

**WI**

NOVEMBER 2012

WISCONSIN INTEREST

# Polar Opposites

DANE  
COUNTY

WAUKESHA  
COUNTY

Dane and Waukesha  
Counties are Magnets  
for Opposing Views

BY TORBEN LÜTJEN

Captive  
School Boards

BY MIKE NICHOLS

What Makes  
Wisconsin so  
Exceptional?

BY WARREN KOZAK

Conservatism's  
Day of Reckoning

BY RICK ESENBERG



Editor > CHARLES J. SYKES

## The Badger paradox

Winston Churchill once described Soviet Russia as “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.”

Apparently, so is Wisconsin: We are a state that elects and re-elects conservative Scott Walker as governor and then five months later sends über-liberal Tammy Baldwin to the Senate; a state that delivers a big win for Barack Obama while returning a bigger conservative majority to the state Legislature.

Our cover story deals with one aspect of this duality — the alternative universes of deeply red Waukesha County and deeply blue Dane County. We’ve asked German political scientist Torben Lütjen to examine the way the two counties embody the deep political divide of our divided state. Professor Lütjen, who is in the midst of writing a book on such polarization, argues that of the country’s 3,000-odd

counties, the Waukesha/Dane divide best illustrates what is happening to the country demographically and politically.

Addressing a second intriguing part of the Wisconsin puzzle, Warren Kozak explores the roots of the state’s current political prominence, asking, “What is it about big ideas and the state of Wisconsin?” In his piece, “Badger exceptionalism,” Kozak traces the history of Wisconsin’s unique role as a laboratory of democracy from the days of “Fighting Bob” La Follette to the rise of Walker and Paul Ryan, young leaders who are “writing whole new chapters of the state’s history books... and the country’s as well.”

As I argue elsewhere in this issue, the results of the November election mean that Wisconsin will continue to play a central role in American politics as an incubator of conservative ideas, reforms and leadership.

## 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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# WI

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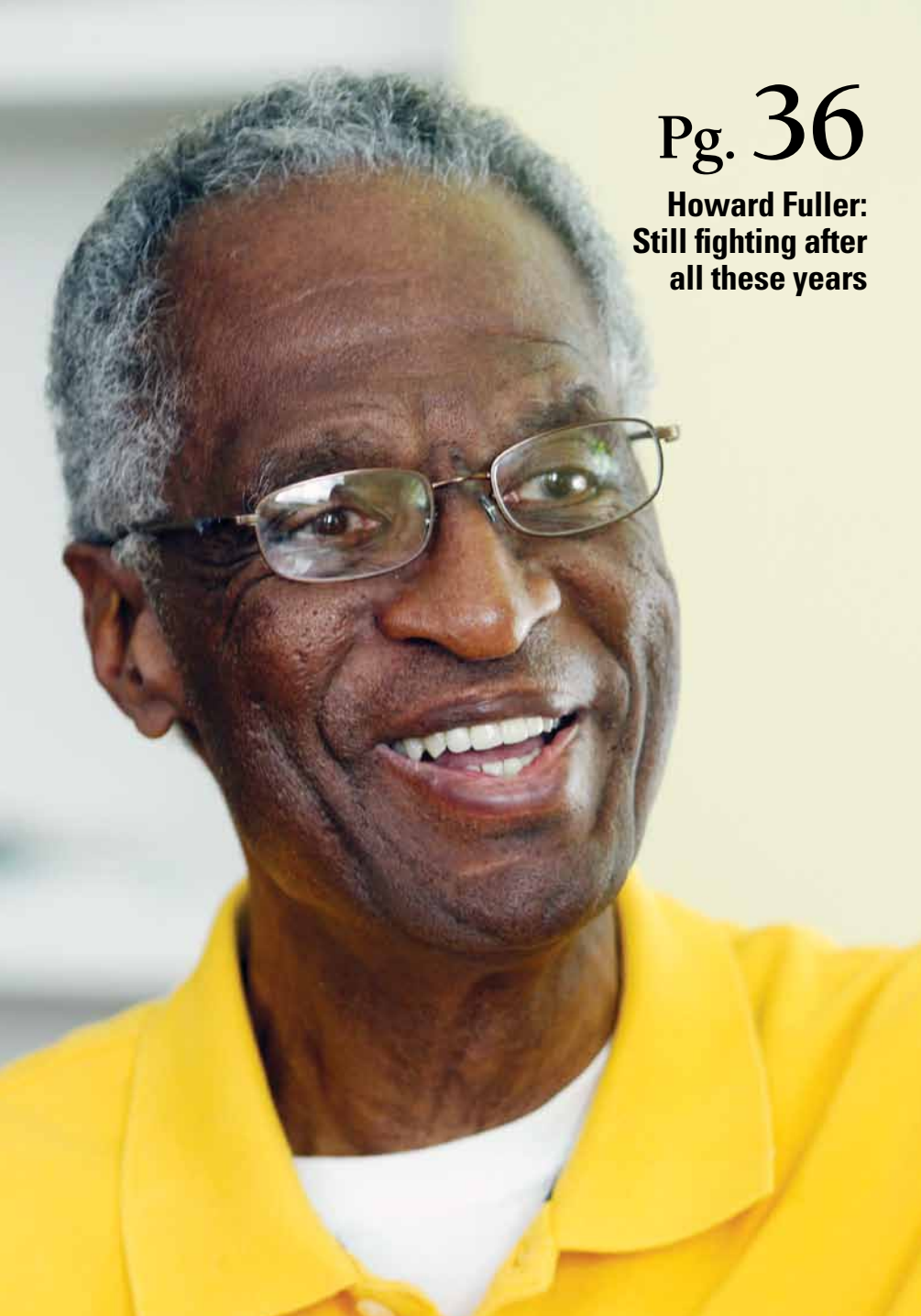
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## Badger state (still) rising

Well, *that* happened.

After a year in which Wisconsin's conservative revolution seemed to gather momentum — from Gov. Scott Walker's decisive reaffirmation in the June recall to the selection of Congressman Paul Ryan as the GOP vice presidential nominee — November's election came as a harsh reality check: Wisconsin is still a decidedly purple state.

A mere two years earlier, Wisconsin had sent conservative Ron Johnson to the U.S. Senate. But then it turned around and paired him with Tammy Baldwin, one of the most liberal legislators outside of the steamy precincts of Madison. Voters who re-elected Walker in June dealt a stinging repudiation to GOP icon Tommy Thompson in November.

