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SEPTEMBER 2011

WISCONSIN INTEREST

No Free Lunch

The middle class feasts
on a subsidy intended
for the poor.

BY MIKE NICHOLS

Total recall: Epic fail

BY CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER

The fall of Madison

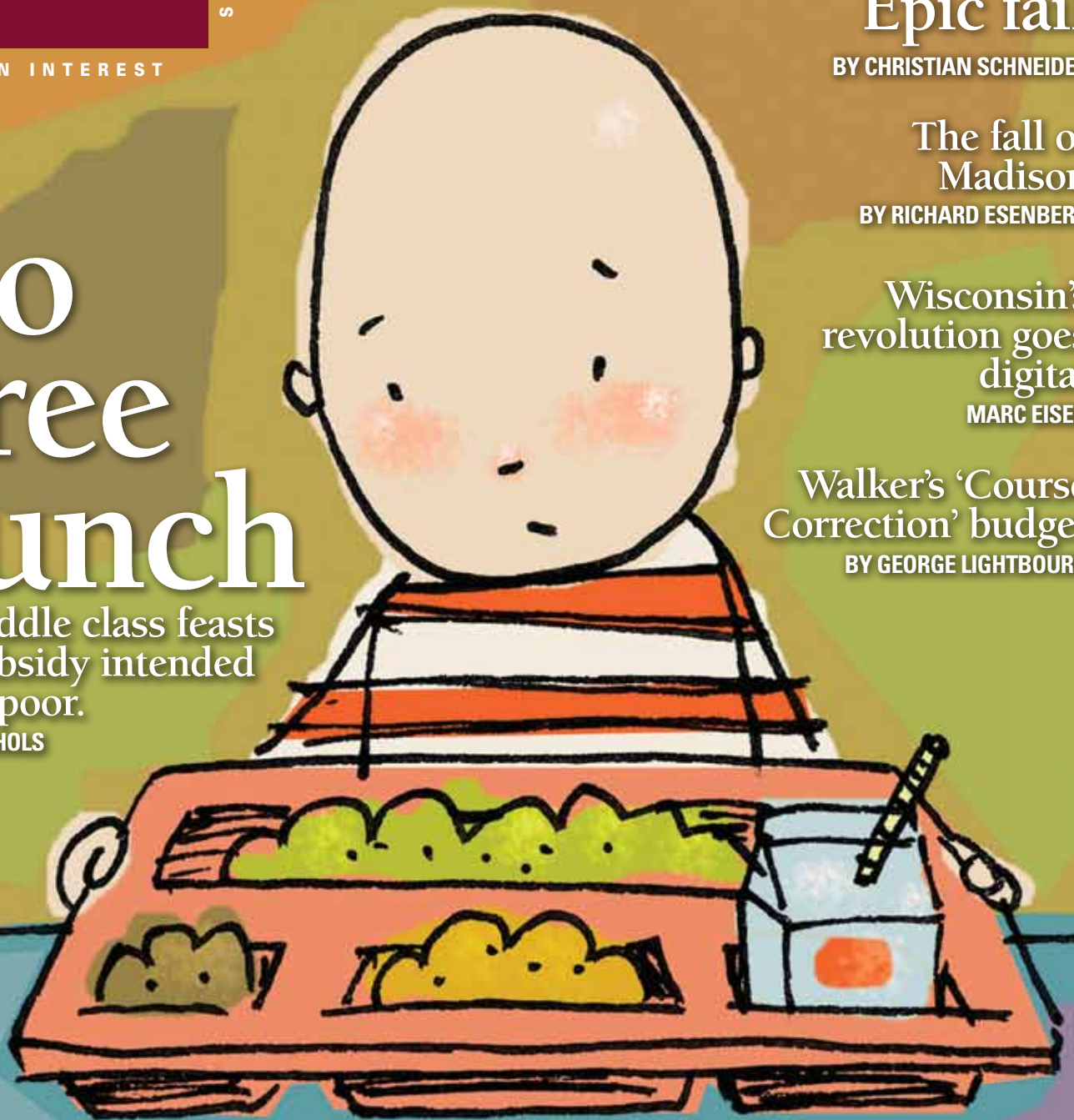
BY RICHARD ESENBERG

Wisconsin's revolution goes digital

MARC EISEN

Walker's 'Course Correction' budget

BY GEORGE LIGHTBOURN





Editor > CHARLES J. SYKES

Eventful, yes; apocalypse, no

Consider for a moment that Scott Walker has been governor for just nine months: a period of mass protests, runaway legislators, court challenges, elections, recounts, recalls and an historic shift in the balance of power between the public and private sectors in Wisconsin. And it's not even fall yet.

In their effort to derail the Walker agenda, organized labor and the left went all in: Outside groups spent nearly \$30 million in a furious attempt to flip control of the state Senate, only to fall short. Our coverage features Christian Schneider chronicling the historic and ultimately futile recall campaign that ended in late August.

At the same time, the realization seems to be dawning that the Walker budget is not the apocalypse that critics had

foretold. In a sober analysis, George Lightbourn explains what the budget actually did . . . and did not do.

As Marc Eisen notes, the battles over collective bargaining marked not only a political watershed but a turning point for the new alternative media as well. The protests "demonstrated the potential power of social media as a mobilizing force," but also the relative decline of traditional media in setting the political agenda.

And, in our cover story, Mike Nichols chronicles what, in other contexts, I have called our growing "nation of moochers": school meal programs "larded with middle-income families . . . siphoning untold tens of millions of dollars" from programs meant for the poor. Bon appétit.

WPRI

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

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

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

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WISCONSIN INTEREST

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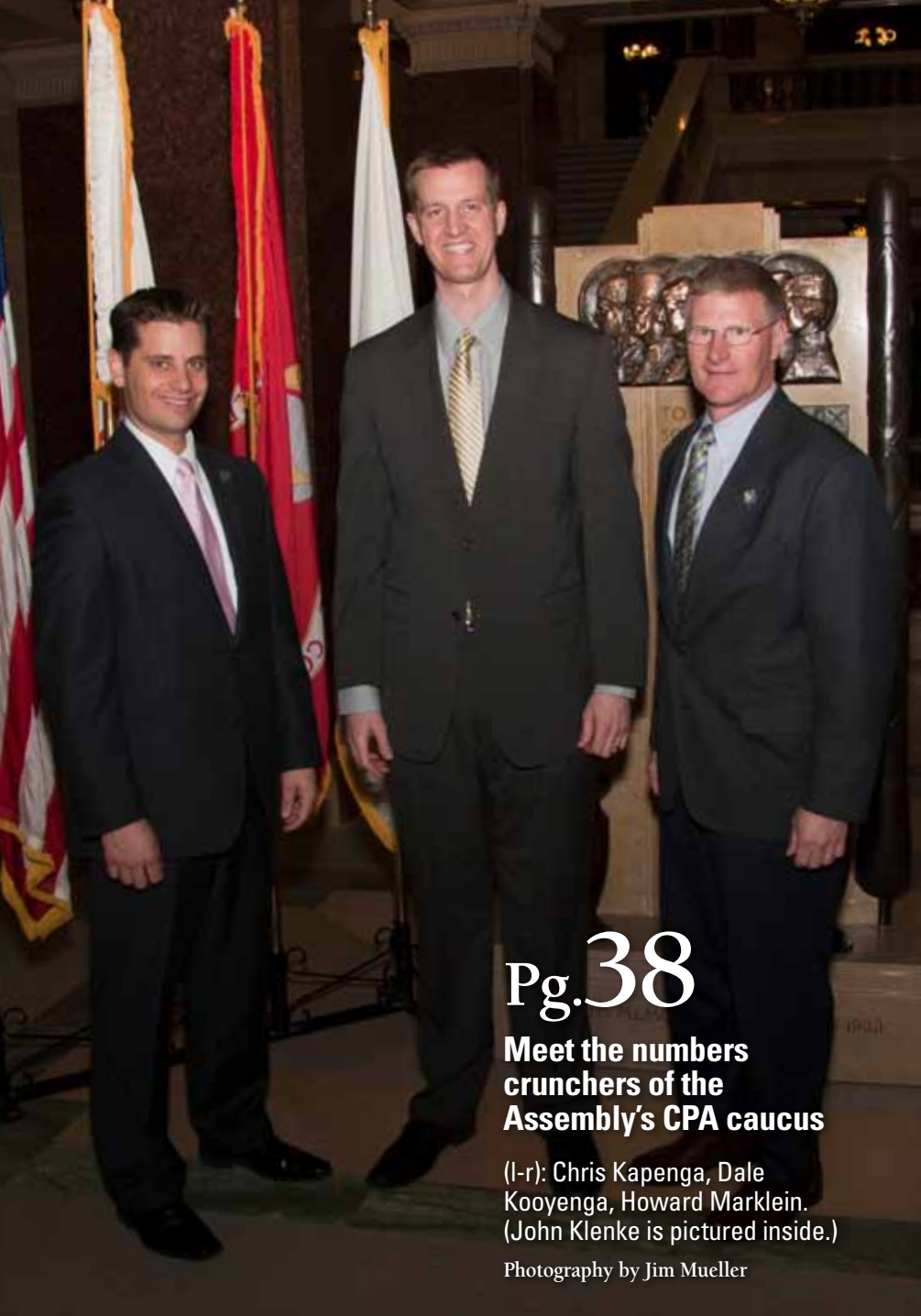
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Meet the numbers crunchers of the Assembly's CPA caucus

(l-r): Chris Kapenga, Dale Kooyenga, Howard Marklein. (John Klenke is pictured inside.)

Photography by Jim Mueller

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A revolution undeterred

The liberal counterattack wilts in the summer heat

As spring turned into summer, Wisconsin remained the center of the political universe. Pundits who labored over obscure Midwestern place names like Oconomowoc and Ashwaubenon pronounced ponderous judgments on the political mood of this politically divided and increasingly consequential state. The airwaves filled with images of mass protests, bongo drums and vuvuzela-blowing activists who besieged the state Capitol. Senators fled, unionistas threatened to boycott businesses, and the mighty arm of the progressive movement descended upon the state vowing to avenge itself on Gov. Scott Walker and the Republicans for challenging the government union monopolies.

In the end, they failed.

A case of premature elation

Progressives sought to turn the election for the state Supreme Court into a referendum on their grievances, and they briefly held victory in their grasp when their candidate, Joanne Kloppenburg, with more confidence than mathematical sophistication, declared herself the winner based on a 203-vote margin out of 1.5 million votes cast.

However, her dream was crushed when Waukesha County officials announced that the total had failed to include precincts that added 7,381 votes for incumbent David Prosser. Kloppenburg, who soon became a founding member of the Wisconsin Coalition of the Bitter, refused to concede and forced a costly and futile recount.

Waukesha's County Clerk Kathy Nickolaus earned her place in political lore as the official who failed to report the "missing" votes until two days after the election, thus inspiring a generation of paranoid progressive bloggers. So deep was the mark she made on impressionable minds that after the August recall defeat, Dems reflexively accused her of "tampering" with the votes in the race between state Sen. Alberta Darling and challenger Sandy Pasch, a charge they later retracted.

Memo to out-of-state pundits who will cover the 2012 presidential recount: Waukesha is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable.



Have they considered yoga?

Undoubtedly reflecting the stresses of public service, two mayors found it necessary to take a break from their duties to go on benders. Marinette Mayor Robert Harbick was arrested for driving with a blood alcohol level more than three times the legal limit. He was overshadowed by Sheboygan Mayor Bob Ryan, who enjoyed a lost weekend at a tiki bar in Elkhart Lake, where, reported witnesses, "he had his shirt off and was twisting his nipples," as he regaled patrons with tales of his marital and personal travails.

Governor fails to destroy schools

Despite dire warnings of massive teacher cutbacks and urchins consigned to classrooms made out of corrugated tin, school districts across the state found themselves in remarkably good shape under the first Walker budget, which freed them from most collective bargain restraints.

In Kaukauna, a \$400,000 deficit was turned into a positive \$1.5 million, enabling the school to hire new teachers and provide merit pay, while reducing class sizes. Other districts found they could save millions by dropping the teachers union's own pricey health insurance company and switching to more competitive carriers. Only in Milwaukee, where the teachers union refused to make any concessions even to save its own members' jobs, were large-scale layoffs planned.

Even more surprising, Walker failed to decimate funding of the state's largest city despite the solemn warnings of Milwaukee's mayor that the governor's budget would "explode" that city's structural deficit. To the contrary, the city now says that it will save at least \$25 million and maybe as much as \$36 million as a result of changes in its health benefits. Despite a \$14 million cut in state aid, Milwaukee actually finds itself in the black as a result of the Walker reforms.

We'd like to report that Mayor Tom Barrett, who lost to Walker last November, thanked his erstwhile foe for this good news, but graciousness is in short supply this political season.

This way for new jobs

Even as the Milwaukee Brewers make a pennant run, following the trail of Cheesehead Domination blazed by the Green Bay Packers, Wisconsin also saw good news on the jobs front. Perhaps aided by the decision of neighboring states to declare a jihad on business, Wisconsin added more than 39,000 private-sector jobs in the first six months of the year, including 9,500 manufacturing jobs. In June, only four states created more private-sector jobs than Wisconsin.

Wisconsin finds its senatorial voice

Even as veteran Sen. Herb Kohl announced his exit, newly elected Ron Johnson assumed a surprisingly high profile role in debates over the deficit. Unaccustomed to a senator who does newsworthy things, the state's media were forced to retool their coverage, especially as Johnson is turning out to be the maverick that Russ Feingold always claimed to be.

Run, Paul, Run!

Congressman Paul Ryan failed to quell the chorus of well-wishers urging him to enter the presidential hustings. A quick Google search on the words "Paul Ryan for President" generates 747,000 hits. The Power Line blog declared, "Paul Ryan is the most consequential House Republican since Jack Kemp in the late 1970s."

