ad as "false," as it incredibly didn't believe the bill amounted to "government health care.")

It wasn't a hard-core negative ad, though, and the health care bill is fair game under any circumstance. Jablonski said that, given Johnson's big lead, the plan was to stay positive.

In that vein, the campaign also cut an ad with Johnson and his daughter Carey, discussing her heart problem. But it needed to be re-shot, because the campaign felt Ron didn't deliver his lines with enough emotion.

At the end of the debate, one stunning fact was clear: Feingold knew he was going to lose the election.

The goal was to get a positive ad on the air featuring Carey, who, it was felt, “presents well on TV” (campaign-speak for “she’s hot”). Eventually, the ad was shelved altogether, as staff believed it didn’t pack the emotional punch they had anticipated.

Simple yet effective, Johnson’s ads were the envy of campaigns around the country.

Brad Todd, who produced the ad for OnMessage Media, said his competition isn’t the other candidate, but the ads that air directly before and after his campaign ad. “What you produce has to hold a viewer’s attention and look like it belongs with all the other ads on the air,” he said.

Soon, Johnson’s measured, disciplined campaign started to get national recognition. At the *Washington Post*’s “The Fix” blog, Chris Cillizza said Johnson “has run one of the best — if not the best — Senate campaigns this cycle.”

The Oshkosh Northwestern, Johnson’s hometown paper, called his campaign staff “brilliant.” *The Washington Times* said, “aided by a smart and savvy campaign staff, [Johnson]

has refined his message and appearance.”

Feingold wasn’t helping his own case by stumbling into a few uncharacteristic missteps. For instance, one of the senator’s favorite talking points was that he has been outspent in every one of his Senate races. For this oft-repeated claim, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*’s “Politifact” feature deemed Feingold a “Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire,” as he significantly outspent challenger Tim Michels in 2004.

In an interview with the *Journal Sentinel* editorial board, Feingold complained about Johnson’s insistence that the 18-year senator was a “career politician.” “I think it’s a pretty sad thing for our society when somebody runs a campaign telling young people, ‘Don’t you dare go into public service, or you’re going to be mocked,’” Feingold told the board.

Of course, it was Feingold who, within weeks of joining the race, called Ron Johnson a racist, implied he was a communist sympathizer, and had fabricated his positions on a number of issues. So exactly who was keeping people from entering politics? Did Feingold expect a telethon for three-



term U.S. senators?

Feingold even bumbled his television ads. On Oct. 1, he began running an ad bragging about his vote for the poisonous health care bill — a bill that, according to Rasmussen, 57% of Americans wanted repealed (46% “strongly”). At the end of the ad, two women urge Ron Johnson to “keep your hands off my health care.” As if people couldn’t figure out that a government takeover of health care is the ultimate “hands on” approach to medical care.

From watching the ad, one would get the impression that it was Ron Johnson who wanted to take over health care — the truth, obviously, was the exact opposite.

But that paled in comparison to Feingold’s next TV blunder. On Oct. 5, the Feingold campaign ran an ad accusing the Johnson campaign of “dancing in the end zone” too early. The video featured a clip of one of the most



notorious moments in recent Wisconsin sports history — then-Minnesota Viking Randy Moss mooning the crowd in a playoff victory over the Green Bay Packers at Lambeau Field. (In an odd twist, Moss was traded back to the Vikings from the New England Patriots the very day the ad began running.)

As soon as the ad appeared, the Johnson campaign sprang into action, calling the National Football League offices. Since anyone who has ever watched an NFL game knows that footage of the games is copyrighted material,

the Johnson campaign suspected Feingold hadn’t gotten clearance to use the clip in his ad. Indeed that was the case.

That very afternoon, Feingold had to pull the ad per an NFL directive. How ironic! Here was Russ Feingold — who had made a career of telling people what was permissible to put in television ads — having to cancel his own ad for using illegal material.