But all was not lost amid the rubble, and therein lies a paradox that is Wisconsin.

Even in the midst of defeat at the top of the ticket, conservatives found themselves still ascendant after the election. Walker not only remains governor, but voters gave him even stronger control of the state Legislature, ensuring continuing support for his agenda. In 2010, no state switched as decisively from blue to red as Wisconsin. Before the 2010 election, Democrats controlled the governorship, both houses of the Legislature and all the levers of power in state government. After that election, they controlled none. As a result, Walker was able to advance one of the boldest agendas of any governor in the country.

And now in 2012, as our own Christian Schneider noted in his column in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,

### **Walker emerged with even stronger control of the Legislature.**

the political landscape is “exactly where it was two years ago, when Republicans swept into office, Walker took on the state's public employee unions and the state devolved into a Mad Max-style, futuristic, lawless wasteland. Over the past two years, we have been recalled and petitioned, Prossered and Koched, and ‘shamed’ and marched into submission.” In November, Republicans picked up a seat in the Assembly, giving them 60 votes in the 99-seat

house. They gained two seats in the state Senate, where they now have an 18-15 majority.

So while other conservatives are licking their wounds, Walker finds himself empowered to continue to pursue the kind of conservative agenda that has already made him a national political figure.

### **How about some good news?**

In October, a national survey on business climate ranked Wisconsin the 13th most attractive state in the country. The ranking, by *Site Selection* magazine, was yet another indication that attention was being paid to changes at the top in a state once known more for its high taxes than for its friendliness to business. (Michigan was 23rd, Iowa was 25th. Illinois and Minnesota failed to make the top 25.)

### **Something seems to work**

And even as the candidates criss-crossed the land, breaking campaign spending records and filling the airwaves with attack ads, the state announced that because of unexpectedly good revenues, the Walker administration was able to deposit \$108.7 million into the state's rainy day fund. That marked the largest such deposit in state history. “Because of our actions,” remarked Walker, “the next generation will not be buried under a mountain of economically crippling debt.”

The move was unmarked either by drum circles or vuvuzelas.

### **Trouble in paradise I**

In September, the owners of one of the oldest businesses in Madison's Meadowood neighborhood announced that they were closing their hardware store. A newspaper account described them as “frustrated by plummeting sales over the past three years and a neighborhood plagued with gunfire and negative perceptions.”

Blogger David Blaska was blunter: “The hardware store is not leaving the Meadowood neighborhood. It has been

driven out, victim of the societal version of Gresham's law in which bad behavior drives out good. It is a tragic opera that has been played out in countless neighborhoods and classrooms since the Great Society. The fat lady is singing."

## Trouble in paradise II

This episode would seem to be a matter of some import for the city's police, but Madison's police chief had other preoccupations.

Chief Noble Wray was described as "contrite" as he apologized to a group of homeless people for the confiscation of belongings that they had left strewn about a Madison park. "From the bottom of my heart, on behalf of the Madison Police Department, I'm sorry that happened," he explained to five aggrieved hobos.

## Ticket to ride

Perhaps to assuage such bruised feelings, Madison Mayor Paul Soglin suggested that the city spend \$50,000 to create "Madison: The Music Video!" The idea was to enhance the city's image by having the video go viral on YouTube, thus reinforcing the city's digital coolness.

Among Soglin's other creative proposals was his suggestion that taxpayers pay \$25,000 for bus tickets so that the homeless could go someplace else. "It's not a vacation to Miami," Soglin tried to explain to outraged Madisonistas. "It's not getting a free ride when the snow piles up and the temperatures drop. It is not 'Greyhound therapy.'" The program, which would provide one-way tickets out of town, would even have its own delightfully Orwellian name: Helping Hands Homeward.

## Politicians with gavels

All of this would be amusing were it not for the fact that Dane County judges continue to hold the rest of the state hostage.

In September, yet another liberal judge ruled that the Walker collective bargaining reform was unconstitutional. "As Yogi Berra once said, 'It's déjà vu all over again,'" wrote legal scholar and WI columnist Rick Esenberg.

"The problem is that there is no constitutional right to collective bargaining. This is not my 'right-wing' opinion; it is black letter law, as [Judge Juan] Colas concedes. While there

is a constitutional right for public employees to form associations and advocate for their common interest, Act 10 places no limitation on that right.

"This decision is unlikely to survive appeal. If it doesn't, it won't be because of politics. It will be because it is wrong."

## Civility update

Even though the mass protests at the Capitol are now a distant memory, a small group of professional annoyers continued to ply their trade. One of the more notorious, named Jeremy Ryan (nicknamed "Segway boy" because he glides around on one), reportedly stood outside the Capitol pressroom singing the words, "Dick Wheeler's dead." The pressroom is named after Wheeler, the longtime dean of the Capitol press corps, who died last year. His daughter, Gwyn Guenther, worked in the pressroom until driven out by Ryan's harassment.

A Capitol Police report noted that Guenther was upset that her fellow journalists would not file complaints against Ryan, apparently at the request of their editors. Despite such reticence and their refusal to run stories about the harassment, one reporter for the Associated Press told police, "If something is not done about the protestors inside the Capitol, someone is going to get hurt."

The AP reporter, wrote the officer, "told me it may not be today, tomorrow or next month, but eventually someone is going to get hurt."

In September, the new chief of the Capitol Police announced a crackdown on protestors, a move that was met with a chorus of criticism from the usual suspects.

## Next

As fall turns to winter, there are faint stirrings of interest in the next round of elections next spring, when control of the state Supreme Court will once again (again!) be in play. But that, as they say, is a matter (thankfully) for another season. ■

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*Charles J. Sykes is the editor of Wisconsin Interest. His new book is A Nation of Moochers: America's Addiction to Getting Something for Nothing (St. Martin's Press).*

# BADGER

## Exceptionalism



Tommy Thompson

Robert La Follette

# From open primaries to school choice, Wisconsin has led the way for the nation

By Warren Kozak

What is it about big ideas and the state of Wisconsin?

The state doesn't have the largest population — it ranks 20th out of 50. It's not the wealthiest — Wisconsin's median income puts it 21st from the top. And it's not even that big — again the state in square miles is close to the exact middle at 23 (and well behind its larger neighbors, Minnesota, 12, and Michigan, 11).

Wisconsin is pretty much near the middle of everything. It's even situated close to the middle of the country.