National Review's Jonah Goldberg was more insistent: "He has three young kids and would have to get organized and funded from a cold start for a long-shot run. But politics is about moments, and this one is calling him. Unless someone suddenly rises to the challenge, the cries of 'Help us, Paul Ryan, you're our only hope!' will only get louder."

Dems play 'class warfare' card

And then there was The Battle for Wisconsin, Summer Edition, which featured the attempted recall of six Republican and three Democratic senators. National unions, Democrats and even the Obama White House went all in. Hopes again ran high.

Even before polls opened, state Democratic Party chair Mike Tate called his shot, declaring, "There's no way we don't take back the majority unless something fundamental

changes." In the end, the effort was an epic failure, but even in failure the attempt to flip state government here had national implications.

Greg Sargent, a lefty blogger for The Washington Post, remarked on the distinctive nature of the left's counter-revolution in Wisconsin. Rather than making any pretense of moderation, Wisconsin Dems, he wrote, built their movement "around an unabashedly class-based set of themes that rely on a type of bare-knuckled class-warfare rhetoric that makes many national Dems queasy." Had they succeeded, it would have provided "a model for a more aggressive, populist approach for Dems in 2012."

Civility update

The recall elections took place against a background of routine attempts to shout down the governor at public appearances, including the disruption of a ceremony for Special Olympians and even the opening of the State Fair. This became so common as to hardly be considered newsworthy by the mainstream media. "Sic semper tyrannis," shouted one anti-Walker heckler, quoting the assassin of Abraham Lincoln (and of Julius Caesar). On the floor of the Assembly, a Democratic legislator from Oshkosh shouted at a female colleague: "You are f**king dead."

Oddly enough, this failed to play well with voters.

A light to the world

As summer faded, Wisconsin again provided a glimmer of hope to a troubled world. The day after the first round of recall elections, the Wall Street Journal editorialized:

"They called it Armageddon. They promised political revenge, and they said it would be the beginning of the end of the GOP ascendancy of 2010. Unions across the country threw everything they had to defeat Wisconsin state senators who voted for collective bargaining reforms for government workers, and on Tuesday the unions lost.

"Maybe we're not Greece yet."

No, we are Wisconsin. ■

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



Game-changer

Scott Walker is Reagan-like in his bold steps to remake Wisconsin government

BY RICHARD ESENBERG

Madison has fallen.

All of its settled ways have been disturbed. The unbroken and upward trajectory of government spending might well flatline. The New Deal symbiosis between the elected and the supplicant in which, as FDR aide Harry Hopkins is reported to have said, “tax and spend” becomes “elect and elect” seems, if not gone, at risk.

To be sure, resistance continues. The defeated partisans still place signs in the windows — the offices of Democratic legislators resemble a college dorm circa 1969 - and scrawl messages in chalk on the sidewalks. They put on orange t-shirts and hold hootenannies in the Capitol rotunda. They sing the old hits — *Solidarity Forever*, *Guantanamo*, the *Internationale*.

There remains hope for restoration. Following passage of the budget-repair bill, Dane County liberals, apparently mistaking Wisconsin for Greece, called for a “general strike” — a term that I have not heard used in reference to American politics since *The White Album*. Recently, in a restaurant on the Capitol Square,



I overheard a woman say that it would be fascinating when “the United Nations comes to Wisconsin to investigate Walker’s human rights violations.”

There may still be victories on the left. I don’t expect to see the UN blue helmets marching down East Washington any time soon, but the recall elections may return control of the Senate to the Democrats. As Democrats learned last fall, there are no political victories that cannot be reversed.

But I want to suggest that Gov. Scott Walker’s bold steps are game changers — policies that are Reaganesque in not only advancing a policy position but in changing the debate that surrounds it. They will do this not because they are immediately popular but because, over the long run, they may work.

Arnold Kling and Nick Schulz point out in a recent issue of National Affairs that services provided by the government are notoriously inefficient and resistant to improvements in productivity. Part of this is that

they are labor intensive in a way that cannot be readily addressed by advances in technology.

But this inefficiency is also rooted in the unionization of government employees. The economic and political critiques of collective bargaining in the public sector are well known. All unions are cartels designed to shift the supply curve of labor. In the private sector, the objective is to increase employees' share of a firm's output by either reducing profits or raising prices. There are, of course, no profits to reduce in government so that unionization necessarily raises its price, i.e., taxes.

In the private sector, the ability of unions to increase labor's share of a firm's output is disciplined (as are profits) by the market. In the old phrase, pigs get fat but hogs get slaughtered. Overreach and you lose business. This is one reason that unions have become rather thin on the ground among private employers.

In the public sector, there is little or no competition to hold down the cost of services. While the political process theoretically disciplines public bodies, those processes tend to be dominated by the intensely interested. Unions are far more interested in the terms and conditions of their members' employment than the general public. They also play a significant role in choosing the officials with whom they negotiate. As the reaction to collective bargaining reform has demonstrated, public employee unions are the alpha males on the political playground. One nasty look and Democrats hand over the lunch money.

Taken together, these factors produce precisely what we see in public employment — generous compensation packages in which the most expensive provisions are often opaque and deferred in a way that avoids public objection. We see benefit packages and work rules that would never survive competition in the private sector.

What Walker has attempted is to, in President Obama's phrase, "bend the cost curve" for the provision of government services. Faced with a \$3.6 billion structural deficit, it was inevitable that state and local government would have less. Reforming collective bargaining reform is an attempt to do more with less.

There is a certain irony in this. The left has excoriated Walker and the Republicans for turning their backs on children, the elderly, working families, and virtually every other sentient thing, save for "corporations and the super-rich."

'Turning his back' on those who in need is precisely what the governor has not done. Instead, he found a way to deliver their services at a more affordable price.

But "turning his back" on those who need government services is precisely what Walker has not done. Instead, he found a way to deliver those services at a more affordable price.

This is not to say that the Walker budget will result in no service cuts — the verdict is still out. But, as it provisions go into effect, we are beginning to see school districts across the state announcing millions in savings and cancelling layoffs.

This is where the game may change. If Walker has really managed to close the budget gap without raising taxes and imposing significant service cuts, a return to the union-dominated politics of the past will never happen. If the sky does not fall, AFSME and its kin may go the way of their private-sector brethren.

Madison will be utterly changed. ■

Richard Esenberg is president of the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty and an adjunct professor of law at Marquette University. He blogs at sharkandshepherd.blogspot.com





Yes, there is a free lunch

Consider the middle-class students feasting on a food subsidy intended for poor families. *By Mike Nichols*

To the age-old childhood lament that the pizza at school is grease-laden, the cheese like rubber and the insides of the quesadilla like something eaten yesterday and regurgitated, add a new and more serious concern:

School meal programs are larded with middle-income families that are, in Wisconsin alone, siphoning untold tens of millions of dollars away from ever-larger federal appropriations meant to help impoverished families.

Free Lunch

The practice is so common and ingrained that scores of middle-class families — when granted anonymity — have admitted during interviews that their children are being fed through government nutrition programs designed to help their less fortunate neighbors.

What's more, they are just a small fraction of what are likely tens of thousands of relatively well-off state families siphoning money and food from school breakfast, lunch or snack programs, a *Wisconsin Interest* investigation has found.

Census data indicates that there are simply many more students in Wisconsin now certified to receive a free or greatly reduced-price lunch — 41% — than can possibly be below income thresholds for the program. And with government subsidies of \$2 or \$3 per meal — and tens of millions of essentially free meals served every year — the cost is enormous.

Taxpayers spend approximately \$141 million a year on the lunch program in Wisconsin alone — a good chunk of which is going to the children of families for which it was never intended.

In most schools nowadays, it's hard to tell who is paying out of their own pocket. Students usually use school IDs that can be swiped to purchase lunch or breakfast, and only the cafeteria worker at the register knows from looking at a computer if the student is getting a free meal — not that it's usually a big secret in the lunchroom.

"A lot of the kids, I don't think it bothers them anymore," says Doreen Miller, the food service

manager in the Spooner Area School District and president of the regional chapter of the Wisconsin Food Service Association. "I don't think there is any stigma involved any longer, not like when I was in school."

Kids, indeed, are often more than willing to admit that they get taxpayer-provided meals. After all, on average in this state, half of the other kids in the lunchroom on any given day are as well.

Wisconsin cafeteria workers served more than 99 million lunches in private and public schools

and residential child-care institutions during the 2009-2010 school year alone, and 48% of those, more than 47 million meals, were either free or nearly so.

It's not just in poorer districts such as Milwaukee that free lunch is common — or that complaints about it are as well. On a recent warm Tuesday

afternoon outside West Bend's two adjacent high schools, half a dozen students engaged in the time-honored tradition of dissing the cafeteria.

The pepperoni pizza is served with "puddles of grease," said a diminutive teen by the name of Brandon, holding up an imaginary grease-laden slice, peering cock-eyed at it and grimacing. The corn, said his buddy Devon, tastes "like plastic. It's like chewy plastic."

Oh, and "it looks like they puked in the quesadilla," added Brandon, "and then put the shell on."

It's all, they opined, disgusting. It's also more and more often provided by taxpayers, even in middle-class Wisconsin school districts such as West Bend — where the percentage of kids receiving



taxpayer-provided lunches has increased from 14% in 2001 to 34% today.

Percentages in other districts, in the meantime, are often considerably higher. More than half of the students in 95 Wisconsin districts — including Green Bay, Racine, Spooner, Mauston, Menasha and Madison — are now approved to receive taxpayer-provided meals at school. The old saw about there being no free lunch is about as relevant as a brown paper bag and a peanut-butter-and-jelly from the home cupboard. And the government doesn't just provide free lunch, it often provides free breakfast and free after-school snacks as well.

Kids are, of course, famously fickle — and critical. Lynne Gross, director of school nutrition in the West Bend district, says every menu is analyzed for its nutritional value. The district follows all applicable nutrition guidelines and only buys wholesome food. Moreover, West Bend has been hit hard with the loss of manufacturing jobs. More kids are eating free and reduced-price lunch, she believes, because more kids need it.

"Yesterday, I approved 10 families" for free lunch, Gross says. "I will go a week or two with no one. All of a sudden, 20 people will come in."

"We have no jobs here. It is ridiculous. We have families where both parents have lost their jobs at the same time."

Many poorer parents, to be sure, need the help — and not just those whose families meet the badly outdated federal definition of impoverishment: less than \$22,350 a year for a family of four. Recognizing how little money that is to raise a family, Congress — through laws supplemented by a bevy of federal regulations and guidelines — directs the United States Department of Agriculture to provide free lunches and breakfast to students from families making less than 130% of that.

Schools, similarly, must provide reduced-price lunches for no more than 40 cents to students from families making 185% of the federal poverty level — currently about \$41,000 per year for a family of four.

The recession surely pushed more Wisconsin families below those thresholds. The growth of the school lunch program cannot be attributed merely to the economy, though. School lunch, breakfast and snack programs have grown steadily year after year through both good times and bad.

The percentage of Wisconsin public school kids found eligible to receive taxpayer-provided meals has gone from 28% during the 2001-02 school year to 41% today.

Nationally, the number of kids receiving free or reduced-price lunch has increased from 6.3 million in 1971 to 20.6 million today. Looked at another way, only one out of every four kids eating a lunch from the school kitchen got it free or at a greatly reduced price 40 years ago. Nowadays, it's two out of three.

In Wisconsin, in the meantime, the percentage of public school kids found eligible to receive taxpayer-provided meals has gone from 28% just 10 years ago during the 2001-02 school year to 41% today.

What was once a relatively small and limited program has grown ever larger. For the nation's farmers, that is good news and a sign that the program is serving one of its fundamental purposes.

Free Lunch

For years, the program has been much more than a safeguard for needy children. It was also designed, as the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 put it, to “encourage the domestic consumption of agricultural and other foods.” There’s a reason, after all, it is run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and not the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Back in Wisconsin, of course, it is run largely by administrators in local school districts who don’t just buy food and serve it up but are also charged with deciding who gets the lunch and who doesn’t.

Gross points out that West Bend has made a “huge push” to get the word out to people who might be eligible — another reason certification numbers have increased dramatically. Many

students, however, almost half, don’t even have to apply in West Bend, or anywhere else in Wisconsin where school lunches are served.

Many — 73% statewide — now qualify through what’s known as “direct certification” of kids whose families receive public assistance through other programs such as FoodShare or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. Such families, since 2007-2008 in some districts and everywhere in Wisconsin today, are simply notified each fall that their children will receive free meals at school.

All they have to do is show up.

Others are still required to submit short applications that ask for information about income but do not require any proof, such as check stubs or even the Social Security numbers of all adults



in the house. Local school district administrators, following federal instructions, only attempt to verify 3% of all applications.

The whole program, in other words, operates largely on the honor system. If an applicant does not respond to a request for more information, the only consequence typically is what federal bureaucrats call a “notice of adverse action.” In other words, the applicant just doesn’t get the free lunch.

In West Bend, Gross doesn’t buy any suggestion that there is a lot of fraud in the program.

“I would have a very hard time agreeing with that,” she says, adding that she personally handles every application. “Anyone in doubt, I investigate. If something comes up that is unusual, I don’t pass it through.”

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, meanwhile, responded to questions about the number of kids in the program by noting that USDA regulations require the state to conduct administrative reviews of all schools at least once every five years and can require schools to return any funds spent erroneously. DPI has also applied for and received federal grants to help reduce problems such as “overcertification.”

The department, in addition, recently received a \$2 million grant to provide training to schools in how to use “accountability software” that will allow the state to monitor both public and private school with a history of certification errors.

What the bureaucrats call overcertification has, in fact, long been a problem in the school lunch and breakfast programs.

The most comprehensive and rigorous study, a look at the programs in 266 different schools across the country, was conducted by Mathematica Policy Research for the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service five years ago. The study found that 15% of students should have been

paying more for lunch while 7% could have been paying less. The net cost to taxpayers at the time was estimated to be approximately \$485 million nationwide.

Participation in school lunch programs has increased dramatically since then, and it appears

It’s not unheard of for households making \$60,000 or \$70,000 a year to be certified for a free lunch.

that so-called overcertification is an even larger problem today.