The left-wing blogosphere pounced, posting ‘Ron Johnson supports pedophiles’ entries everywhere. But Johnson’s campaign was ready to respond.

Feingold’s missteps helped Johnson stay ahead in early October: a “We the People” poll showed him up 49%-41%. But that didn’t necessarily mean all was well with the campaign staff.

The pressure was causing significant fissures within the staff. This is common with campaigns. By the end of the race, people who have been trapped in a headquarters for months

The campaign was also rebuffing national politicians who wanted to come to Wisconsin to campaign for Johnson. But since Johnson was running as the anti-politician, he turned almost all of them down.

“You name the national Republican figure, and we told them there were better places they could be,” said one staffer.

One state senator called to tell the campaign it could

improve Ron’s numbers by buying an ad in a political leaflet printed in a Milwaukee-area conservative activist’s basement. Other state legislators, despite never having run a competitive race, called on a daily basis to offer advice.

But even with all of these sudden pressures from the outside world, the campaign had to deal internally with its most daunting task of all: Johnson had to get ready to debate one of



can barely stand the sight of one another. Among the Johnson campaign staff, these divisions ran deep.

People began moving desks around to avoid one another. Some staffers appeared to be more concerned about landing a job with Sen. Johnson than doing the work they had been assigned. There was talk of firing troublesome staffers, but with a month to go, there was no time to train replacements.

The campaign was also fending off political consultants. Three months earlier, when Johnson was a long shot, the campaign had struggled to find help. Now, with the polls showing the candidate well ahead, consultants descended like locusts.

Undoubtedly, they had resume-padding in mind, wanting to share credit for the expected stunning Johnson win. If victory has a thousand fathers, the Johnson campaign was quickly becoming the Maury Povich Show of campaigns.

the U.S. Senate’s most capable orators, Russ Feingold.

The constant drumbeat of negative stories during

September created a schism within the campaign staff. Ruesch and Sara Sendek, the public relations team, wanted to keep open lines of communication with the press. They felt that’s what they were there for — to deal with reporters and hopefully head off more negative stories.

Campaign manager Juston Johnson and Jablonski, on the other hand, had a different philosophy. Johnson (who’s unrelated to the candidate) indelicately described his preferred strategy as “don’t ever f@#*king talk to the media. For any reason. Ever.”

They figured the press was going to write unflattering stories about Johnson no matter what, so there was no sense in giving them more material. And their best bet was taking

Ron's message directly to the voters, via television ads.

"The press is worse than the Feingold camp," said Jablonski. "We spend a lot of time worrying about the press, and almost no time worrying about Feingold."

This discussion continued up until Oct. 22, when Johnson arrived in Milwaukee for the third and final debate with Feingold. Johnson and Feingold appeared on stage at Marquette's new law school, took some photos together, and settled into their seats.

It was an uncomfortable 20 minutes before the debate would actually begin — during which time Feingold smiled and joked, and Johnson sat and stared straight ahead.

Once the debate began, it was clear that it was going to be monumentally boring. This was the best-case scenario for Johnson. Feingold had the chance to stir things up, but chose to keep the debate restrained.

Johnson did an adequate, if unspectacular, job of answering questions. In the weeks leading up to his first two debates, he had been through endless hours of often confrontational debate prep with his staff. For this debate, he was told not to refer to the "Bush tax cuts." He uttered the term once, but then when it came back around, he said the letter "B" before stopping himself and saying "the 2003 tax cuts."

(When asked later about how he felt about his staff telling him what specific words to use, he pursed his lips and said, "It's annoying.")

As the debate moved on, it became clear that this wasn't a contest between Ron Johnson and Russ Feingold. It was a debate between Feingold and the voters of Wisconsin. Feingold tried to convince the audience that the health care and stimulus bills he supported were to their benefit. Polls showed that the public strongly disagreed. Johnson's presence was almost superfluous.

At the end of the debate, one stunning fact was clear: Feingold knew he was going to lose the election. But he was going to lose like a man.