But for some strange reason for over the past century, Wisconsin, that middle-of-everything state, has also been the incubator of some of the greatest political reform ideas in the United States. Let's call it Badger exceptionalism. In fact, many of the most original concepts to benefit the common man since the dawn of the industrial revolution began not in Washington, D.C., or California, New York or Massachusetts. They started right here, in places like Madison, Milwaukee and little Primrose.

When people think of Wisconsin's big ideas, they first think of the Progressive movement that took hold in the beginning of the 20th century. There is one name always associated with the movement — Robert La Follette. The Progressive tradition that La Follette championed continued for the next 70 years with the “sewer socialists” who helped run Milwaukee from the 1900s into the 1950s, right up through Sen. Gaylord Nelson and his environmental activism. Earth Day, one of Nelson's lasting legacies, is not only still observed, it seems to grow bigger every year.

But over the last 20 years, a sea change has taken place in Wisconsin. Although the state has continued

its tradition as ground zero for the big idea, it is the conservatives who have grabbed the intellectual high ground. And if the name La Follette defines the early reformers, Tommy Thompson's 14 years as governor seems to be the starting point of Wisconsin's new reformers.

Major new concepts like welfare reform and school choice began in Wisconsin under Thompson in the 1990s and then took hold throughout the country. The ground-breaking ideas have continued with a new wave of younger Republican conservatives — Scott Walker's fight to break the hold of public sector unions in order to reverse huge unsustainable deficits and the celebrated fiscal policies of a congressman from Janesville, Paul Ryan. It doesn't end there. The new chairman of the Republican National Committee, Reince Priebus, also comes from Wisconsin.

**Actually, collective bargaining offers the greatest** example of the massive switch that we're talking about. Wisconsin was the first state to offer collective bargaining rights to public employees in 1959, and a little over half a century later, in 2011, Wisconsin became the first state to take on the growing strength of public employee unions by doing away with it.

When did Wisconsin's intellectual switch from its liberal tradition to the conservative side take place? Was there one moment or was it personality driven? Or did it just evolve over time?

To answer those questions, a brief history of the state Republican Party is in order along with a closer look those two individuals — Robert Marion “Fighting Bob” La Follette and Tommy George Thompson — Wisconsin governors who served about a century apart.

## A sea change has taken place in Wisconsin: The conservatives have grabbed the intellectual high ground.

At first glance, La Follette and Thompson may appear to be polar opposites on the political spectrum. But a closer look reveals they have more in common than most people would imagine.

La Follette was born in a log cabin (for real) in Primrose in southwestern Dane County five years before the Civil War. In college at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he was deeply influenced by its president, John Bascom, who stressed morality, ethics and social justice. This is part of the “Wisconsin Idea” — the state funds the great university system and in return the university gives back to the state graduates who improve its health and its agriculture and who offer great ideas on public policy that improve the lives of its citizens. Two of its leading proponents, Bascom and Charles Van Hise, are memorialized by signature buildings on the Madison campus.

As an aspiring politician, La Follette championed women’s suffrage and immigrant rights. He was elected to Congress for three terms in the 1880s. But La Follette didn’t really make his name until he lost the race for his fourth term and returned to Madison, where he practiced law.

“It’s important to remember [when comparing the two movements] that La Follette and the early Progressives were also Republicans,” observes Mordecai Lee, a former Democratic member of the state Assembly and state Senate and now a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

“It was the Republican Party that championed the end of slavery and fought for equality, fairness and good government reform,” says Lee.

But by the 1890s, things had changed and a split had developed within the state Republican Party. The opponents of the early GOP Progressives were the “Stalwarts.”

“Those were the Republicans who controlled the party,” explains Lee, “The timber barons, the beer barons, the guys at the country clubs with the cigars.”

**La Follette fought the Stalwarts, first with an open primary.** Up until then, the moneyed interests chose the candidates. The Progressives demanded a more democratic system of choosing leaders and fought for the open primary that we have today. This made Wisconsin one of the first states to adopt the primary system. As much as New Hampshire prides itself in always having its primary first, the concept of the primary was actually invented in Wisconsin in 1903.

In true populist fashion, La Follette traveled throughout the state speaking against moneyed interests — especially the railroad barons — and for more direct democracy. He also wanted and eventually established state regulatory control over utilities and other monopolies.

La Follette’s campaign paid off. He won the governorship in 1900, giving speeches in 61 counties from the back of a buckboard and launching a political career that lasted the rest of his life.

As governor, he ended the policy of free railroad passes for all state legislators and fought for the first workers compensation system, minimum wage, women’s suffrage and progressive taxation.

But with less than five years in office, La Follette left the governorship in 1906 and headed to the U.S. Senate, where he remained until his death in 1925. La Follette’s policies then went national, international and slightly off the rails. He was seen by many — not just conservative Democrats — as extreme.

Ultimately, La Follette broke with the Republican Party after strong disagreements with another Progressive, Theodore Roosevelt (who called La Follette a skunk and said he ought to be hung). La Follette’s vehement opposition to the U.S. involvement in World War I made him one of the most hated men in America. He formed the Progressive Party and was its candidate for president in 1924. He carried one state — Wisconsin.

Throughout his years in Washington, La Follette fought to end what he called “American imperialism.” He advocated for stronger laws for labor unions, the



outlawing of child labor and keeping America out of any future wars.

His popularity in Wisconsin never waned, as evidenced by the fact that he won every election. Subsequently, almost any candidate with the La Follette name was assured some political office.

**Given his record, and the political news Wisconsin** has been making recently, it would appear that there has been a huge shift in the state's attitudes. Or does it?

"It is really a continuum of the same thing," says James Klauser, who served in Thompson's administration in the 1990s and is board chairman of the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, which publishes this magazine.

"What's changed are the definitions."

Klauser suggests that it is wrong to use terms like liberal and conservative.

"Both of these movements — the Progressives in the early 20th century and conservatives in the 1990s — were advocating for the benefit of the individual against the controlling interests."

By the end of the century, it was the controlling interests, he points out, that had changed. And this is where Tommy Thompson enters our story.

"In one case, welfare had reached a point of excess and it had to correct itself," says Klauser. "Those who defined themselves as needy were getting greater benefits than those who were not."

By the 21st century, the public employee unions had reached a point where the benefits of everyone from teachers to bus drivers were higher than many in the private sector. This saddled the state with unsustainable deficits.