Part of the evidence is statistical.

During the 2010-2011 school year, according to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, approximately 349,000 kids in public schools and another 24,000 kids in private schools were certified to receive taxpayer-provided meals — a total of 373,000.

The problem: There are nowhere near 373,000 elementary and high-school kids from Wisconsin families making under 185% of the poverty level, according to the Census Bureau and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data. The Current Population Survey of 2009, which was administered by those two federal entities, found that only about 28% of elementary and high-school children in Wisconsin are from families falling below 185% of the poverty level. That would be only about 252,000 students — some 120,000 fewer than are actually certified.

The Current Population Survey (CPS) has limitations, including about a 3% margin of error in Wisconsin. It includes kids who are of school age but are not attending, and it leaves out kids

who, for example, might be attending but don't have families.

Professor John Karl Scholz, a University of Wisconsin-Madison economist, says that using CPS results to estimate eligibility in the National School Lunch Program is a flawed methodology largely because CPS data is annual and kids are often certified to get meals based on their parents' monthly, rather than yearly, income.

In a 1999 paper, however, the USDA used the same methodology as *Wisconsin Interest* to

The stigma is gone, says a food services manager. 'A lot of the kids, I don't think it bothers them anymore.'

estimate eligibility in the school lunch program. While acknowledging the methodology was not perfect, the USDA concluded that — even then — there were high overcertification rates.

Comparisons of the CPS and school lunch participation statistics, moreover, are not the only evidence of abuse.

For instance, the Census Bureau's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) focuses largely on household finances but also asks a limited number of parents and guardians if their children get free or reduced-price lunches at school.

In fact, in the same 1999 paper the USDA examined ASEC data to determine that between 1993 and 1997, 23% of households with kids getting free- or reduced-price lunches reported income exceeding 185% of the poverty level. Approximately 6% of households with kids participating in the meal program at the time

reported incomes over 300% of the poverty level.

The sample of households surveyed with the ASEC in Wisconsin each year is too small to accurately come up with similar, statistically valid percentages here in recent years. But anecdotal results are telling. Between 2002 and 2010, interviewers contacted a total of 863 Wisconsin households with children who received free or reduced-price meals at school, Wisconsin Interest determined. Of those, 146 were in the top half of all income-earners in the state; 33 were in the top third and 15 were in the top quarter.

Median income in 2008 in Wisconsin, according to Census Bureau data, was around \$52,000 per household — including, for example, households of one individual living alone in a single room or apartment. Median family incomes in Wisconsin in 2010 were much higher, ranging from \$57,000 for a family of two to \$80,000 for a family of four, according to Census Bureau data.

It's not unheard of, both this analysis and the ASEC surveys indicate, for households making \$60,000 or \$70,000 or more a year to be certified for free lunch.

All this is exceedingly expensive.

At the federal level, the total cost of the school lunch program jumped from \$3.7 billion in 1990 to \$6.1 billion in 2000 to almost \$10 billion today. In Wisconsin alone, in addition to the \$141 million spent on lunches during the 2009-10 school year, taxpayers kicked in another \$38 million for breakfast and snacks.

That is just a fraction of the money the ever-burgeoning program costs taxpayers, moreover, because school administrators typically use the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price meals as an argument for more money for programs that have nothing to do with food.

"Funding for public schools is vital at a time when two out of five students receive free or reduced-price school meals," State Superintendent Tony Evers

argued in a March press release. “The proposed 2011-13 budget makes huge cuts to education, balancing the fiscal follies of adults on the backs of children, especially those living in poverty. We need a budget that is fair, equitable, and does not do permanent harm to our public schools.”

Having lots of kids who qualify for taxpayer meals isn’t just a good debating point during budget talks. Millions of dollars in Title I federal grant funds in many states, including Wisconsin, are often dispensed to school districts in proportion to the number of children approved for free or reduced-price meals.

For instance, in the Port Washington-Saukville District, where about a quarter of students are certified to receive subsidized meals, it is the sole determinant for Title I, according to Gary Myrah, who was the district’s

director of special services until he took over as executive director of the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services on July 1.

Might there be an incentive for Wisconsin schools to submit high free- and reduced-price lunch numbers to increase Title I aid? Myrah allows that “someone might find creative ways to get some cash,” but Port Washington has never operated that way, and he didn’t know of anyone elsewhere who had either.

The USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service freely concedes there have been problems caused partly by “misreporting of income” by applicants as well as administrative errors. And an FNS spokesperson says that the agency has already

ramped up training of program administrators in every state, in addition to strengthening direct certification and establishing tougher requirements for school districts that demonstrate high levels of error.

The idea is to “help schools reduce the cost of erroneous payments without compromising access for low-income families and without major increases in burden for schools,” says the USDA’s Susan Acker.

Running the program better is different, though, than examining how it morphed beyond its initial, well-intended mission and came to cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars a year more than it should just in Wisconsin — and likely many, many times that nationally.

America has a long, proud history of feeding students from poor families. Lunches have

been served in public schools in America — most notably in Boston, Philadelphia and Milwaukee — for more than 100 years. From the beginning, kids who could afford the lunches paid for them while the less fortunate ate for free.

The poor and struggling still benefit, of course — along with farmers and a chunk of the middle-class that freely admits it during the annual interviews. Perhaps that’s because they know their answers are confidential. Or perhaps there is another explanation. So many families now receive taxpayer-provided meals that they no longer think about it as just an anti-poverty program.

Because it’s not. ■



Mike Nichols is a Senior Fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute.

THE REVOLUTION THAT WASN'T



BY CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER

FILLED WITH SOUND AND FURY, THE RECALL ELECTIONS SIGNIFIED NOTHING AT ALL

It all started with such promise. The people of Wisconsin would soon rise up against Gov. Scott Walker's assault on the middle class. Walker's plan to virtually eliminate collective bargaining for public employees, dubbed by state Sen. Spencer Coggs (D- Milwaukee) as the return of "legalized slavery," would provoke a historic rebuke of Walker's overreach.

This uprising would manifest itself in the form of recall elections against the six eligible Republican state senators. (Under Wisconsin law, an elected official must be in office for one full year before recall signatures can be collected — leaving all senators elected in 2010 ineligible.) Democrats, who had fought so hard against Walker's reforms, would need to win only three of six seats to retake the state Senate, thereby sending a strong message to elected officials nationwide who dared tussle with public unions.

The GOP roster of recall targets included senators Sheila Harsdorf and Dan Kapanke from western Wisconsin, Randy Hopper and Rob Cowles from the Fox Valley-Green Bay area, Luther Olsen from central Wisconsin, and Alberta Darling from suburban Milwaukee. According to the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, roughly \$35 million was spent on the recall races, well outpacing the estimated \$19.3 million spent on all 115 legislative races last November.

As the recall elections approached, Democrats did nothing to manage expectations. On the eve of the GOP recall contests, Madison state Sen. Fred Risser, America's longest-

serving state legislator, predicted Democrats would sweep all six elections. The same day, Wisconsin Democratic Party chairman Mike Tate pumped up poll numbers showing Democrats leading in three races, and in a "dead heat" in the rest. "Independents are moving towards the Democratic candidates in strong numbers," he told a group of national

reporters. Every race, he said, is "eminently winnable."

Yet on the morning after the elections, most Wisconsin residents wondered where the revolution went. Democrats fell well short of their lofty expectations, winning only two of six contests, failing to win control of the Senate. A week

later, Democrats would dodge further disaster, retaining two of their own incumbents in recall elections.

That's not to say the recall election period wasn't wild. Charges and countercharges flew, wild statements were made about public support for the unions' efforts, and personal attacks normally confined to whispering campaigns were blared in TV ads. And as was the case during much of the Wisconsin collective bargaining imbroglio, nothing during the recall elections was as it seemed.

THE RECALL MECHANISM WAS PUT TO A USE NEVER ENVISIONED BY ITS AUTHORS IN 1926.

The revolution that wasn't

In fact, the recall mechanism itself has become something its authors never intended. Passed as an amendment to the Wisconsin Constitution in 1926, the recall provision was intended for judges, not state legislators or governors. Back then, most state officials had two-year terms; it wouldn't have made sense to recall a governor 14 months into a 24-month term – yet judges had longer terms that could be cut short. (Gubernatorial terms were extended to four years in 1967.)

In 1926, on Oct. 31, The Milwaukee Journal editorialized against the constitutional amendment, saying: “And here is the harm of the amendment. It threatens every judge with recall at any time. Not in the case of bad conduct; he can be

removed for bad conduct under the present laws. It threatens his removal if he so far offends a sentiment that a fourth of the voters rush to sign a petition. Or he can be recalled if he offends interests able to spend a great deal of money to get what they want.”

As it happened, 1926 wasn't the first time a recall amendment had been proposed. In 1913, LaFollette-era Progressives put a similar amendment before state voters, who voted it down by a 2-to-1 margin. In October 1926, Manitowoc attorney I.J. Nash, the former Wisconsin revisor of statutes, wrote a prescient commentary urging Wisconsinites to reject the amendment. Such a constitutional provision would make Wisconsin the “laughingstock of the country,” he wrote, adding that a recall proceeding is “slow, conducted with passion, expensive, sets neighbor against neighbor, is unaccompanied by sworn or other competent evidence, and convinces few that justice has been served.”

Yet in November 1926, the amendment passed by a margin of 4,743 votes, with just 50.6% of the statewide vote. The margin was so close that the The Milwaukee Journal's

page-one headline trumpeted “Recall Unlikely.”

Supporters had argued that recalls would seldom be launched, as collecting signatures from 25% of the last election's voters was just too cumbersome. And for seven decades, the amendment's supporters were right. It was only in 1996 that the first state elected official was recalled from office — state Sen. George Petak was ousted for changing his vote to allow Racine taxpayers to be included in a taxing

district to pay for a new Milwaukee Brewers' stadium.

The unions quickly figured out that the Internet age of Facebook, Twitter and other social media changed everything. Word could spread immediately about a recall effort, and signatures came cheap. Even the most Republican of senate

districts have the 15,000 (give or take) Democrats and public employees needed to force a new election.

Republicans, too, jumped on the recall bandwagon, gathering enough signatures to force recall elections for three Democratic incumbent senators. Yet the GOP's most plausible candidate, state Rep. John Nygren, failed to get enough signatures on his nominating papers. Nygren turned in 426 nominating signatures, almost daring Democrats to challenge their validity — most candidates turn in twice the number required signatures. Sure enough, after a successful Democratic challenge, Nygren ended up with 398 signatures, two short of the required 400.

Nygren's failure to simply make it to the ballot may have helped Democrats retain their two-seat pickup.

Sheila Harsdorf, 55, is one of the GOP senators that Nygren's flub could have harmed the most. With the unions not having to spend a million dollars or more defending state Sen. Dave Hansen in Green Bay, that money could be spent on other Democrats such as Shelley Moore, a teachers union

WHISPERS ABOUT RANDY HOPPER'S EXTRAMARITAL ISSUES BEGAN WHEN HE APPEARED AT THE INAUGURAL BALL WITH A COMELY YOUNG WOMAN DRAPED ON HIS ARM.

activist running against Harsdorf.

The 10th Senate District is in the fastest growing area of the state. It has become a Twin Cities suburb, growing more Republican as it grows rapidly in size. Harsdorf has represented her hometown of River Falls in the Legislature since 1988 (in the Senate since 2000), and hasn't lost an election in that 22-year span.

Yet in July 2011, Republicans were nervous about Harsdorf. In the Prosser-

Kloppenburg Supreme Court race, the district split virtually 50-50 between liberals and conservatives. A nationwide public union group (ironically known as "We Are Wisconsin") spent millions of dollars on expensive Minneapolis-St. Paul

television blasting Harsdorf for "cutting \$800 million from schools," and "giving tax breaks to the super-rich."

This became a common theme in the 2011 recall elections. While the public unions' outrage forced the GOP recalls, scant mention of the collective bargaining issue was heard. In dropping millions of dollars in negative ads on the state, union groups completely abandoned their struggle as a talking point.

Yet Harsdorf wasn't afraid to fight back. While Moore, 37, was an energetic candidate, she was also a fiery union activist, prone to intemperate public remarks. Video surfaced of Moore speaking at the Madison protests, pumping her fist and screeching tropes like, "We breathe union!" and "This is a war!" On her website, Harsdorf linked to a video of Moore comparing the teachers' union to the Mafia — favorably.

Moore was discovered using her public school e-mail address to rally fellow teachers against Scott Walker. The e-mails were sent while school was in session. In one, she openly acknowledged that she was flouting the law: "We are

not supposed to use school email, but since all of our rights are being taken away, I don't frankly care."

At the final forum between the two candidates, Moore sounded a familiar talking point: that "out-of-state third party" groups were hijacking the election. Unmentioned was that national teachers unions were pumping more than \$15 million into Wisconsin to help Democrats retake the Senate. (Another astonishing moment of political obtuseness found

Democrat challenger state Rep. Fred Clark, in an ad run against GOP Sen. Luther Olsen, saying, "I won't take from our seniors or from our children just to reward some special interests" — ignoring the fact that the whole election was nothing less than an attempt to reward a special interest known as



"government employees.")

Harsdorf responded to her challenger by talking about how the GOP-controlled Senate was able to deal with a \$3 billion deficit without massive layoffs of public employees. She pointed out that Wisconsin had created nearly 40,000 private-sector jobs since January. Moore jumped in, saying that for real economic development, the state should follow the recommendations of the "Be Bold Wisconsin" study group, which pushed for more funding for education. "We're not studying, we're doing," Harsdorf shot back.

While Harsdorf battled Shelley Moore in the 10th District, she had nowhere near the fight on her hands that state Sen. Randy Hopper faced. Hopper, a 45-year-old radio station owner from Fond du Lac, was first elected in 2008 by a margin of 163 votes. For months, he had been considered the second most likely Republican to lose, behind Dan Kapanke in La Crosse (who represented a solidly Democratic district.)