After the 90-minute debate, Ruesch and Sendek retreated to their holding room, where Sendek furiously banged out a press release. Johnson, his brain freed of debate facts and linguistic rules, strode out into the night to speak to 400 GOP loyalists at Serb Hall on Milwaukee's southside. But first he had a message for one of his staffers:

"That was hard."

In early April of 2010, Michelle Litjens, chairwoman of the Winnebago Republican Party, found some local guy who was thinking of running for the U.S. Senate. She brought him to a meeting of conservative operatives

in Madison. He didn't even know he was supposed to speak, and patched together a few talking points in the car on the drive down.

When Litjens introduced businessman Ron Johnson, people rolled their eyes and checked their watches as he ambled through his reasons for running. There were already a few people thinking about running for Senate, even Wisconsin political legend Tommy Thompson.

The last thing Wisconsin needed was another rich guy to serve as fodder for the Feingold political machine. Just who did this thin-faced, white-haired guy think he was?

Six months later, everyone found out. He was Ron Johnson, Republican senator from Wisconsin. Just months ago, Johnson had decided to run because he abhorred politicians — now he had become a plausible one himself.

On election night, Democrats suffered a bloodbath. Republicans won more than 60 seats and regained control of the House of Representatives. In the Senate, the GOP picked up six seats, short of the number needed to take control.

Yet many of the states where the GOP gained seats (Illinois, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, North Dakota, and Indiana) routinely elect Republicans statewide; Wisconsin hadn't elected a GOP U.S. senator since 1986.

National media darlings like Marco Rubio and Rand Paul sailed to election, but did so in seats previously held by Republicans. Ron Johnson's pickup stands alone as perhaps the most stunning GOP victory in 2010. ■



ON THE FRONTLINES OF REFORM
WITH WRITER SUNNY SCHUBERT

It's 'Put Up or Shut Up'

Rep. Mike Huebsch talks about the GOP's legislative agenda for change

On Nov. 3, state Rep. Mike Huebsch woke up “feeling like the Packers had won the NFC Championship game: It’s great, but now we’ve got a lot of work to do.”

Huebsch, 45, easily won reelection, the ninth time that voters in the La Crosse area’s 94th Assembly District have sent him to Madison. But this time, the veteran lawmaker is keenly aware that it’s “put up or shut up” time for Republicans.

“I think our failure to do that in the past has led to a great deal of the mistrust our citizens feel about their government,” Huebsch says. “Voters do not want to feel that they’ve been misled.”

His legislative to-do list includes: a balanced state budget, a better business climate, lower taxes, more jobs, and restored voter trust in state government.

Voters have clearly lost confidence, according to the Wisconsin Citizen Survey, which was conducted this past March by WI’s publisher, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute.

- Only 23% of the 600 likely voters surveyed thought our elected leaders were up to the task of solving the state’s \$2 billion structural budget deficit.

- Only 38% believed elected officials were working on issues important to the average Wisconsin family.
- Only 39% found the state’s elected officials to be trustworthy.
- Almost 60% said Wisconsin’s elected leaders only care about the wishes of lobbyists and the rich.

A June WPRI poll of 2,508 residents found that 61%

were angry or frustrated with state government, compared to 34% who said they were content. Sixty-four percent said they never or only occasionally trust state leaders to do the right thing, compared with 35% who always or usually trust the government.

Such deep-felt voter

cynicism helped power the growth of the Tea Party movement, which in turn helped the GOP regain power in Madison. But, Huebsch warns, the voters will turn on the GOP just as fast as they turned on the Obama administration if Republicans revert to “business as usual.”

Huebsch set himself on a lifetime course of public service at a young age.

‘We have had a tremendous growth in government. And politicians from both parties have done a tremendous job of shifting the blame to anybody but us.’

He grew up in Onalaska (where his parents moved from Milwaukee when he was five), and he remembers how impressed he was with George Washington and Abraham Lincoln when he read their biographies in fifth grade. The political bug really bit when Huebsch was in eighth grade and his mother woke him up one morning to tell him that the middle school he attended was on fire.