"Things weren't working, and they had to be fixed," says Klauser. Like La Follette in his early days, Tommy Thompson in the 1990s was an outsider fighting against the status quo.

In the case of school choice, another correction had to be made. School systems in parts of the state weren't doing their job of educating, and the state

Department of Public Instruction was not open to Thompson's new ideas. When school choice was passed and about to be implemented, a Dane County judge stopped it the day before it was set to go in place. This turned out to be a huge public relations debacle for the Democrats.

"We demonstrated that conservative reformers cared more about kids than liberal Democrats," explains Scott Jensen, Thompson's former chief-of-staff and a former Assembly speaker.

Thompson's impact on politics in the state during the 1990s was huge, and it inspired a new class of



younger Republican politicians, much the same way that young people who watched Ronald Reagan a decade before were inspired.

"Tommy Thompson captured the imagination of the country with school choice and welfare reform," says Jensen.

Jensen remembers starting his days with breakfast at the governor's mansion at 7:30 every morning and finishing the day with a phone call with the governor near midnight.

## Wisconsin was the first state to offer collective bargaining to public employees in 1959, and a little over half a century later, Wisconsin became the first state to do away with it.

“Tommy’s greatest strength — and what drove me nuts — was that he would talk to a huge number of people. He talked to everyone from all sides and all walks of life.” Jensen remembers Thompson inviting welfare mothers into the mansion to listen to their problems and, perhaps more importantly, their hopes and dreams — what they hoped to accomplish in their lives.

“It was what I was taught at the Kennedy School [of Government at Harvard University] about how government — good government — should operate,” says Jensen.

In that way, Thompson believed in government. More specifically, he believed in government that could fix things that were broken and help people make better lives for themselves — again, an updated version of the Wisconsin Idea.

“**There was no ta-da moment with welfare or school choice,**” Jensen observes as he looks back on his years with Thompson. “We tested both of these out in different counties, and we pored over the data. We’d toss out parts that weren’t working and keep the elements that worked.

“Our ta-da moment came later when it was implemented and it worked.”

“Tommy Thompson fundamentally saw government as something to help people, but government wasn’t doing that,” recalls Linda Seemeyer, who worked for Thompson and later worked for Scott Walker when he served as Milwaukee County executive. “An example of that was the Family Care Act, which allowed people to care for their relatives themselves and close institutions. This way, they received better care and it cost much less.”

“Tommy Thompson was a Republican in the

old tradition,” says Charlie Sykes, the talk show host on WTMJ and editor of this magazine. “He is different from today’s conservatives. He worked with what he had. He did things incrementally. He was patient.”

So if Tommy Thompson was the catalyst for the new progressives and the next generation of young Republican shakers like Scott Walker and Paul Ryan, that still doesn’t answer the question: Why Wisconsin?

“Maybe it’s because it’s so evenly divided,” says Seemeyer. “People are nice and friendly and have to listen to each other.”

“There is something about our culture,” notes Sykes, “and perhaps the role the earlier Progressives served as a precursor, but there is definitely a tradition of hearing out the other side — although you wouldn’t have

known that in the recall election.”

When it was pointed out that the country is pretty evenly divided and people are just as nice in Iowa, Seemeyer agreed. “But maybe it was as simple as two men [Thompson and Walker] at the right place at the right time, one inspired by the other and a public willing to listen to both sides and make up their mind.”

Add La Follette to that list.

“**So much has to do with events and timing,**” says Jeff Mayers, the president of WisPolitics.com, an online political news service based in Madison.

“Some of it is event-driven, and some of it was driven by ambitious politicians — and in this case, ambition is not a bad thing.”

The timing that Mayers refers to has to do with the fact that there was money available in the 1990s to actually accomplish these big ideas.



*Exceptional Badger Tommy Thompson*

“After Tommy left to go to Washington, Doyle came in and these were tough times,” Mayers points out. “So he was in a holding pattern trying to protect programs. It was a different time and they were different politicians.

“Thompson was also helped by Democrats like Milwaukee Mayor [John] Norquist, who supported school choice and welfare reform as well,” says Mayers. “This gave it national attention, and it was picked up by President Bill Clinton.”

“The concept of Tommy Thompson being at the right place at the right time is correct,” says Klauser. But he strongly disagrees that Thompson had national ambitions. “He had no thought on national programs. His focus was purely on the state.”

Still, why Wisconsin?

“Well,” says Klauser, “If you are asking how do ideas start ... how did [German Chancellor Otto von] Bismarck come up with these early ideas of social security and healthcare? The apprenticeship program began in Germany and was adopted here. We borrowed these ideas from Germany, which were brought over by our German ancestors.

“There is no easy answer to this,” continues Klauser. “It’s a confluence of time and events.”

UWM’s Lee reminds us that a lot of La Follette’s support came from the rising middle class, small farmers and Scandinavians.

Support for the Republican agenda in the 1990s was driven by Thompson. The reforms to welfare and school choice were logical, since they were adopted by both parties.

But there was one more factor that pushed it — talk radio.

“Conservative talk radio found a successful economic niche,” Lee says. “The liberals couldn’t — Al Franken

[the comedian and former talk show host on liberal Air America] had to run for the Senate to find a job.”

But conservative talk radio had a huge influence, especially in the southeastern quadrant of the state — so much so that it divided the Republican Party in the state, with the GOP in the north being more moderate than the Republicans in the south.

“That was true to some extent,” observes Scott Jensen. “But by the 2010 election, the rest of the Republicans in the state had come to the same conclusions as those in the southeast.

“The original program of the early reformers was individual citizens against the power of big business,” says Jensen. “The conservative reformers still fight for the individual citizen, but now it’s against the power of big government.

“At the heart of what

Tommy Thompson was trying to change with welfare reform and school choice was to empower people over government,” he says. “To let people who were shackled by welfare free themselves from government. To educate kids and give them futures, because they weren’t being educated by the system that was in place.”

The citizens of Wisconsin have been the beneficiaries of two of the greatest movements in this 236-year-old democracy. So has the rest of the country. Robert La Follette successfully worked at making lives better as the governor of Wisconsin. Whether it was an updated version of the old Progressives as Jim Klauser suggested or something completely different, Tommy Thompson did the same thing a century later.