The revolution that wasn't

Hopper's district, however, was considered solidly Republican, despite going 54% for Barack Obama in 2008, the same year Hopper first won. It was 1936 when the district was last represented by a Democrat. Internal GOP polls showed voters favoring Walker's collective bargaining reforms; It was just the other thing that was pulling Hopper down.

Whispers began about Hopper's extramarital issues began as early as Scott Walker's inaugural ball, when the married senator appeared with a comely young woman draped on his arm. Hopper's open secret became really open when union protesters showed up to picket Hopper's house in Fond du Lac. According to reports, when they set up shop outside the front door, they were greeted by Hopper's wife, Alysia, who told them to buzz off — as Hopper was living in Madison with his 25-year-old mistress.

In a statement, Hopper pointed out he had been separated from his wife for more than a year and had filed for divorce in August 2010. Still, unease over Hopper's behavior quickly spread through his district, earning him the derisive sobriquet "Bed Hopper." Older women, in particular, were said to be unforgiving.

Hurting Hopper even more was Nygren's failure to make it to the ballot. Had there been a full-tilt campaign waged against Dave Hansen in the Green Bay media market, it would have taken the heat off Hopper.

Soon, Hopper's romantic life was the central focus of the campaign. The unions launched an ad implying Hopper helped his girlfriend get a well-paying job within the Walker administration.

Late polls had Hopper pulling even with King, or even ahead. But once again, this recall election, purportedly

about union rights, had become a referendum on something completely different — Randy Hopper's choice of mates.

A combined 288 years of GOP representation was at stake in these six districts on Aug. 9. Luther Olsen's 14th Senate District had been represented by the GOP since 1896 — yet he was seen in some circles as an underdog to Clark of Baraboo. Kapanke was almost certain to lose — Harsdorf,

Hopper and Rob Cowles in the Green Bay area were all thought to be in play.

That left Alberta Darling, 67, whom Tate just days before called the "crown jewel" of the recall effort. Assuming Democrats could get Kapanke and Hopper, they just needed one more to take the Senate — and they spent millions on television ads in the Milwaukee area to ensure Darling was the third.



State Sen. Alberta Darling, the 'crown jewel' in the Democratic recall efforts, won by a surprising 8 points.

Darling's opponent was 57-year-old state Rep. Sandy Pasch, who represents Shorewood. The recall campaign had been beset by allegations of corruption, as Pasch sat on the board of a group called Wisconsin Citizen Action, which had been running third-party ads against Darling — an apparent violation of state law barring these groups from coordinating their efforts with candidates. Citizen Action was also affiliated with a group called Wisconsin Jobs Now, which may have violated state law by offering free barbecued ribs as an inducement for people who voted early.

Election night in the Darling war room was frantic. Early returns showed Harsdorf and Cowles running up big margins; Olsen, Kapanke and Hopper were all slightly ahead early. Then, the first big Darling news came in; she lost Whitefish Bay, a suburb that she normally loses by 600 votes, by only 150. Shorewood, a liberal area in which Darling usually gets between 22% and 27%, came in at 26% — on

the high end of her range.

Despite television reports showing Darling down by 10 percentage points, smiles spread through the war room. Heavily GOP Waukesha County had yet to report its most populous areas. Darling could underperform and still win easily. With 65% of the vote tallied and Darling still looking like she was losing, Darling's campaign manager, Andrew Davis, smiled. "There's no way Pasch can win."

The statewide picture was also clearing up. Kapanke had lost, although not by as much as some had predicted; Harsdorf hammered Moore 58% to 42%. Cowles did even better, getting 60% of the vote; Olsen's seat stayed in Republican hands. Hopper, while leading most of the night, was barely clipped in the end, losing by 2%.

With Darling wining by a

surprising 8 points, the GOP held the Senate. Tens of millions of dollars and thousands of hours of labor had gotten the Democrats two Senate seats — and after the redistricting plan signed by Walker on Election Day, Hopper's old seat is almost certain to return to Republican hands next year.

The biggest surprise of the recall elections is how unextraordinary they turned out to be. Despite being told how unprecedented and historic these elections were, Wisconsin learned the age-old lesson: Republicans tend to vote for Republicans, and Democrats tend to vote for Democrats. Unless, of course, one of those Republicans is accused of sexual shenanigans.

And that, in the end, is upon what these elections hinged. Despite everything Wisconsin citizens had heard about union rights, these elections boiled down to one alleged affair and two John Nygren nomination signatures. In most cases, the votes against the GOP candidate mirrored the number of signatures gathered to recall that incumbent —

not exactly the message national unions can take back to fire up their members.

In failing to take control of the Senate, Democrats squandered a strong advantage. Democrat Assembly members Jennifer Shilling, Fred Clark and Sandy Pasch could challenge Republican senators without putting their own seats at risk. Shilling won in a Democrat-leaning seat, but Clark and Pasch were unable to parlay their proven electability into Senate victories.

Darling actually increased her winning margin from her last election in 2008. Ditto for Harsdorf. Olsen and Cowles ran unopposed three years ago; it was only Hopper and Kapanke who underperformed compared to 2008 — and Hopper only saw his numbers slide by about 1%.

Despite their underwhelming performance, the unions are unlikely to be deterred. They've already

signaled they will move forward with more recalls of GOP state senators in 2012. Once the one-year waiting period for the Class of 2010 is up, Democratic-leaning seats currently held by Republicans will be in play. They need only flip one to control the Senate.

Furthermore, unions claim they have already collected 150,000 names of people wanting to recall Walker. (About 500,000 signatures would be needed to force the election.) In Ohio, unions only needed 218,000 signatures to force a statewide referendum on their new collective bargaining law; they turned in 1.3 million.

The day after the recall constitutional amendment passed in 1926, famous magician/escape artist (and son of Wisconsin) Harry Houdini died. In 2011, Wisconsin Republicans managed their own miraculous electoral escape. Whether Scott Walker can replicate the same trick in 2012 remains to be seen. ■

**'WE BREATHE THE UNION!'
SHEILA HARSDOFF'S
CHALLENGER
EXHORTED THE CROWD.
'THIS IS A WAR.'**

Christian Schneider, a Senior Fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, wrote frequently on the recall elections for National Review Online.





Turning Point

The tumult of the Capitol protests became a nationwide digital phenomena

By Marc Eisen

The revolution came to Madison in February, but not the one you think.

Sure, Gov. Scott Walker's efforts to roll back a half-century of labor legislation and the ferocious liberal backlash were earthshaking events. But the outcome of this epic struggle awaits a last act.

No such uncertainty marks the digital revolution. New media played a crucial role in both organizing the Capitol protests and in covering them. The digital future arrived on the wings of text messages, cell-phone photos, flip-camera videos, Facebook posts and Twitter tweets.

"It was a turning point," says Dhavan Shah, a University of Wisconsin-Madison journalism professor. The protests against ending most collective-bargaining rights for public employees "demonstrated the potential power of social media as a mobilizing force. We've seen a season of that literally across the globe.

"The parallels aren't as great as some people would like to think with what happened in Egypt," he says, citing how the Twitter generation deposed

strongman Hosni Mubarak. "But certainly we saw evidence of how information can move laterally between trusted networks of people rather than coming top-down from mainstream media or even from elite political bloggers."

So how did the revolution play out? Consider the experiences of three players in the new-media order:

* Steve O'Neill, a former union organizer for the butchers, was checking Facebook and his labor websites early evening on March 19 when he was stunned to read that the state Senate had unexpectedly voted 18-1 to gut collective bargaining for public employees. Within 15 minutes, a fired-up O'Neill had left his Madison home and was surreptitiously climbing through a basement window to enter the supposedly locked-down Capitol.

"That night pretty much opened my eyes," says O'Neill, 62, who notes his days as an avid newspaper reader are over. "I knew if I wanted to

'I knew if I wanted to get timely, accurate information, I had to go online to find it,' says activist Steve O'Neill.

get timely, accurate information, I had to go online to find it."

O'Neill says he came to Facebook "totally by accident" when he signed up to get the details of his 40-year high school reunion three years ago. Now he's a convert: "It cuts out the middle man. You don't have someone filtering your information."

* If O'Neill was a reluctant convert, young people like Alex Hanna, 25, turned to social media within a nanosecond. As a leader of the Teaching Assistants Association on the UW-Madison campus, Hanna briefed his nearly 3,000 members through email, tweeted comrades to coordinate student speakers at a Joint Finance Committee hearing, texted other TAA leaders to plot strategy, used Facebook to promote major protests and, last but not least, set up the Defend Wisconsin website to post press releases, blog reports and a calendar of events.

Tech-savvy TAA activists like Hanna emerged as key leaders in the protest. But Hanna, who's a sociology graduate student studying social movements and social media in the Middle East, is wary of the hype. He says that new media is simply a tool to be used in a broader political strategy.

And he doesn't buy any comparison to the uprisings in the Muslim world. "Social media means something very different in an oppressive state," he says. "Nobody got killed in Madison."

* A thousand miles away, Charles Hughes, a UW-Madison doctoral candidate in history, was wired into the events in Madison even though he was in Washington, D.C., on a research fellowship.

"I member walking around the National Museum of

American History getting first-hand reports on Facebook, a few on Twitter, even before the national news media was reporting the story," he says.

"A lot of my friends were among the first people in the Capitol," Hughes says, recalling their messages — everything from the mundane ("We need water") to the tactical ("We need people here, in this room, right now.")

"It was nice having this direct line into the action," he says. "Even though I was on the East Coast, I felt part of the information network." But the experience also left Hughes disconcerted with how the protests were portrayed by TV news. "They weren't covering the story I heard from the people on the ground," he says. "MSNBC was

just as bad as Fox. For anyone hooked into the digital media world, they were just missing a whole lot of the story."

And that brings us to the second front of the revolution: News coverage of the Capitol protests was transformed by the digital advance into the 21st century.

Like never before, non-traditional news sources

helped drive the story's at-times conflicting narratives. Partisans, activists, ordinary citizens and even pranksters were all enabled by digital media.

"We hold up our smart phones and say, 'If it's not happening here, you're not reaching anyone under the age of 30,'" says Brian Fraley, communications director of the conservative MacIver Institute.

"Social networks aren't just for Justin Bieber fans," he says. "They're how people share their ideas and concerns about public policy. ... Our philosophy is that we can't control how people get information, so we put it out there on multiple platforms — Facebook, Twitter feeds, the Web."

Time and again, non-traditional news sources such as



MacIver and Media Trackers broke and publicized protest-related stories. As Dhavan Shah, points out, those reports quickly became the fodder of mainstream news reports.

Talk show host Charlie Sykes (who is editor of this magazine) publicized the vile threat that state Rep. Gordon Hintz (D-Oshkosh) made to state Rep. Michelle Litjens (R-Oshkosh) — “You’re fucking dead” — on the Assembly floor. Sykes’ blog post garnered more than 200,000 hits and broke into the national news.

Another Sykes post — exposing a strong-armed union attempt to pressure M&I Bank to support the protesters — drew more than 250,000 hits after it was linked by Matt Drudge’s powerhouse site.



MacIver and UW-Madison law professor Ann Althouse, whose blog has a national following, both posted eye-opening videos of Madison doctors freely writing medical excuses for teachers who skipped work to protest at the Capitol.

Freelance photographer Phil Ejercito’s dramatic video captured Capitol protesters approaching mob-like behavior as they pursued state Sen. Glenn Grothman (R-West Bend) as he tried to enter the locked-down Capitol. Ejercito’s 12-minute video, viewed more than 190,000 times on YouTube, shows archliberal state Rep. Brett Hulsey (D-Madison) stepping in and defusing the confrontation as he declares the conservative Grothman to be his friend and urging the hecklers to be “peaceful and respectful.”

In a footnote to the ridiculous, blogger Jack Craver, who posts as “The Sconz,” garnered more than 240,000 YouTube views for his serendipitous video of a failed *Daily Show* bit that featured a camel and Comedy Central’s John Oliver. Plans for Oliver to mimic whip-wielding Mubarak defenders (they rode camels through crowds of Egyptian protesters) came undone when the poor camel slipped on the ice and

became entangled in temporary fencing on the Capitol grounds.

But the most notorious of all the acts of new media was prankster Ian Murphy, posing as billionaire conservative-activist David Koch, phoning a solicitous Walker to discuss the protests. The 10-minute call (the YouTube version has been cued up more than 800,000 times) prompted

a liberal firestorm and wounded Walker politically. Shah says that new-media partisans of all stripes love to slice and dice unrehearsed comments like these to damage the other side.

“That’s the intent of the people collecting it,” he says. “They go in with the intent to embarrass.” As for the Walker call, Shad says, “You can

pick out the embarrassing quotes, but the overall tone of the conversation — the governor managed it pretty well.”

Over at *Isthmus*, the Madison weekly I used to edit, the paper broke new ground by aggregating 140-character Twitter comments that became the heartbeat of the protests. The paper deployed CoverItLive blogging software to create a day-long stream of comments from activists, other media and its own reporters — up to two or three posts a minute — to provide live continuous coverage of the protests.

“People wanted to know what was going on every minute,” says Jason Joyce, the paper’s digital media director.

Joyce wasn’t exaggerating. Public interest in in the Walker budget repair bill — rife with national implications because of the dagger it aimed to the heart of the unions — was extraordinarily high. Reporters and editors had never seen anything like it.

“More than anything, the immediacy of the Internet and the crushing pace of this story fit each other really well,”

'We were inventing and discovering as we went along,' says videographer/blogger Ann Althouse.

says Jason Stein, a Capitol reporter with the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. "This wasn't a day-by-day, or even hour-by-hour story; many times it was a minute-by-minute story in which the public wanted to know what was going on in each of those minutes."

Little WTDY, a Madison AM radio station, even web-streamed the audio of a crucial court hearing before Circuit Judge Maryann Sumi, expecting a few dozen listeners at best, according to reporter Dusty Weis. Well over 400 people clicked on, he notes, and they flooded the station with calls when a glitch briefly interrupted the feed.