“For a middle-schooler, finding out that your school had burned down is some of the best news you can get!” he recalls with a laugh. But the school was only two years old and had been built on an “open classroom” design, with pods ringing a central classroom area. Some school board members wanted to abandon the open-classroom concept, believing the design had helped the fire spread.

Huebsch was president of the student council, which conducted a survey of students and found that most loved the open-classroom configuration. So he was selected to present the findings to the school board.

“There were probably about 200 people in the audience,” he says, “but of course I was convinced there were about 5,000. I was very nervous, but I got up and gave my speech, and lo and behold, the school board kept the open-classroom design. It made a huge impression on me when I realized I could have that kind of impact.”

After high school, Huebsch spent four years at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Okla., leaving the conservative Christian college nine credits short of graduation. “Basically, I ran out of money before I could write my senior thesis.

“The real irony,” he adds with another laugh, “is that they say I never completed another class:

American Government 101. Anyway, I have promised my mother I will finish my degree someday, and I will.”

Huebsch returned to Onalaska in 1990 and went to work for a printing company, starting out as a press operator and ending up as vice president for sales just four years later.

He also served on the La Crosse County Board from 1992 to '95. Ever since, he's been dividing his time between Madison and the home he shares in West Salem with his wife, Valeria, and their two sons, Ryan and Brett.

Huebsch does not hide the fact that he is a social conservative as well as fiscal conservative, and he wishes those two factions of the Republican Party could work together better.

“The fiscal conservatives get so mad

at the social conservatives,” he says. “That’s what happened in 2008 — the fiscal hawks stayed home, and the GOP was the big loser.”

He feels fortunate to have begun his legislative career when Republican hero Tommy Thompson was governor, noting that of the 99 members of the Assembly, only 20 were in office under Thompson.

Since then, he says, “We have had a tremendous growth in government. And politicians from both parties have done a tremendous job of shifting the blame to anybody but us. We say that the recession was caused by bankers acting like kids in a candy shop, but we weren’t much better.

“Think about it: The state employs 60,000 people, but not one of them has been laid off because of the recession. Tax collections are down, but government hasn’t been cut. Our leaders — both in Madison and in Washington — have demonstrated a fundamental lack of understanding of how the economy works.”

*Huebsch warns that
the voters will turn on the
GOP just as fast as they turned
on the Obama administration
if Republicans revert to
‘business as usual.’*

Evidence that the state needs to change direction includes the \$2 billion structural deficit that the Doyle administration bequeathed to the new governor and Legislature. Because of the deficit, the Pew Center on the States rated Wisconsin's budget woes among the 10 worst in the nation.

"Wisconsin people don't have enough money for what government wants them to pay," Huebsch says. "We have to cut spending; we simply cannot afford the government we've got."

For the Legislature, Huebsch says, that means a return to basics, which he defines as education, public safety and helping the people who need it most. Everything else is negotiable.

This segues neatly into his next priority: growing the economy

to provide more jobs. According to the Pew Center, Wisconsin has lost 140,000 jobs since the recession began, including about one-eighth of its manufacturing jobs.

"We've seen a decline in entrepreneurship in Wisconsin," says Huebsch. "People are afraid to invest. But there are many ways we could encourage business growth. To start with, we could remove taxes on small businesses so their owners can reinvest their profits rather than sending them to Madison."

Huebsch feels that in addition to improving the tax climate, the state needs to lighten the regulatory burden.

"We have a very zealous regulatory climate in Wisconsin," he says. "I'm not saying we need to reduce the safety of our workplaces or products, but we are in competition with other states for

job creation, and the bureaucracy always wants to make that more difficult."

Given his experience, Huebsch is mentioned as a candidate for Secretary of Administration in the Walker regime. He downplays the possibility, saying there are lots of qualified candidates. But when asked what role the DOA secretary could have in improving public confidence in government, he quickly says, "Accountability."