And now, a younger generation of Republican transformers is writing whole new chapters of the state’s history books ... and the country’s as well. ■

**Welfare reform and school choice began in Wisconsin under Tommy Thompson in the 1990s and then took hold throughout the country.**

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*Wisconsin native Warren Kozak is a frequent contributor to the Wall Street Journal’s editorial page and the author of the recently published ebook, Presidential Courage: Three Speeches That Changed America.*





# SERVING WHOSE INTERESTS?



# When teachers are elected to school boards, they have two conflicting masters

*By Mike Nichols*



## Serving whose interests?

Jeff Ziegler is a “teacher leader” in the Madison Metropolitan School District who has never made any secret of his disdain for Gov. Scott Walker. Openly critical of the budget-repair bill that virtually eliminated collective bargaining, he didn’t just sign the recall petition against the governor. He circulated it and spoke up publicly at a school board meeting in his hometown of Marshall during the height of the protests in March 2011.

### The school boards of three of the six largest districts in the state — Kenosha, Racine and Appleton — are led by retired teachers.

“I’d just like to say I do not support what the governor’s doing, with this motion to eliminate collective bargaining of public employees,” he was quoted as saying. “I am very disappointed in the WASB, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, for initially coming out and supporting this and characterizing it as, I believe they said, it balanced the negotiations.

“I don’t see how you could characterize giving one side total control and the other side nothing and calling that balanced,” he said.

Both the protests and the recall, of course, fell short. And chances are the effort of the union to which he belongs, Madison Teachers Inc., to nullify the law in the courts will fail, too. But that doesn’t mean Ziegler, who said he was speaking only on behalf of himself that night, has no influence over how his local school board in Dane County — which he suggested has too much power — makes decisions.

Quite the opposite.

Like many other teachers, former teachers and union leaders in Wisconsin, Ziegler is a longtime member of his local board. Not long after he spoke out against Walker and the new negotiating leverage Wisconsin school boards have, he became the Marshall School Board’s president.

In Marshall, a village of 3,900 in northeast Dane County, the old lament that “the teachers are running the place” turns out to be literally true.

The Wisconsin attorney general opined almost 35 years ago that the legal “doctrine of incompatibility” prevents teachers and other staff from simultaneously serving as school board members in the districts in which they work. But there’s nothing to stop them from serving on boards in nearby districts where they live or, immediately after they retire, running in the same districts that long employed them.

Many do. And when that happens, a Wisconsin Interest investigation shows, they often appear to use their school board platforms and connections less as a management mechanism than as a way to advance the interests of unions and teachers — and sometimes, perhaps, themselves.

The investigation comes at a critical time and illustrates just how much influence board members can have in a new era where debate and power have shifted from Madison to hundreds of local districts across the state.

**There is no database that keeps track of what** board members throughout Wisconsin do for a living. Marshall, though, is far from unique. The current presidents in three of the six largest school districts in the state — Kenosha, Racine and Appleton — are retired teachers. A fourth district, Madison, has a former Madison teacher as vice president. The head of the state’s largest district, the Milwaukee Public Schools, teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and is married



to an MPS district administrator. (Eight of nine MPS board members are either current or retired public employees.)

Similar situations — teachers and former teachers on boards — can be found in smaller districts all over the state, from Menomonie to Marathon to Marshall to Manitowoc. The Manitowoc board, in fact, includes three retired teachers, two of whom once worked in the same schools they now oversee.

It's not just teachers who often serve on boards. Folks who have made or make a living advancing teacher interests serve as well. In Menomonie, board member Frank Burdick is a former field representative and political action consultant for the Wisconsin Education Association Council, who, according to a story in the local paper, fondly recalls taking part in the infamous Hortonville teachers strike. In the Glendale-River Hills district just north of Milwaukee, board member Bryan Kennedy is the president of the American Federation of Teachers-Wisconsin.

"Isn't this a clear conflict of interest?" district resident Dave Daniels, asked board president Bob Roska in an e-mail sent last year during the height of the teacher protests in Madison, which Kennedy helped lead. "How can someone who represents a teachers union fairly negotiate

teacher salaries and benefits?"

Roska responded that Kennedy "brings a very balanced perspective to the board" and is not on the negotiating committee. And Kennedy points out that AFT does not represent employees in the Glendale-River Hills School district.

That's true, Daniels acknowledges. The union that represents teachers in the Glendale-River Hills district is affiliated with WEAC rather than AFT. But he is still concerned.

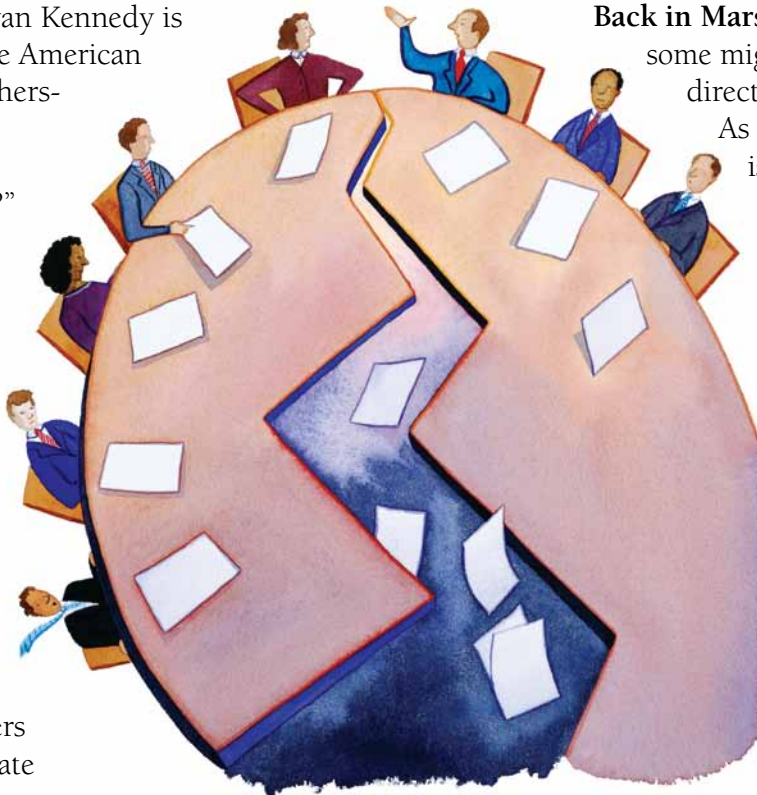
Kennedy "represents teachers and he will represent them when it comes to school board matters whether they are his teachers or not," says Daniels.