The *Journal Sentinel*, with the state's biggest and best newsroom, augmented its two-person Capitol bureau with up to four or five other reporters and did, as Stein puts it, "saturation posting" at the paper's website, updating stories all through the day.

At one point, he says, he worked 22 straight hours.

Local news editor Gary Krentz, who coordinated the coverage, says a simple change on the paper's website made it easier for Facebook and Twitter users to share its stories. "That had an enormous impact on page views," he says.

Viewership rose to big-storm levels, to even Packers-win-the-Super-Bowl levels. On the day when 14 Democratic senators fled the state to block the anti-union vote, page views at JSOnline hit 3.9 million, Krentz says. The day after the furiously contested state Supreme Court race ended in a seeming toss-up between incumbent David Prosser and

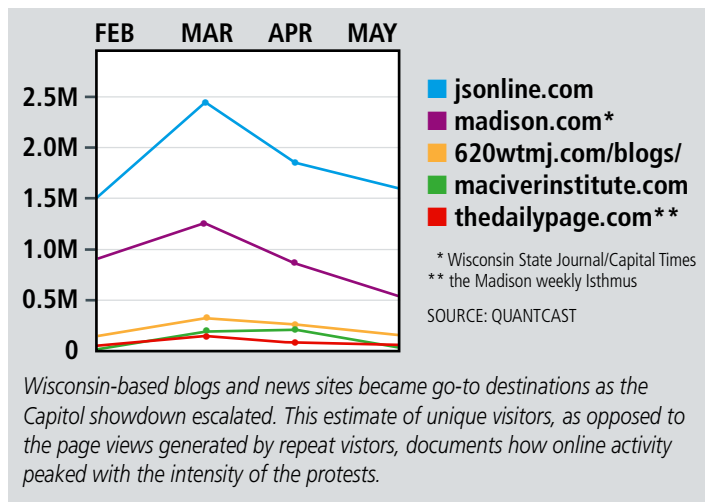
little-known challenger Joanne Kloppenburg, the paper's website peaked with a stunning 4.2 million page views, including almost 400,000 hits in a single hour.

"Interest was insatiable," says Stein, who says he regularly fielded interview requests from national media outlets wanting to know what was happening in Wisconsin.

For an old-media creature like a newspaper, rising to the top of the online world

was a rare moment of vindication of its work. Still, there's little sign that success online did much to offset the hemorrhaging of revenue that has sent the newspaper into a tailspin. Financial statements for Journal Communications Inc. show that only about 7% of the daily paper's revenue came from its interactive media in the first quarter of 2011.

ONLINE ACTIVITY SPIKED WITH THE PROTESTS



The revolution in media is undeniable. In an influential essay published two and a half years ago, media critic Clay Shirky saw history in the making. He compared the explosive rise of new media — it has blown up the quasi-monopolistic economic model that sustained papers like the *Journal Sentinel* — to the upheaval unleashed by the introduction of movable type in the 15th century.

As Shirky recounts, Gutenberg's supremely disruptive technology broke the Catholic Church's monopoly on books. The Bible was quickly translated into contemporary languages. Literacy spread. Erotica appeared. The writings of Copernicus and Martin Luther rocked the established powers. Governments shuddered and toppled. All this came from Gutenberg democratizing the printed word.

Now we have the smart phones, social media and the worldwide web creating their own sweeping changes. If Shirky has it right, only in retrospect will true turning points be identified, a narrative constructed and sense be made out of the ever-morphing media revolution. Wisconsin may even get a featured chapter in its history.

Althouse, in an email discussing the protest videos posted by she and her husband, gets to the truth of the situation when she says “we were inventing and discovering as we went along.”

Althouse describes new media as an “emerging process” — something that MacIver’s Fraley would agree with. “You have to be flexible and play to your strengths,” he says of his group’s new-media strategy. “We don’t get to choose how people get their information.”

In breath-taking quick fashion, Fraley says the digital revolution began with dotcom publishing, shifted to the searched-based Web and then to email. “Now it’s social media — Facebook and Twitter. Two years from now it could be something that’s not even invented yet.”

That politics — or more precisely, the mechanics of politics — will be transformed by new media is obvious to everyone. Not so obvious is if politics itself will be changed.

“Social media won’t turn people out for something they’re not passionate about,” says Katy Culver, a faculty associate at the UW-Madison journalism school. “Twitter and Facebook are good about telling people about the ‘where’ and the ‘when,’ but the ‘why’ is something is something they have to feel in their own mind.”

Her colleague Shah makes much the same point. Thanks to social media, “we’re more mobilized around the issues that concern us,” he says. “Participation seems to be spurred whether it’s voting or turning out for protests.”

But he and Culver differ sharply on the political impact of social media. Shah basically sees it as reinforcing the

same polarized thinking that has gripped the country in recent years. Liberals and conservatives have stoked their ideological fires by following websites, listening to talk radio and watching cable news that reinforces their existing opinions. “Our social networks tend to be ideologically homogenous as well,” he says.

Culver says that both research and anecdotal evidence suggests otherwise. Our social networks are more diverse, she says, because we fashion them not from our ideological fellow travelers, but from our family members, work colleagues and schoolmates.

But even if Culver is right about the diversity of our “friends,” the present tone of our politics would seemingly back up Shah’s interpretation. The rise of social media has had little impact on the polarization of American politics. No middle-of-the-road, “third way” movement has been texted into public consciousness.

If anything, the new technology has been deployed in the revival of a grand old creedal fight. Surging conservatives are rolling back 50 years of liberal Democratic programs in Wisconsin and even challenging the Progressive and New Deal shibboleths of earlier generations. New media has been conspicuously agnostic in this war, equally available to the left and right.

The irony is that the epochal rise of digital media may wind up triggering Gutenberg-like changes in our culture and economy, in the transmission and creation of news, and in the very nature of our intimate communications. But in the substance of our politics — well, not so much. At least for now. ■

Marc Eisen is managing editor of Wisconsin Interest.

For links to the videos and blogs cited in this story, go to its online version at:

<http://www.wpri.org/pages/wi-interest-frontpage.html>

Not what you think

Let's peel away the hyperbole to see what Gov. Walker really did in his first budget. BY GEORGE LIGHTBOURN

Great people and great institutions can give us great moments worthy of Churchill. Given the size of last winter's demonstrations in Madison and the international attention they received, it is tempting to define Gov. Scott Walker's first budget as one of those Churchillian moments. That would be a mistake.

As the volume of protests rose along with Wisconsin's blood pressure, it was easy to be caught up in the passion of the moment. To be sure, Walker's budget was startling in so many ways. Yet it was hardly startling to the new governor. While much of Wisconsin yanked its hair, he calmly went about delivering on his number-one campaign promise. He presented a truly balanced budget, as he pledged, and it was unlike anything we'd seen in our lifetime: no taxes, no gimmicks, real cuts. My goodness, did he really do that?

Just after Walker was swept into office, we wrote on these pages imploring the incoming governor to produce a real budget. "Where do you begin to chop this overgrown hedge?" we wrote. "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 were wrong. It did not take time. Like so many people, we misread our new governor. He brought to the office tenacity honed on the mean budgets of Milwaukee County. More important, he came into office with political capital and he intended to spend it.

The budget he introduced — including the companion budget repair bill — made a firm, clear statement. The past was past, and he wanted no part of it. His script became familiar to all of us. "Wisconsin is broke. We need to bring spending into line with reality. We must give local governments a way to deal with budget cuts." Conservatives nodded in silent agreement while liberals clenched their fists and waved a bloody shirt.

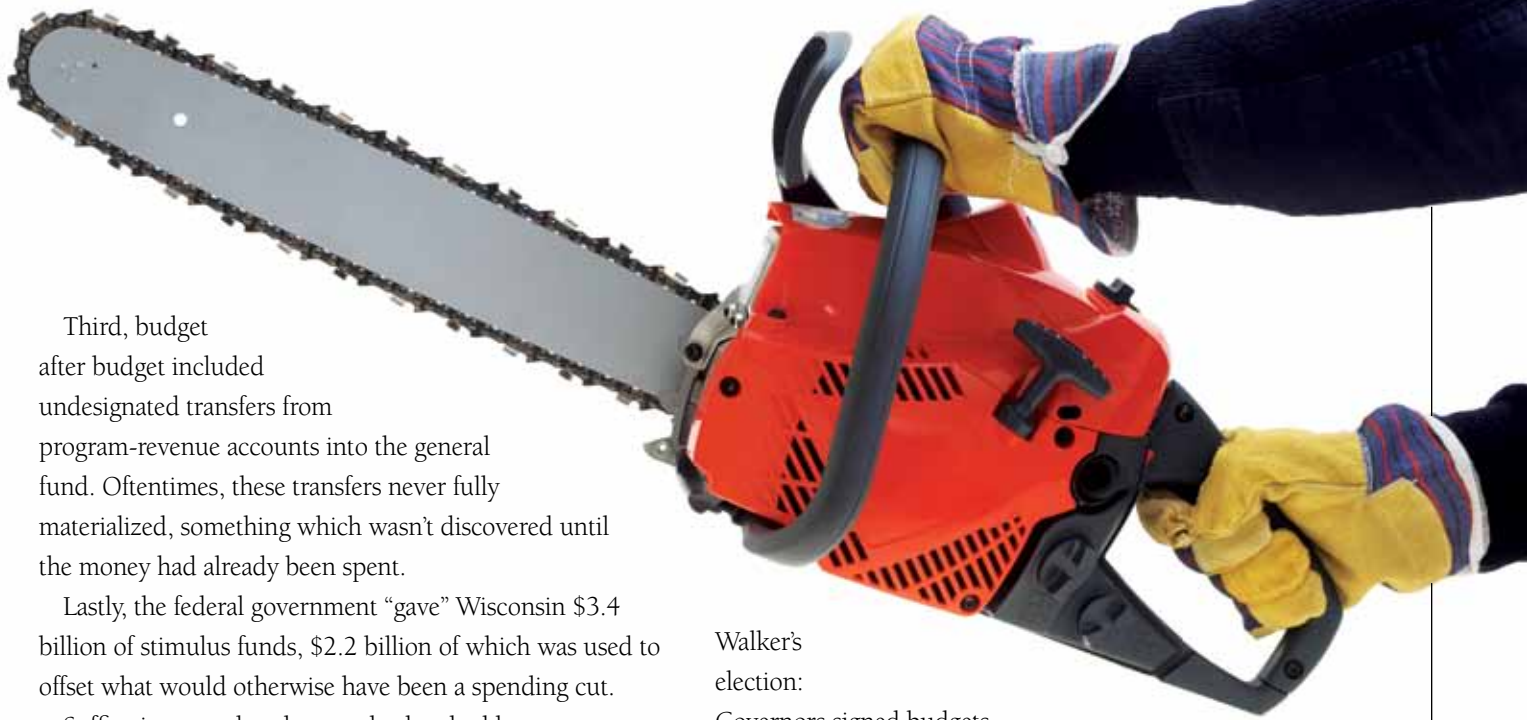
The story of Walker's first budget can be told in the usual budget jargon, using numbers and charts and graphs. However, the numbers tell but a fraction of the story and in large part mask the true picture. But let's review the key numbers anyway.

In the decade before Walker's election, state tax collections grew in fits and starts. Book-ended by recessions, the first decade of the millennium showed overall growth of just 10.8%, or an average annual growth of just above 1%. Remember that number.

Meanwhile, in that same 10-year period, total state spending (all funding sources) grew by 51.9%, or nearly five times faster than state tax collections. How was this possible? Simple: First, governors and legislatures routinely tapped into segregated funds and spent the proceeds. We recall the \$1.1 billion moved from the transportation fund and the \$200 million moved from the patient's compensation fund (since reversed by the state Supreme Court).

Second, borrowing grew at a phenomenal rate. In that same 10-year period, state borrowing increased by 155%. It was a decade when state government overcame its shyness about the use of debt. State budgets routinely authorized exotic new types of debt and permitted bond revenues to be used to support the operational budget.





Third, budget after budget included undesignated transfers from program-revenue accounts into the general fund. Oftentimes, these transfers never fully materialized, something which wasn't discovered until the money had already been spent.

Lastly, the federal government "gave" Wisconsin \$3.4 billion of stimulus funds, \$2.2 billion of which was used to offset what would otherwise have been a spending cut.

Suffice it to say that the state budget had become a biennial exercise in finding creative ways to support an ever-growing level of spending. Like the New Testament story of the Temple overrun with money-changing and deal-making, Wisconsin's Capitol had become a building where dishonest budgets were routinely negotiated and approved.

It was against this backdrop that Walker introduced his no-nonsense budget. He set the ground rules and the Republican Senate and Assembly largely complied. When the governor signed the budget in June, spending grew by a modest 0.2% the first year and 2.5% the second year – a far cry from the average annual spending increases of more than 5% of the previous decade.

Most telling is what could be described as a moral statement in Walker's budget numbers. For more than a decade governors, aided by willing legislators, had approved budgets propped up by a torrent of inventive maneuvers intended to make an unbalanced budget seem to balance. Yet every time the politicians promised a dollar of spending that had no money backing it up, the state's accountants kept track. To them it was just another dollar state government owed.

Look at what happened in the decade leading up to

Walker's election:

Governors signed budgets that accumulated an additional \$ 2.1 billion of unfunded commitments. On average, every budget signed by a governor included \$ \$211 million of spending that they knew was unfunded. To the insiders who wrote the rules in the capitol, this wasn't just the accepted practice, it was the expected practice.

Walker's budget stopped this rise of red ink. When this plainspoken minister's son said there would be no more winking at shady budget tricks, he meant it. His was not a negotiating posture. He was all in.

Capitol insiders, long accustomed to comfy go-along, get-along budgets, were flabbergasted. Walker was destroying Wisconsin's schools, they said. He did not respond. He was attacking the middle class. Still no response. We would become (gasp) Mississippi! Nothing.