"We have to start running the state like a

business, and that means holding people accountable."

The state's mismanaged computer project illustrates the problem. In 2005, Huebsch says, the Doyle administration told taxpayers it would cost \$12.8 million to consolidate state computer servers. By the

end of this past June, the cost had risen to \$110 million, and the project still wasn't finished.

"At some point, you have to cut your losses. That's the kind of accountability you see every day in the private sector, but rarely in state government. You need to bring that same kind of lean approach to state spending."

Huebsch believes that if Wisconsin Republicans keep their promises to rein in state spending, lower taxes and cut unemployment by improving the business climate, voters will feel renewed confidence in their leadership and keep them in office.

"But if we don't, if we don't learn from mistakes we made in the past, we deserve to lose," he said. ■



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

Johnson is not a lawyer, but a manufacturer — as his brilliant “whiteboard” ad conveyed so effectively. He’s a smart guy, but he’s not a professional politician and has no apparent interest in becoming one. That is a powerful tool in a world where reelection is often the highest priority.

And Johnson might be the purest blend of Tea Party/Republican Party in the coming Congress. His speeches at Tea Party rallies first caught the attention of influential conservatives and the Republican Party of Wisconsin, which, unlike many other state parties in the country, quickly understood the advantages of allying with the various Tea Party groups.

The fact that Johnson is of the Tea Party and in the Republican Party will put him in a position to serve as a bridge between Republican Party leaders in Washington and grassroots conservatives across the country.

Walker's victory was important for other reasons. Wisconsin is a mess. Taxes are too high, spending is out of control, and Madison is dysfunctional. Walker is a problem solver. He tells people what he plans to do, and, with rare exceptions, he does what he says.

As one prominent Washington-based GOP strategist told me: “Scott’s popularity has less to do with what he’s saying and more to do with what he’s done.” National Republicans from Jeb Bush to Newt Gingrich to Haley Barbour paid careful attention to what Walker did in Milwaukee County.

On Nov.2, some two hours after polls had closed
across the state, Walker took a call from Gov. Jim
Doyle.

The two men chatted briefly, and Doyle congratulated Walker on his impressive win. “He was very gracious. I thought about asking him to stop the train, but decided it wasn’t probably the best timing,” Walker joked moments after the call ended.

A week later, however, Walker sat down with

Doyle, listened to his case for funding the train, and promptly dismissed it. He shrugged off threats to pull the funding from Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and told me that his inclination was to escalate the fight, not run from it.

This, probably more than anything else, is why Scott Walker was elected governor. Not the train, specifically — though it represented government waste and arrogance in a way that was easy for voters to understand — but Walker's simple way of talking about it. People don't want the train. It costs a lot of money. We can't afford it. I'm going to stop it. Walker's stripped-down rhetoric is an asset.

National Republicans from Jeb Bush to Newt Gingrich to Haley Barbour paid careful attention to what Walker did in Milwaukee County.

There is no question that these two victories — along with Sean Duffy and Reid Ribble winning House seats and the GOP capturing the state Legislature — have once again focused attention on Wisconsin as a swing state in 2012.

Political strategists consider Wisconsin winnable for Republicans and Democrats alike in presidential elections. But it has been a quarter century since a Republican won Wisconsin — Ronald Reagan in 1984.

Could that be changing? Ron Johnson's vote percentage was the highest for a Republican senatorial candidate since 1956. And Walker, as noted, won 60 of 72 counties. So Wisconsin is in play in 2012.

No surprise, then, that just before Jim Doyle called Walker, he took another call — the first congratulatory call he received. It was presumed 2012 GOP presidential frontrunner Mitt Romney. ■



People do stupid things

That's why political movements should be anchored in ideas

In the July issue of *WI Magazine*, I got the chance to write about the current “Conscience of Conservatism,” Congressman Paul Ryan. (A quick aside: Now would be a good time to start the “Paul Ryan Drinking Game.” Any time this magazine mentions Ryan, take a drink. You’ll be dialing up former lovers by the third page.)