"You can't serve two houses equally," adds Bruce Brocker, who ran unsuccessfully against Kennedy in the last election. "You can't be president of a union and serve them 100 percent, and be on a school board and serve them 100 percent."

**Back in Marshall, Ziegler has what some might consider more direct conflicts of interest.**

As a Madison teacher, he is a member of a union affiliated with WEAC — just like the teachers in the district he presides over.

Then there is this: Ziegler was already president of the Marshall School Board in August 2011 when his colleagues voted 6-0 to hire his wife, Mary Jo Ziegler, to be Marshall's director of instruction — a job that pays her



## Serving whose interests?

\$85,000 a year in salary and another \$21,000 in benefits.

The hiring of Mary Jo Ziegler — who prior to that was an education consultant for DPI paid an hourly rate of \$36.70 — never became a controversial public issue. Nor, perhaps, was it widely known.

“No, I was not aware of that. That really frustrates me,” says David Waddell, a Marshall School District taxpayer who has criticized the district in recent years. He thinks the hiring could create problems and put the district in a difficult situation, especially if Mary Jo Ziegler’s performance is sub-standard.

Superintendent Barb Sramek and both Jeff and Mary Jo Ziegler defend the situation. Mary Jo Ziegler says she wanted to work in the district because of its diversity.

The job was posted both internally and elsewhere, according to Sramek, and drew 16 applicants. Jeff Ziegler — who is prohibited by Wisconsin law from voting on anything that involves a substantial benefit for a member of his family — was absent the night the board voted to hire her last year. He notes that he also stays out of discussions that involve her, just as, he says, he refrains from negotiating with the teachers in

the district who, like him, are members of unions affiliated with WEAC.

Given all the potential conflicts and issues Ziegler must refrain from involving himself in, Wisconsin Interest asked him why he serves on the Marshall School Board at all. The school board job, after all, pays him only \$1,533 per year — a mere fraction of the \$60,000 he makes as a Madison teacher.

“Because I think I have something to offer,” he said, standing in the library of the elementary school after the district’s annual meeting. “Having someone with an education background is valuable to a school board. I bring my perspective the way everyone else brings theirs.”

**Bryan Kennedy, the AFT-Wisconsin president** who sits on the Glendale-River Hills board, makes a similar argument. He points out that he is the only person with an education background — he has taught at UWM — on the board. Rather than sit on a negotiating committee, he adds, he serves on the curriculum and policy committees.

Yes, he concedes, he supports collective bargaining. But he argues that it’s not just good for teachers, it’s good for the district as a whole because it promotes “best practices.”



Some taxpayers in the district are still upset that those practices included canceling school so teachers could join protests against Walker and Act 10 that Kennedy was helping lead in Madison. For his part, Kennedy insists that he knows he's management when he sits on the school board. He points out that even before Act 10, the teachers in the district were required to make contributions to both their pensions and health insurance — proof, he suggests, that a conciliatory approach can be mutually beneficial to taxpayers and teachers alike.

Dennis Wiser is another union leader heading a school board. A former president and executive director of the Racine Education Association, he is now president of the Racine School Board.

Wiser, as board president in a large city, gets a lot of e-mail, not all of it complimentary. When the board was negotiating new employee agreements during the debate over collective bargaining, residents accused him and other board members of everything from being “shills for the unions” to being “irresponsible” to being “blatantly pro-union and anti-taxpayer.”

Wiser invariably responded with a form letter stating that he shared concerns about spending, opposed a new central office and did not support a higher-spending referendum. He also argued that contracts would include benefit reductions deeper than the ones proposed by Walker.

Of course, Wiser has his admirers as well. One teacher thanked him for ratifying a new contract, adding, “It's nice to know you haven't forgotten your roots.” Another noted that she had taught in the district for 30 years and wrote, “It was great working with you again!”

Just to the south, in Kenosha, both current board President Mary Snyder and board member Jo Ann Taube are also former district teachers and union leaders. (Taube was once president of the Kenosha Education Association.) For years, a third board member was a former district teacher as well.

Gilbert “Gib” Ostman taught social studies

and drivers education in the Kenosha district for approximately 30 years before serving on the board. Ostman sent an e-mail to Kenosha Superintendent Michele Hancock after Kenosha teachers skipped school to protest Act 10, suggesting she cozy up to the teachers behind closed doors:

**‘You can't be president of a union and serve them 100 percent, and be on a school board and serve them 100 percent,’ says a critic.**

“Those PUBLIC EMPLOYEES are attempting to find a solution to not lose those ‘Rights of Public Employees’ that were established over 50 years ago. They are standing up to protect the right to ‘BARGAIN CONTRACTS FAIRLY!’

“Dr. Hancock, I know you cannot support the actions that teachers are taking on a statewide basis, behind the scenes is a different story, however. If teachers are only verbally reprimanded rather than suspended without further pay loss, or terminated from their position, [it] would speak volumes as to how much you appreciate our employees,” wrote Ostman, who left the board later that year.

District employees in Kenosha clearly see their former colleagues as conduits for their agendas.

“Having been a teacher, Mary, you know how important it is to hold on to collective bargaining rights. We all work hard and do important work for the district. This is not too much to ask for,” wrote one employee in a note to Snyder seeking contract extensions last year.

Such pleas seemed to work. During the tumult in Madison, the Kenosha board quickly settled contract extensions with everyone from secretaries

to educational assistants to carpenters and painters, albeit contracts that included pay freezes and retirement and health insurance contribution increases.

### Eight of nine MPS board members are either current or retired public employees.

**Districts like Racine and Kenosha are still** working under extended teacher contracts and living in a world that seems like an ancient memory in places with boards that embraced the Walker reforms.

In Kenosha this summer, for instance, the administration wanted to alter schedules at elementary schools until a union leader informed the district that he was going to file a grievance. School Board member Bob Nuzzo — an engineer and businessman — threw in the towel. But only for a time.

“Let everyone work to the contract,” he wrote to his fellow board members in a June e-mail. “Then evaluate each teacher on their performance for next year, giving contracts for 2013 to only those teachers who perform to OUR expectations. We must provide the best possible education for our students!!”

The exchange shows just how much things could change — and in some districts, already have. Depending on who has the votes.

It would be unfair to assume that all teachers on boards will always side with their former colleagues in the classroom. Indeed, while Act 10 motivated teachers and union members to rally together in many places, it also exposed fissures in union solidarity. One teacher who

sent a confidential e-mail to the superintendent in Kenosha last year frankly commented on the “nature of the union that makes some timid about speaking up.”