Clearly, those attacking the governor wanted more spending but were afraid to have their names linked to a tax increase. They read the polls. They understood the message the electorate sent last November. Incumbents had been slaughtered, especially incumbents who talked about tax hikes.

Nevertheless, while Democrats tried their best to dodge the tax question, a clear picture of what they really wanted emerged late in the budget process. Led by the Institute for

**THE UNEXCITING TRUTH
IS THAT WALKER'S
BUDGET REPRESENTED
NOTHING MORE THAN A
COURSE CORRECTION.**

Wisconsin's Future (the architects of the combined-reporting business tax hike authorized in the previous budget), the left laid out its marker. They wanted Walker to increase spending by \$2.3 billion and raise taxes by more than \$1.4 billion. The difference would be made up in the usual way – by somehow pushing the problem off into the future.

And the response from Walker? Nothing.

On June 16, with the state Senate about to vote on the budget, Jon Erpenbach, the titular head of Wisconsin's Senate Democrats, explained what was behind the hysteria. From the floor of the Senate, this respected, camera-friendly lawmaker from Middleton revealed that the real problem was that Walker was attempting to wrestle ownership of state government away from – well, away from its owners. Erpenbach and others saw state government as a condo association, belonging to a select group of owners.

Erpenbach was one of those owners, and he chose this June afternoon, when all of Wisconsin was listening, to expose, point by point, the real motivation behind the Walker budget. When he finished his remarks and sat back in his leather chair, he looked up into the gallery to see a protester, a young woman who had inexplicably clamped her neck to the gallery railing with a bicycle lock. Somehow, her odd gesture fit the moment.

What did the senator tell the world that June afternoon? With a reptilian calm, Erpenbach laid out a bizarre interpretation of Walker's motivation: Walker wasn't balancing a budget; instead he was leading, "a hostile takeover of Wisconsin." The governor, he explained, sought to "get rid of local and state employees." And why would he

do this? To make it "easier for corporations to come in and take over those jobs." To prove that he had thought this all the way through, Erpenbach told the Senate, "Multinational corporations can't improve their bottom line overseas, so they're turning to the states."

While it might be easy to dismiss Erpenbach's theory, he put his finger on the essential element of Walker's budget.

This budget is about ownership. Empowered by an increasingly restless electorate, Walker clearly saw that he could not produce an honestly balanced budget by working with Jon Erpenbach and the rest of state government's old ownership group. He had to blaze his own path. This was his budget and he was willing to allow his political future rise or fall on his fresh approach.

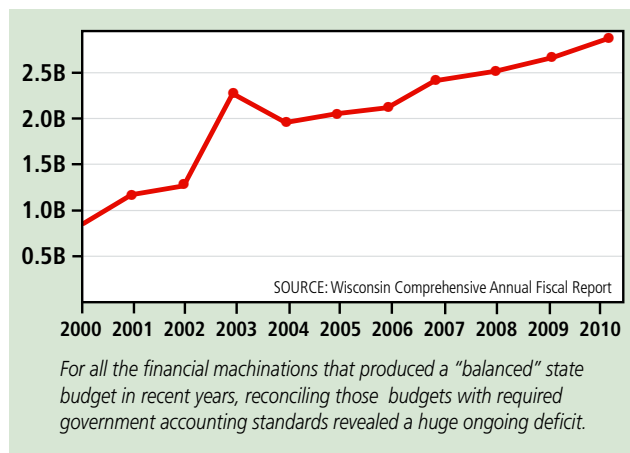
Walker anticipated a backlash.

However, he could not have anticipated its magnitude. When he introduced his budget repair bill, my wife and I were out of the country in an intentionally remote location. On the few occasions we did reconnect with civilization, the BBC and Sky Channel consistently led with stories about Scott Walker and the protesters in Madison. Across America, all eyes were fixed on Wisconsin.

But they were reporting on the hyperbole, not the reality. Let's stop and take an honest account of the more contentious elements of the budget. Was the backlash due to Walker asking public employees to contribute more toward their pension and health care? Unlikely, since state employee unions quickly conceded the governor was right and agreed to contribute. Moreover, polling suggested that 80% of the public, including a majority of union households, supported the governor's idea.

How about Walker's budget for schools? Democrats

THE STATE BUDGET'S (HIDDEN) DEFICIT



accused him of “destroying public education by starving it” and “making educators public enemy number one.” Yet that couldn’t account for the reaction. True, education budgets were nicked, but overall cuts amounted to a tiny 4.2% of school budgets in the first year of the two-year budget; there was a slight increase in the second.

Talk of 2,000 or more teacher layoffs quickly gave way to reality. Only Milwaukee and Kenosha — two districts where unions have yet to agree to changes in pension or health insurance — are likely to see noticeable teacher layoffs. Other districts have accommodated the cuts with minimal effect on classrooms. This is hardly the destruction of education.

How about social services? Democrat legislators point out that Walker cut \$500 million (in projected spending) from Medicaid. But the reality is that the governor added \$1.2 billion to the new Medicaid budget, the largest increase anywhere in the budget.

Even the outrage over Walker’s collective bargaining changes cannot fully account for the intense backlash. After all, Wisconsin public employees, even without collective bargaining, have civil service job security that any private sector union member would envy.

No, at the heart of the backlash is Walker’s audacity in reclaiming state government. Stated simply, he killed business as usual and seemed indifferent to the protestations of Erpenbach and the other former owners of government. Never had Wisconsin seen a governor so deaf to the dealmakers.

The unexciting truth is that Walker’s budget represented nothing more than a course correction. The two-year budget he signed into law increased state general fund spending by 2.5%, hardly the scorched-earth budget that has been described as “right-wing social engineering.” Local governments will be raising property tax bills by 1.2%

the first year and 1.3% the second year. Again, these are relatively modest increases, requiring belt-tightening, to be sure, but they are still increases, not decreases. Many industries have been forced to make major cuts to their budgets and to their workforces. Neither has happened in state government.

There have been no state employees laid off, and under the Walker budget, furloughs are a thing of the past. All state workers retain their defined-benefit pensions, enviable health insurance and generous post-retirement health coverage.

The noisy defenders of the status quo would have us believe that Walker’s budget is the defining moment in the future of Wisconsin. Well, as a state, we can put down the paper bag and stop hyperventilating. This is not the end of life as we know it; it is just a balanced budget. Perhaps it has been so long since Wisconsin has seen an honest budget that we no

longer know what one looks like.

Last November, we at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute implored governor-elect Walker to submit an honest budget to the people of Wisconsin. “This is a different era in Wisconsin — an era that calls for a lot less flash and a lot more competence,” we wrote. And that is what he brought to the process: competence. He gave Wisconsin a budget devoid of gimmicks, devoid of false promises, devoid of tax increases (either explicit or hidden). It is a simple, honest budget, one true to the values of Wisconsin.

We should not allow the insiders to define this budget as something it is not. Historians will not write about this as a defining moment for Wisconsin. No, Walker has simply produced a budget with numbers that add up. It is a budget built of competence. We will be fortunate if it serves as a model for governors to come. ■

George Lightbourn, who served as secretary of administration for two governors, is president of the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute.

THE GOVERNOR STOPPED THE RISE OF THE RED INK.



*Peter Boscha and his wife
Linda met in Holland and
dreamed of the U.S.*



*Yash Wadhwa was born in
India and also dreamed of
the U.S.*

Game on!

BY WARREN KOZAK

Immigrants like Peter Boscha and Yash Wadhwa understand that competition is the secret to American success

Here is one of life's little mysteries: If you place two 4-year-olds in the middle of a block, they will, without prompting, immediately race each other to the corner. Michael Phelps never breaks records in the pool by himself. But line up five other swimmers next to him and Phelps smashes world times. And when two teenagers are idling at a red light, engines running and no cop in sight, it might be wise to get out of their way.

We see the impact of competition every minute of every day, yet few of us realize that the greatest consequence of competition has been its impact on the American economy. Competition has electrified it and pushed it past every other nation on earth. It can be as mundane as watching service improve and prices fall at your local grocery when a competitor opens up across the street. And it reaches to the highest echelons of American business — from Ford to Gates.

But as critical as competition is, few of us understand the first thing about it. We don't know its origins, why it pushes us forward, why some people are more competitive than others or why artificial constraints on competition will stifle an entire population and leave an economy stagnant. To help explain all this, let's look at two Wisconsin residents who have never met and come from very different worlds but who have one very important thing in common.

Peter Boscha was born in a small rural town in Holland in 1932. When the Nazis occupied his

country, his education stopped at sixth grade. But Boscha had a dream that he could do more than work on a farm for the rest of his life. And he instinctively understood that his dream would not be fulfilled if he stayed in postwar Holland. So he took a chance and came to the United States with his girlfriend in the mid-1950s.

On the other side of the world and some years later, Yash Wadhwa had the same dream. Wadhwa was born in Delhi, India, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. Like Boscha, Wadhwa knew that his native country did not offer the opportunities he desired.

After a series of grimy factory jobs, Peter Boscha learned how to build houses. He took a chance and bought some land, subdivided it, built homes and sold them. He developed a reputation for honest, good work, and he prospered in Racine. Wadhwa received an advanced degree here in the U.S. and took a job first in Buffalo, N.Y. In the early 1970s, he was transferred to Milwaukee, where today he is the head of Strand Engineering's Milwaukee office, overseeing more than 100 employees.

Both men have raised families and been involved in their communities. Both men are considered success stories. And fulfilling one of this country's truest beliefs in individualism, both men accomplished this on their own.

What Boscha and Wadhwa were defining, even though they may not have realized it at the time, was

‘Successful people figure out ways to win, and that is another example of how **competition is directly tied to innovation,’ says Patricia Tidwell.**

a reality that, on one level, is astoundingly simple. The United States — more than any other country in history — offers human beings the chance to express one of the most basic, even primitive human instincts, the chance to compete against others and the chance to win. Even though this concept sounds obvious, few nations throughout history have actually offered this common-sense equation to humankind.

Competition is innate in human beings. It comes naturally to us because it is in all of us. We are descended from hunter-gatherers who understood that if their tribe did not get the woolly mammoth before the other tribe, they would not eat and they would die. Males have always competed for the most desirable females. Darwin saw competition as a critical part of human evolution.

“Competition is a very powerful force,” said Patricia Tidwell, a psychoanalyst in New York who has studied competition, especially as it relates to females. “It causes us to perform better but it also gets us in the game. ... It forces human beings to learn how to win and it ultimately makes people successful.”

We experience it throughout our lives. Whether it is on the playground or in basketball tournaments or comparing test scores in junior high school, these are lessons we learn early and ones that continue to play out through adulthood in work, business and personal relationships.

As a recent full page newspaper ad for Sprint reads, “Competition is the steady hand at our back, pushing us to faster, better, smarter, simpler, lighter, thinner, cooler.” Sprint should know. If it weren’t for the landmark court decision in 1984 that broke up the Bell System monopoly and allowed other phone companies to rise up and compete against each other, there would be no Sprint today — and we would be paying higher phone bills.

What motivates people like Boscha and Wadhwa to pick up and leave their homes for a far land where they don’t know the language or anything else? According to Tidwell, the first reason is a problem. “The very first people who came to America did so because they weren’t able to do what they wanted to



do back there.”

For some, it was religion. For others, like Boscha and Wadhwa, it was opportunity. But the opportunities were not handed out at Ellis Island. These new immigrants had to learn everything from a new currency to laws and business practices before they could succeed. And up until the end of the 20th century, there were very few government or even private institutions to help them along the way.

But only a certain type of individual is willing and able to emigrate: a person with an adventurous streak and a competitive personality. And while they understand that in America, their chances of success were simply better than anywhere else in the world, they also know there is a catch. Success would be completely up to them. “If you are highly risk-averse,” said Tidwell, “you are not going to be a good competitor.”

Throughout history, there have been particular periods where thriving competition pushed people to do greater work. The Impressionists in the late 19th century learned from each other, but they were also competing with each other. The physicists in Germany and Hungary at the beginning of the 20th century were doing their own research, but they were all looking over their shoulders at each other, and everyone was watching Professor Einstein. The space race with the Soviets put Neil Armstrong on the moon within eight years of the first manned space launch.

But strangely, as human beings evolved and tribal societies matured into nation states, almost none of

these man-created entities allowed for this very strong innate force to manifest itself in its natural way. In fact, they did the opposite. Barriers were set up through royalty, caste systems and variations on authoritarian rule — some benign, most not — that subverted free enterprise and competition. Thus, their natural potential could never be achieved.



Boscha started at rock bottom on a factory floor in Racine.

The first person to formally recognize this and integrate it into an economic theory was an 18th century Scotsman named Adam Smith. Smith blended the two components, competition and economics, and in so doing had a profound effect on the future of the world. Smith's lectures at Edinburgh were the framework for his book, “The Wealth of Nations,” first published in 1776.

In the same year, a group of men in Philadelphia designed another experiment called the United States. In this design, they opened up everyone and everything to compete through hard work and innovation.

It is for this reason alone that the U.S. gained some of its most profound and beloved leaders — men who came from extremely modest backgrounds. For every Roosevelt and Kennedy and Rockefeller that entered politics, there are many more Lincolns, Clintons, Ryans and Obamas. Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower were born on working farms.

Another example is the man who laid down the framework for our economic system, our first Secretary of the Treasury — Alexander Hamilton. Here was a man born to a prostitute, abandoned by his father in the Caribbean and left to his own very formidable devices. Hamilton rose through the ranks of the Continental

Only a certain type of individual is willing and able to emigrate: a person with an **adventurous streak** and a competitive personality.

Army, was noticed by Washington for his brilliance and daring, and was given huge responsibilities in the new government. He accomplished all of this without lineage — just sheer merit.

Such acts of self-definition are the stuff of the enduring American ethos. These are the Horatio Alger stories: the young men and women who come from nothing and eventually overcome great hardship and trial to become enormously successful. And of course, there are the immigrant stories that spread across the globe and created a self-fulfilling prophesy by fueling an even greater desire to go to America.