During our discussion about his growing fame, Ryan said something that I immediately dismissed as false modesty: “It’s not about me, or my name, it’s about the ideas that I’m pushing.”

Like Frank Lloyd Wright, I prefer honest arrogance to fake humility. But in reviewing the past election season, I think Ryan has a point.

People do stupid things. We drill holes in our bodies. We tattoo the names of our favorite bands on our bodies. We listen to modern country music. We smoke. We have children with people to whom we are not married. We grow comb-overs.

And too often, politics is about people and not ideas. Flawed, misinformed, vulgar people.

Take, for example, poor Christine O’Donnell, the defeated Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in Delaware. Had O’Donnell beaten the odds and earned election to the Senate, she would have likely been a dependable conservative — something voters in record numbers all over the country said they wanted.

But in the public’s perception, O’Donnell the oddball swallowed O’Donnell the conservative. She famously dabbled in the occult in high school, leading to the most memorable ad of the 2010 election cycle, in which she declared: “I’m not a witch.”

The examples of personal quirks derailing policy-minded pols could go on forever. Former New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer’s thirst for prostitutes quickly cut short his thirst to clean up Wall Street. Erstwhile South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford’s principled

anti-federal stimulus stand was forgotten when the voters learned he was being stimulated by an Argentine mistress.

Hanging the future of a political party on star power rather than ideological principles is always a risk. For one, candidates elected on the sheer force of their personality often stray from the parties that elected them. (See Schwarzenegger, Arnold.)

If ideas ran the show, Republicans wouldn’t have to cringe when Sarah Palin’s family life turns into a “Green Acres” episode. Democrats wouldn’t have to slap their heads in abasement when John Edwards is found to have fathered all of the Jonas Brothers.

And when politics becomes about ideas and not personalities, the discussion suddenly ramps up to a new level. Take, for example, the much-talked-about documentary *Waiting for Superman*. Written and directed by Davis Guggenheim (who directed Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*), the movie details how

Examples of personal quirks derailing policy-minded pols could go on forever.

the American education system is destroying opportunity for inner-city youth.

Guggenheim forcefully argues for education reform,

including eliminating tenure for teachers and expanding educational options.

Think tanks like this magazine’s publisher, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, have been soberly urging such reforms for decades. Yet once the *Inconvenient Truth* director waded into the morass, traditional Democrats sat up and began to ask hard questions about teachers unions. Suddenly, it’s not who is saying it, but what is being said that takes precedence.

A little Hollywood can be a good thing.

Certainly, it’s Pollyannaish to believe the day is coming when every voter carefully reads candidate policy pronouncements as if they are mutual fund prospectuses. Politics has drifted into the realm of entertainment and will likely stay there.

One suspects that Sen.-elect Rand Paul’s devotion to the “Aqua Buddha” occupies the same lobe in the national cranium as Lindsay Lohan’s inability to wear underwear in public.

But Paul Ryan is showing that pushing ideas for a politician doesn’t have to be a death sentence. In fact, it can help get government back where it belongs — in the news section. ■

Christian Schneider, who never reads trashy online stories about Lindsay Lohan while at work, is a senior fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute. His blog can be read at WPRI.org.

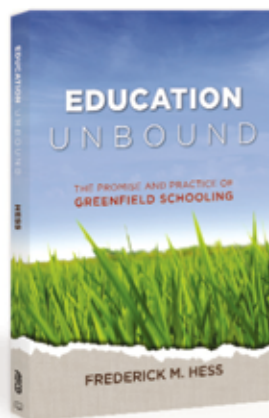
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By Frederick M. Hess

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Frederick M. Hess is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. A nationally recognized educator, political scientist, and author, his books include *Educational Entrepreneurship*, *Common Sense School Reform*, and *Spinning Wheels*.



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