“You are aware that ‘mob mentality’ incites fear amongst the weaker and the onlookers and causes people to hold back their voices,” the teacher wrote to Hancock. “I don’t come from Kenosha and am related to nobody here so I am less intimidated. Others (even some administrators) are intimidated by the fire of the union and the way people are connected and talk.”

Others in the district, at about the same time, e-mailed Kenosha board members recommending everything from getting rid of elementary school orchestra lessons, to not requiring counselors to attend all in-service programs, to sharing librarians as a way of saving money. Many of the changes would involve bargaining — though, assuming a ruling by Dane County Circuit Judge Juan Colas restoring bargaining is overturned, not for long.

Even the contracts in places like Kenosha and Racine and Milwaukee will expire eventually. That happened in Marshall earlier this year. In place of the contract, a work group that includes staff as well as administrators and school board members put together a handbook that scales back costly post-retirement health insurance benefits and requires employees to pick up a modest percentage of contributions to health insurance premiums and pensions. It also retains some benefits that aren’t typically found in the private sector. For instance, teachers still get 12 sick days per year and the total can accumulate to 187.

Sramek defends the board’s approach, saying, “Their priorities are always in the right place. It’s about the kids, not their connections or ties.”

The board will — from here on out — have ample opportunity to prove or disprove Sramek’s assertion.

**That same night as the Marshall board meeting,** and not long after the Dane County Circuit Court ruling restoring at least some elements of collective bargaining, the Madison School Board voted to resume bargaining with Madison Teachers Inc., the union Ziegler belongs to.

In Marshall, according to Sramek, there had been no such discussions by *Wisconsin Interest's* deadline. "I believe that most of us view our status as wait-and-see," she stated in an e-mail. "My understanding is that the recent Dane County decision has been subject to misinterpretation as to the scope of the ruling. Information seems to emerge each day. It does make for interesting times!"

It does.

The Marshall School District is strapped for cash. Voters on Nov. 6 approved a school board-sponsored referendum to spend \$1.5 million more for operations over the next three years than currently allowed under levy limits — a budget tactic numerous other boards such as Glendale-River Hills are planning to use or have already used.

Absent successful referendums, though, many districts will continue to face tough choices, including the possibility of layoffs. That's when potential conflicts involving board members in places like Marshall could become even more apparent.

Daniels, the Glendale-River Hills district resident, doesn't think teachers or union representatives should be allowed on school boards at all — a prohibition that is likely not legally feasible.

For now, defenders of the status quo say it's an irrefutable fact that no one gets on a board without being elected. Bryan Kennedy, for instance, has been elected twice. And Jeff Ziegler points out that he's been re-elected since his wife got her job in the district, suggesting that his fellow residents have no problem with it. Assuming most of them even

know about it.

There's reason to wonder.

Ziegler made his comments to *Wisconsin Interest* at the end of the board's annual meeting, and the room was nearly empty, perhaps partly because it was the night of the infamous Monday night Packers-Seahawks game. Even before the game

**'Having someone with an education background is valuable to a school board,' says Jeff Ziegler, a Madison teacher and Marshall board member.**

had started, though, there were only three or four people present other than district staff and board members, including both Jeff and Mary Jo Ziegler.

Brockner, who ran unsuccessfully against Kennedy, has nothing against teachers or unions. His dad, in fact, was a business rep for the AFL-CIO. Unions, he says, "have their place. But there are times that they overreach."

And, he suggests, there are times when voters don't realize the stakes in Wisconsin's new education landscape and let them overreach. The same folks who lost in Madison — the teachers and the unions and the Democrats — are now making a "conscious effort" to slowly gain control of the schools at the local level, says Brockner.

"The Democrats are good at one thing," he adds, "the grass roots. They will take their time and work their way up, and that is what they are doing here." ■

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*Mike Nichols is a freelance writer and a senior fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute.*



# *Power Up!*

# ***Wisconsin's rickety power system nearly collapsed in 1997. What followed was a rare case of our often-feuding leaders uniting to meet the state's future energy needs.***

**BY MICHAEL FLAHERTY**

In the summer of 1997, Wisconsin's electrical generation system was in trouble. Two of the state's nuclear generating plants were down for repairs, and as the summer started getting hotter, Wisconsin and its economy came close to blackout — a regional or possibly even a statewide crash of its electrical generation system.

"We were very close to a major disruption that would have caused serious damage to the state's economy," says Steve Kraus, spokesman for Madison Gas & Electric, a utility that serves the Madison area.

Customers were calling Kraus with sharp questions for which he had no good answers. They were legitimate questions, too, he adds. Manufacturing customers require huge amounts of electricity, while businesses and the state's then-emerging technology industries require power that flows at precise voltages and

amperages. So even "brownouts" (not failures, losses of voltage) could have had serious consequences.

It's impossible to calculate the economic catastrophe that might have been created in 1997 by a statewide brownout, rolling blackout or total blackout. But it's not hard to envision it in broad strokes. Wisconsin's economic output that year was about \$160 billion, or about \$440 million a day. Even a regional disruption could have cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

As India demonstrated this past summer, the failure of an electrical grid can spread quickly. India's

circuits kept popping until the blackout spread 2,000 miles, putting nearly 10 percent of the world's population in the dark.

The reason for Wisconsin's 1997 blackout scare wasn't complicated. For more than a decade, Wisconsin's utilities had not built a major electrical



generating plant or done a major transmission system upgrade, while demand for electricity was projected to grow more than 2 percent per year — the equivalent of a new 500-megawatt electric generating plant every two years.

With no major power plants being built, or even planned, Wisconsin was facing a situation in which the state's economy would soon demand more electricity than its utilities could deliver. We Energies, which serves the heavily industrialized southeast, was projecting that Wisconsin would be 4,000 megawatts short of its electrical needs by 2010. And that projection didn't include the planned retirements of the state's oldest coal-burning power plants, a third of which were more than 50 years old.

The utility industry and the state's political and business leaders knew they were operating on borrowed time.

"We faced very serious reliability problems," says Ave Bie, chairwoman of the Wisconsin Public Service Commission from 1998 to 2004. "We knew we needed new generation — and we needed the investor-owned utilities to start building."

**Fast forward to the summer of 2012.** High temperatures around the state set records, and Wisconsin experienced more than a month's worth of highs over 90 degrees and nearly a dozen days with highs over 100.