There are the classic immigrant stories such as those of Wadhwa and Boscha, and practically every family has one. They are our family stories, and you don't have to go too far back to find them in your family tree.

When World War II ended, Peter Boscha was 13 years old and things had changed in his country. All of Europe, in Boscha's mind, seemed to be self-limiting. America, on the other hand, seemed to be a place

where his imagination could run wild. So Boscha began talking to his girlfriend, Linda, about leaving Holland for the United States.

Boscha still remembers the date and time of his redemption — it was a Saturday morning, at 11 o'clock. The mailman came to the door with one of the greatest gifts of his life: "The visa to the promised land." That's how Boscha still refers to the immigration papers that arrived from the U.S. Consulate.

On the other side of the world, Yash Wadhwa had the same dream. Wadhwa was well educated, getting a bachelor's degree in civil engineering in Delhi. But throughout his adolescence, Wadhwa's favorite activity was going to the American library in Delhi to read U.S. history books. He remembers the pictures of presidents up on the wall and would stare at them with awe. Just as it had to Boscha, this far off land seemed to beckon to Wadhwa. And like Boscha, Wadhwa recalls that in America, all things seemed possible — anything a person wanted to be, he could become.

In the late 1960s, India under Prime Minister



Indira Gandhi moved closer to the Soviet Union. Rampant corruption, India's crushing caste system and a multilayered government bureaucracy stifled business and competition. Like Boscha, Wadhwa's parents were not happy about the idea of their son leaving home in search of new opportunity, but they also understood that the economic system in the U.S. offered him a better chance to maximize his potential.

In 1969, Wadhwa enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh for an advanced degree in civil engineering and environmental engineering.

Both men adapted immediately to their new country, but they held on to important parts of their past. They married women from their home country — Boscha married Linda, and Wadhwa married Usha from his hometown. Wadhwa went directly upon graduation to a good job at the Larsen Engineering firm in Rochester, N.Y., in 1971. He was transferred to Milwaukee eight years later. After 16 years at

Larsen, he moved to Strand Engineering and is the head of its Milwaukee office and its 150 employees.

Boscha started at rock bottom — his first job was with J.I. Case in Racine in the late 1950s, where he hauled dyes and material on the factory floor. When an opening in the machine shop came up, he asked the foreman to consider him. When the foreman asked if he any experience, the bold young man simply replied, "Give me a chance and if I can't do it, I'll leave." Boscha got the job.

Everything changed when Linda's cousin needed a

partner in his building business and offered Boscha the job. When Boscha went to his foreman and told him he was leaving, the foreman didn't want to lose a good worker and told him he couldn't go. Boscha's only comment was, "I didn't come to this country to punch a time clock." His boss looked at him and then leaned over and whispered: "You're right. ... Good choice."



The India of Wadhwa's youth was marked by rampant corruption and friendship with the Soviet Union.

I asked various experts what impact competition has had on the U.S. economy. They all more or less agreed with Tidwell's succinct definition: "It made it the dominant economy in the world. Period." But she pointed out something that was equally important when I asked her if that was because competition was encouraged here in the U.S. "It's not just that it is encouraged but that it is celebrated," she said. And that comes across again and again in our national story.

As an example, Tidwell offers a man who sees someone else create widget number one. "He sees it and instead of just seeing a widget, he envisions an even better widget that can be made better and faster and cheaper. Basically, he thinks he can do it better and he wants his widget to beat the other guy's widget."

"Competition draws on people's creativity," observes Tidwell, "and that's how things improve. Otherwise, everything would remain the same; there would be no advancement. Successful people figure out ways to win, and that is another example of how competition is directly tied to innovation."

This is exactly how Peter Boscha moved from learning how to frame a house to the intricate business

'The visa to the promised land.' That's how Peter Boscha still describes his immigration papers.

of buying land, subdividing it, dealing with town ordinances, building quality homes at affordable prices and selling them. Along the way, he also employed dozens of carpenters, plumbers and roofers. Yash Wadhwa had to figure out a way to beat other engineering firms bidding for contracts by providing it for less while still giving a quality product. "Competition," says Wadhwa, "is everything. It is what causes us to do a better job for less."

The positive side of this equation can be seen in the evolution from the A&P in the early 1900s to the Kohl's Foods grocery chain following World War II to Costco and Sam's Club today.

Practically every small town in Wisconsin had an A&P on its Main Street for the first half of the 20th century, and in most of these towns, it had a monopoly. After an Eastern European immigrant by the name of Max Kohl came to Wisconsin in the early part of the century, he introduced a more modern, better lit and larger store that was more pleasant to shop in. Produce, bakery and meats were fresher and better presented. Soon, Kohl's surpassed the A&P.

Today, borrowing on that theme, stores like Costco and Sam's Club offer customers even larger

stores, broader selection and lower prices. In today's challenging economy, that is what many customers desire. But all of these stores watched each other to improve and innovate. Throughout it all, the chief beneficiary has been the customer, although the heirs of A&P founder George Huntington Hartford, of Max Kohl and of Sam Walton did pretty well also.

Harry Truman once remarked that his job as president was, in many ways, far easier than when he was a young man working on his family's farm. Even in the White House, Truman said, his greatest fear at night was imagining his father calling from downstairs at 4 in the morning to get up and start plowing. Here was the leader of the postwar free world, who faced down first Germany and Japan and then Stalin, yet he woke up worrying about the backbreaking work of running a horse-drawn plow.

But today that work ethic, once the standard, may not be pervasive. There are 44 million Americans who receive some form of food stamps. Unemployment benefits continue to be extended, which will cause some people to be less aggressive in their job hunts. The dirty factory job that Peter Boscha was glad to get



when he first arrived in America was miserable work. But he learned something from it, and it gave him the opportunity to move up the ranks.

Certainty is the enemy of competition. This was made clear in the failure of the Soviet Union and most of the communist governments in the 20th century that sought to dominate the world economy: People do not work as hard when guaranteed an income. Human beings need incentives. “Why bother,” asked Tidwell, “if I get the same amount whether I work or not?”

Why indeed? But two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites, some of those same practices have taken hold here in the United States. Union protection of jobs, teachers with tenure — jobs for life — and state workers with nearly free pensions work very differently than their neighbors who have to compete in the private sector.

Teachers, bus drivers, fire and police officers are very necessary and treasured parts of our society. But it is doubtful that the drive of a Henry Ford can be found within many in those ranks — the constant push for greater efficiency is just not there when a human being knows that his job will be there tomorrow no matter what. That “hand at your back, pushing us to faster, better, smarter” mentioned in the Sprint ad just isn’t there.

There have been critical points throughout this country’s history that changed everything thereafter. The Civil War, the Industrial Revolution, the Great Depression and World War II were four such periods. And we are living through one today.

One decade into this new century, Americans are no

longer just competing with other Americans, they are in a flat-out sprint with billions of highly motivated human beings around the world who, for the first time, see the possibility of bettering their own lives. Globalization has driven our country and our world into hypercompetition.

So we stand at this divide and we hear the voices from our present and our past. If there is a force that could stifle competition and destroy what made this country productive, it comes from within. Americans

have sometimes failed, but the mark of success is getting up and trying again.

When a 12-year-old loses a race, when a 15-year-old loses a soccer tournament, it might seem like the end of the world. It is, in reality, only the beginning. We often hear America compared to Rome — that the end of the empire is at hand. And there are leaders from our past — men such as Lincoln, Roosevelt

and Reagan who had boundless optimism in this country, its potential and its future.

Peter Boscha and Yash Wadhwa heard this call in distant lands many years ago. Today, many years later, they believe in this country with all their hearts — and for good reason. America still has the most amazing toolbox ever assembled. It has a Constitution now in its 236th year and as fresh and strong as it was on its first day. It has a rule of law — not perfect, but as close as human beings have come to getting it right. It has spirit and charm and the awesome ability to renew and reinvent itself. And it has a competitive advantage that is still the envy the world.” ■

Warren Kozak is a former reporter for National Public Radio and has written for news anchors at ABC, CBS and CNN. His latest book is *LeMay: The Life and Wars of General Curtis LeMay* (Regnery, 2009). A longer version of this essay appears as a *WPRI Report*.

**Teachers with tenure
— jobs for life —
and state workers with
nearly free pensions
work very differently
than their neighbors in
the private sector.**



ON THE FRONTLINES OF REFORM
WITH WRITER SUNNY SCHUBERT

Number crunchers on a mission

The Assembly's CPAs want to reform the state's
funny-money accounting

A funny thing happened on the way to electing yet another big-spending, lawyer-laden, special-interest-loving Legislature last fall: Voters in four Assembly districts elected certified public accountants instead.

Forget the jokes like, "When does a person decide to become an accountant? When he realizes that he doesn't have the charisma to become an undertaker."

Howard Marklein of Spring Green, John Klenke of Green Bay, Dale Kooyenga of Brookfield and Chris Kapenga

of Delafield are neither boring nor dull. And their goal of putting the state's fiscal house in order for the first time in a decade is truly exciting.

The four make up the "CPA caucus." A fifth

*'Marklein says the
four CPAs are more likely
to hew to accounting
principles than to toe
the party line.'*

CPA, Bill Kramer of Waukesha, was elected in 2006 and is the Assembly's speaker pro tempore; he meets with the other four when he has time. While the CPAs are still vastly outnumbered by lawyers

(the single most popular occupation among lawmakers, and Kramer is both), the rise of the number-crunchers is a sign of hope for Wisconsin's beleaguered taxpayers.

The accountants, all of them Republican, share other political characteristics besides a devotion to honest

bookkeeping: They're staunch social conservatives, determined to grow the private-sector economy, and none want to raise taxes to fix the budget.

But their primary goal is to get Wisconsin off

the Pew Center's list of states with the nation's worst budget woes. And if it takes a constitutional amendment to enact permanent accounting reforms, that's a hill they're willing to die on.

Meet the CPA caucus:

Howard Marklein, fraud buster

Before he became a lawmaker, Marklein was a certified fraud examiner, also known as a forensic accountant. He worked for Baker Tilly (the state's largest accounting firm, formerly known as Virchow Krause), searching financial records for white-collar crime. Marklein's eyes narrow when he talks about the state budget: "If I did this kind of accounting for my clients, I'd be in jail."

A tall man whose close-cropped hair, erect bearing and no-nonsense demeanor give him an authoritative air, Marklein, 56, was raised on a Spring Green dairy farm. He earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, which recently named him an outstanding alumnus.

Of the CPA caucus, Marklein said, "We're not official; we're just four guys coming out of the same discipline." And, he says, they're more likely to hew to accounting principles than to toe the party line.

In examining Gov. Scott Walker's budget repair bill, Marklein says he was startled by a \$165 million charge for refinancing the state's debt. "Even though it was a Republican-sponsored bill, I was uncomfortable with that number and said, 'Until somebody can explain this to me, I'm voting no.' It took four days, but I finally got the explanation I needed to support the bill."

In preparation for his new job, Marklein read 10

years of state audit reports. "And I kept noticing that when times were good, if we took in an extra dollar, we'd spend \$1.10. There was only one year in 10 where we took in more than we spent."

Marklein is enthusiastic about challenging the status quo. "I'm looking forward to using my skills to ferret out fraud, abuse and waste in state government," he said. "People get annoyed when they find out their tax dollars are simply being wasted."

He added: "We need to ask ourselves, 'What services should government provide?' I want to make sure that our programs are providing a safety net — not a hammock. I want programs that help people get back on their feet and find jobs."

'Kooyenga points out that by not following accepted accounting practices, the state avoids reporting 'unaccounted-for debt,' such as the cost of retirement benefits.'

Dale Kooyenga, Baghdad veteran

A slender, blond man with an eager smile, Kooyenga looks younger than his 32 years. His impressive résumé includes a master's degree in business administration from Marquette University, a stint at U.S. Army Officer Candidate School, and an 11-month tour of duty in Iraq, where he earned a Bronze Star and served as the officer in charge of economic development in Baghdad. Returning to the States in November 2008, Kooyenga says he was appalled at the deteriorating economic conditions in Wisconsin and across the country.

"If you study history, you learn that all the great nations and empires were brought down by financial recklessness," he said.

Kooyenga and his wife, Jennifer, settled in the Republican stronghold of Brookfield. When incumbent state Rep. Leah Vukmir decided to run for the state Senate, Kooyenga announced for her old seat and won an uncontested election. The

father of two young children, Kooyenga says he wants to cut state spending and create more jobs so his children's generation has a bright future.

The son of a Teamster, he grew up in a union household and says he sympathizes with state employees angered by Walker's insistence they contribute more to their health insurance and retirement packages. "I truly understand that it's never easy to accept what is essentially a pay cut," he said. "But private unions, including the Teamsters, have made concessions. What we're asking is not that big. The Massachusetts Legislature, which is dominated by Democrats, went much farther than Gov. Scott Walker did."

Kooyenga wants the Legislature to mandate better accounting practices by amending the state constitution. "The way the state does its budget right now, it's fraudulent," Kooyenga said. Alluding to a notorious bankruptcy, he said, "We're using Enron-like accounting rules."

The Wisconsin Constitution, he points out, requires state government to balance its budget. But that's easy to do, he complains, since the state doesn't follow what are called generally accepted accounting principles. "It's a lot easier to budget on a cash basis," he says with a laugh. "All you have to do is not pay your bills!"

By not following those principles, referred to as GAAP, he adds, the state avoids reporting "unaccounted-for debt," such as the cost of retirement benefits. The difference between the cash-basis budget and a GAAP budget is \$3 billion.

Chris Kapenga, detail man

On paper, Kapenga is a poster boy for conservatism, though from a distance, the 39-year-old Delafield man — slender with soft, dark eyes and a faintly wolfish grin — looks a bit like a young Russ

Feingold, the liberal icon who lost his U.S. Senate seat to Ron Johnson.

Kapenga grew up in Michigan and was raised in the conservative Christian Reformed Church. He attended two Reformed colleges, earning his accounting degree. Kapenga is an active churchgoer and is a staunch supporter of the right-to-life movement.

He worked at General Electric and Arthur Andersen, and he now owns Integrated Time

Systems, a workforce time-management consultancy. Kapenga is eager to bring his business skills to the statehouse. "Too many people legislate off of emotion," he said. "There is a lack of financial

intelligence both among lawmakers and the general public. Well, I've got a pretty good knowledge of economics, and I intend to use it."

When asked whether the Legislative Fiscal Bureau isn't supposed to provide lawmakers with the financial research, Kapenga said, "They don't give you the whole story. They might say that a particular bill will help create 500 jobs and tell how much it will cost the taxpayers. But the LFB won't tell you what the financial impact of those 500 jobs is going to be two years from now."

Kapenga's focus is reversing the state's anti-business reputation. One of his first acts in the Legislature was to partner with Vukmir on legislation to repeal Milwaukee County's mandatory sick-leave law.

That ordinance was overwhelmingly approved by voters in a binding referendum. Sensitive to the argument that, as a Republican, he ought to favor local control, Kapenga says that no matter how well-intentioned the law is, it's a job-killer.

"People don't realize the risks and sacrifices that small-business owners take to create and grow

'By continuing to overpay state workers, we're not respecting the people of this state,' said Klenke.'

their companies," he says. "Government should be supporting them, not the other way around."

John Klenke, the trucker

Klenke, 52, has perhaps the most impressive private-sector credentials in the CPA caucus. A 23-year employee of Schneider National, the fourth largest trucking firm in the United States, Klenke led the firm's tax department and then served as president of its financial branch, vice president of corporate development and as company treasurer. Klenke holds a bachelor's degree from UW-Madison and a master's in taxation from UW-Milwaukee.

Having retired early with the full intention of spending more time with his family, which includes his aging father and his own eight children, Klenke found himself so angered by the state's fiscal crisis that he plunged into politics.

"A lot of the values I bring to the Legislature I learned from Don Schneider, including the (belief) that while we can't always be the low-cost service provider, we can't be the highest-cost one either," he said. "When you have high-cost government, it's paid for by the state's 5.5 million taxpayers. It costs a lot to live here. People are leaving the state for that reason — and not just because of the cold climate."

While Klenke understands the distress of state workers, he says that, contrary to union rhetoric, the governor's moves are dictated by money and not some desire to disrespect state workers.

"By continuing to overpay state workers, we're not respecting the people of this state — the hair stylists, the plumbers, the truck drivers," he said.

"We're not vilifying state workers. It's just that the market is changing for them, too. We have gone from managing abundance to managing scarcity. That's the simple reality. The state can no longer afford to keep operating the way it has been."

Klenke says that in the past 10 years, the state's overall economy grew by 38%. "I thought that was pretty good until I found out state spending increased by 60% over the same period."



Klenke says the simple reality is that state government has gone from managing abundance to managing scarcity.

The state is carrying \$15 billion in long-term debt, he says. "Back in the 1970s, Wisconsin built all its roads with cash. Then we started issuing bonds to raise the cash to pay for the roads, and now we have to pay back that money plus interest. We keep taking our revenue sources of today and promising them to the future."

The upshot is that the state must now cut spending to live within its means while whittling away at its long-term structural deficit. The state is "incredibly fortunate" to have the leadership of Walker to help force the state onto the fiscal straight-and-narrow, Klenke says.

He wholeheartedly supports the movement to enact a constitutional

amendment to force the Legislature to adopt GAAP. Paradoxically, say Kooyenga and Marklein, while the state doesn't use GAAP, all counties, cities, villages and school districts do.

Adds Kooyenga: "The really only effective way to change the way the state budgets is through a constitutional amendment. If we just change the statute, the Democrats will just change it back the next time they're in power." ■

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



Frederick M. Hess is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute and author of *"The Same Thing Over and Over: How School Reformers Get Stuck in Yesterday's Ideas"* (Harvard University Press 2010).

Walker boldly recasts school reform

His combative conservatism is a welcome challenge to Bush-era compromises with Democrats. By Frederick M. Hess

No one knew for sure back in November 2010 what the Tea Party tide that swamped state legislatures and swept rock-ribbed conservatives into governor's mansions from Tallahassee to Madison would yield. It's now clear that one of its legacies is the return of principled conservatism to K-12 school reform. And that first became evident in Wisconsin.

State leaders wrestling with gaping budget shortfalls have abandoned a decade-long willingness to embrace me-too education reform, in which the entire playbook amounted to new dollars, more testing, and kind words about charter schools. Instead, Tea Party-backed officials have challenged collective bargaining, demanded that schools find new efficiencies and insisted that educators be held accountable for their job performance. Wisconsin, thanks to Gov. Scott Walker's get-tough proposals, became the epicenter of this shift.

Unlike Democratic reformers, who have duck-walked around collective bargaining and teacher benefits, Walker directly challenged the teachers unions. Absent such direct challengers, the unions grew comfortable — and shameless. In his new Brookings Institution volume, "Special Interest: Teachers Unions and America's Public Schools," for instance, Stanford University professor Terry Moe points out that the Michigan Education Association has distributed a 40-page instructional manual to its members entitled "Electing Your Own Employer, It's As Easy As 1, 2, 3."

What made the Wisconsin standoff so significant? For a decade, Republican thinking on education was dominated by the Bush administration's big-government conservatism, with its affinity for federally mandated testing, race-based accountability, new spending, and intrusive interventions in "failing" schools.

The Bush agenda made it remarkably easy to reach common ground with school-reform Democrats and progressive groups like The Education Trust. The price was that conservative thought offered little of substance when it came to challenging teachers unions, out-of-control school spending or federal overreach.

The result: The education arena was celebrated by Washington tastemakers as a rare case of healthy bipartisanship.

What this meant, in practice, was that conservatives agreed to sing from the progressive hymnal — pumping more dollars into schools, sidestepping the enormous costs represented by teacher benefits and remaining so intent on closing achievement gaps that they had nothing to say about how to improve schools serving the vast majority of the nation's children.

For instance, per pupil K-12 spending increased from \$7,380 in 2000-01, the first year of the Bush presidency, to \$9,683 in 2006-07, the most recent year for which the National Center for Education Statistics has data. That's a 31% increase in just six years. From 2001 to 2008, federal spending on K-12 schooling rose from \$42 billion to \$59 billion.

The resurgence of principled small-government conservatism has swept away the Bush-era conventions like so much driftwood. How much have things changed? House Republicans are concerned not with reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act but with cutting federal education spending and seeing how many programs they can zero out.

Left-leaning and right-leaning reformers no longer appear to be interchangeable when it comes to collective bargaining, school vouchers or the federal role. The new, combative conservatism is bemoaned as mean-spirited by pundits and CNN anchors who want

everyone to sit down and hug it out.

Of course, it was also played as big news that Walker's efforts would hurt his political opponents. The New York Times editorial page thundered that the governor was seeking to "crush unions" and engage in "destructive game playing."

Such hand-wringing would be more convincing if these voices had expressed similar concerns when President Obama famously reminded Republicans that “elections have consequences” while promoting health-care and financial legislation that benefited Democratic constituencies and weakened Republican ones.

The winning side always promotes policies that reflect its preferences — and those, not surprisingly, tend to advantage its supporters and disadvantage its opponents. Nothing is new here. Democrats, for example, were pleased and fully aware that passing Medicare would help tame the once virulently anti-D.C. American Medical Association.

The only real question is whether Walker's proposals

The winning side
always promotes policies
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Nothing is new here.

are sound, sensible and good for Wisconsin. For critics to dodge that question by suggesting that policies conferring political benefit are illegitimate is disingenuous at best. Yet by failing to talk bluntly about this reality or about the fact that curtailing collective bargaining is not geared to the short-term fiscal situation but to putting the state on firmer footing going forward, Walker managed to make it look like he was the one engaging in doubletalk.

The Democrats For Education Reform, or DFER, spent the spring crying crocodile tears about the overreaching by uncouth Republican governors. DFER is an organization founded by reform-minded Democrats who wanted to challenge both their party's spineless orthodoxy and the teacher unions on education reform.

The thing is, DFER's leaders are serious about school reform but, first and foremost, they are Democrats. So, when Republican reformers like Walker went after collective bargaining and state spending with guns blazing, DFER

couldn't resist a priceless opportunity to steal a page from the old Clinton playbook and triangulate like mad. DFER president Joe Williams penned a very public letter that touched all the bases: decrying wild-eyed Republicans, defending unions and positioning DFER as the voice of wisdom and pragmatism.

Williams wrote, “How do we [at DFER] keep the political focus on providing a quality education for all students at a time when some Republican leaders appear to be primarily salivating at the chance to whack a significant political opponent?” He took pains to point out that, unlike the evil Republicans, “We believe that teacher unions have a crucial voice that should be heard in education debates.” In fact, “we’re kind of creeped out by some of what we are seeing and hearing these days in the Heartland.”

So much for the vaunted bipartisanship of education reform. Turns out that DFER is all for bipartisanship on things like teacher evaluation and pay, so long as Republicans support new spending, don't mess with the unions and take care to respect progressive priorities. Indeed, Williams bemoans the Wisconsin dispute as a distraction from talk about teacher evaluation and school improvement.

It's not that the DFER stance is unreasonable. It's a sensible stance for progressives interested in both school reform and Democratic electoral prospects. What's peculiar is the befuddlement that conservative reformers might disagree with the DFER party line when it comes to collective bargaining or government spending.

The public debate in the past decade has been impoverished by the dearth of tough-minded conservatives willing to talk bluntly about public sector reform. It's healthy to have those folks back in the mix, and unfortunate that DFER is so eager to score political points rather than seek common ground on school reform.

It's not yet clear who emerged victorious from the sparring over Walker's proposals this spring, though it's clear that Democratic reformers were thrilled by the chance to do a little fence-mending with the teacher unions. The long-term winner, though, is the American people — who get to trade the stale, banal orthodoxies of the Bush years for a bracing debate about how to organize the public sector in the 21st century.

It's hard to think of a debate that's more urgent, or more relevant to reforming our nation's public schools. ■



Tough Noogies

What's the big deal that Scott Walker didn't campaign on curbing union power?

On the day before Gov. Scott Walker introduced his plan to restrict public-sector collective bargaining, he met with Democratic legislative leaders to brief them on the details. Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca expressed disbelief, complaining to Walker that he hadn't mentioned the plan at all during the gubernatorial campaign.

This meme has become the primary obloquy hurled at Walker during the collective-bargaining firestorm: Walker is somehow a liar for not mentioning his plan while campaigning for governor in fall 2010. Walker's proposal "went far beyond what anybody thought he would do," union leader Richard Abelson told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in February. "He didn't talk about it during the campaign. If he had said that, some people who supported him would have had some second thoughts," said Abelson, head of District Council 48 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

Yet the "we was duped" talking point is as old as democracy itself. Ancient Greeks were probably overheard saying things like, "None of Cleisthenes' YouTube videos mentioned that he was going to stop me from trading my wife for three goats."

In 1960, Republican presidential candidate Nelson Rockefeller ripped his primary opponent, Richard Nixon, for not being forthcoming with voters about his plans. "I find it unreasonable — in these times — that the leading Republican candidate for the presidential nomination has firmly insisted upon making known his program and his policies, not before, but only after nomination by his party," Rockefeller said.

He lost.

The Walker complainers have a more finely honed selective memory than people who remember the Titanic as a fine dining experience. Do they recall Walker's predecessor, Democrat Jim Doyle, campaigning on cutting the University of Wisconsin budget by \$250 million and raising tuition 35% in two years to cover it? Was candidate Doyle in 2002 running around the state promising to raid the transportation fund and backfill it with debt? Of course not — but upon taking office, he thought he had to do these things to balance the budget.

In fact, the archetype of the lying politician is as ingrained in American politics as the sight of candidates kissing babies. Doyle promised never to raise taxes — yet he raised them by billions during his tenure. Candidate Barack Obama pledged to close the Guantanamo Bay prison facility — yet under President Obama, there it remains, providing the government with the intelligence it needed to catch Osama bin Laden.

And yet Walker isn't being excoriated for going back on a promise; he's being criticized simply for something he *didn't* say. (Incidentally, plenty of unions were telling their members during the campaign that Walker was going to roll back their ability to bargain.) As if campaigns are measured, cautious affairs, where candidates put forth their plans and voters carefully measure each morsel of fiscal policy contained therein.

The 'we was duped' talking point is old as democracy itself.

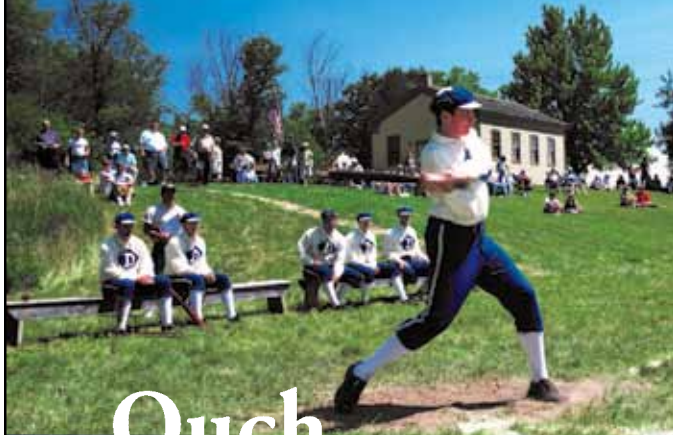
In reality, the Walker campaign was fighting off claims that he wanted to kill women by denying them mammograms.

Finally, would Walker really have not been elected had he proposed to limit union bargaining during the campaign? Face it, he would have won.

In a year where Republicans wiped Democrats off the face of the political map, winning control of the state Senate, the Assembly and the U.S. House of Representatives and defeating liberal icon Senator Russ Feingold, do people actually believe Walker would have lost? Does someone want to call Supreme Court Justice David Prosser and ask him what he thinks?" ■

Christian Schneider is a Senior Fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, which he is secretly planning to convert into a waffle house.

Did you know that baseball was originally played without gloves?



Ouch.



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