At the same time, Wisconsin's economic output had grown nearly two-thirds (to \$254 billion in 2011), and Wisconsin manufacturers were coming back to life from the 2008 recession, re-energizing their production lines and their need for electricity to power them.

Yet this summer, Wisconsin's electricity production system didn't miss an electron. Even at the height of summer demand, Wisconsin was actually exporting electricity — with an estimated 22 percent of its megawatts of generating capacity still in reserve

"We signed up for interruptible power in exchange for lower electric rates," explains John Torinus, chief executive of Serigraph, a specialized printing company in West Bend that buys about \$1.25 million worth of electricity per year. "In the last six years, we've never had our power interrupted — not even once," even

though the agreement allows the utility to shut off power to his plant if systemwide demand starts outstripping the utility's capacity.)

In fact, Wisconsin utility representatives, regulators and observers such as Bie say the state is now well-positioned for years into the future as the nation's electrical generation system — and the way we use electricity — faces enormous changes and challenges.

"It is very hard to site new transmission lines or build a new coal generation facility, but we got it done," says Bie, who is now managing partner at Quarles and Brady law firm in Madison specializing in regulatory law and utility legal issues. "And today, it is clear we made a good decision."

**What happened in Wisconsin starting in 1997 is a case of good government, good leadership and good public policy.**

In 1997, Wisconsin's political and business leaders, as well as consumer representatives, all agreed the state's outmoded electrical generation and transmission system was a serious threat to future economic growth. They knew that failing to act could cost millions in terms of lost productivity and jobs —





and could cost billions in lost future state growth and investment, especially in energy-dependent sectors such as manufacturing.

And they fixed it.

Over several years, they worked together, laid out enormously ambitious plans, and took substantial political risks to build the legislative, regulatory, business and consumer support needed to reinvest in and modernize Wisconsin's generation and transmission system.

At the table in legislative discussions in 1997, 2001 and again in 2005 were utility leaders; consumer groups such as the Citizens Utility Board, Customers First! and the Wisconsin Industrial Energy Group; business groups including Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce and the Milwaukee Area Chamber of Commerce; and legislative leaders from both political parties. During this time, state government was in the hands of governors from both parties, Tommy Thompson, Scott McCallum and Jim Doyle.

Since then — after not building a new power plant in more than a decade — Wisconsin has opened 36 new and rebuilt power plants. This includes facilities powered by coal, natural gas and renewable energy sources, with the capacity to generate an additional 7,313 megawatts of electricity — more than half again as much as the state's total capacity in the mid-1990s.

Those leaders came together again in 2001 to support a second piece of legislation that created a new system to rebuild Wisconsin's electric transmission system and that connected the state with a regional electricity marketing organization. And in 2005, they cooperated again (albeit with much less

unanimity) to support legislation to help Wisconsin join the national drive for electricity produced from renewable energy sources such as wind.

The problems facing Wisconsin's electrical grid in 1997 were as complicated as the grid itself. The technical problems weren't easily understood. Reserve margins, prices and projected demand increases varied by utility and by region of the state. One small utility in the 1990s even enjoyed summer reserves as high as 25 percent.

***Since the 1997 crisis, Wisconsin has opened 36 new and rebuilt power plants. The added electrical capacity exceeds by 50 percent the power available in the mid-1990s.***

Wisconsin was linked with other states by three interstate power lines that, while limited, could import electricity when Wisconsin plants couldn't keep up. And the industry had tools such as energy efficiency efforts, customer-demand management tools, time-of-

day pricing and interruptible demand.

But major areas of population such as southeastern Wisconsin still faced a crisis in 1997 in which electrical supply was at times within 1 percent of customer demand. That meant, in essence, there was no reserve margin — let alone the 15 percent-plus required by regulators.

Wisconsin utilities didn't even own enough generating capacity to serve their customers during periods of peak demand. They were instead meeting that razor-thin margin between supply and demand through load-balancing tools and by importing up to 1,000 megawatts of electricity from other states.

"It was a very serious situation," says MGE's Kraus.

Adds Bie: "Even the University of Wisconsin was deeply concerned because its research facilities use a lot of electricity — and they needed that reliability."

More worrisome, the economy and demand for

electricity were projected to grow by 2 percent or more per year — with higher growth in parts of the state that had some of the lowest reserve margins. Manufacturing, about a fourth of the state's economic output in 1997, was the state's most power-thirsty sector and projected to grow 2.7 percent per year.

In short, the Public Service Commission's first Strategic Energy Assessment concluded in 2000: Major regions of Wisconsin faced "serious reliability problems."

One important step had already been taken. In May 1998, the Legislature passed — and Gov. Tommy Thompson signed — the Electric Reliability Act (Act 204), a comprehensive piece of legislation designed to streamline the process for planning and approving new power plants and transmission lines. The law replaced the Advanced Plan process which, in the PSC's words, was designed to "efficiently" take into consideration all the major factors that go into planning new power facilities, such as demand, reliability, prices, environmental impact and economic impacts.

But it was a complicated process that included steep regulatory hoops and involved a large number of groups with deep divisions over how to proceed with Wisconsin's energy future. Supporters of the Advanced Plan process argued forcefully that approving major projects such as new power plants should be slow, with great attention to detail. Utility leaders argued that it was a recipe for regulatory gridlock, which, given what was happening at the time, was hard to dispute.

**Once the Reliability Act passed, utilities got right to work.** Wisconsin Energy Corp. (We Energies) launched "Power the Future," a \$6 billion plan to

build 1,200 megawatts of new electric generation in the form of two large coal-fired plants as well as a huge natural-gas-fired power plant. It later re-launched the project as a \$7 billion proposal that included the conversion of an older, less efficient coal plant to natural gas as well as a host of environmental and transmission system upgrades. By itself, Power the Future would add 2,800 megawatts of electric generating capacity to Wisconsin's energy grid.

Green Bay-based Wisconsin Public Service Corp. soon followed with its plan to build a 500-megawatt coal-burning plant at its Weston facility, near Wausau.

Act 204 also paved the way for another new, important player in Wisconsin's electric generation industry: independent "merchant" power producers. The act partially deregulated the industry for non-utilities by removing the rule requiring proof of "need" for a new power plant, a major sticking point in debates over new power plant approval under the Advanced Plan process.

Under 204, plants could be built as long as their builders could show they didn't create major environmental problems. It was up to the owners to bear the risk of whether the market — or the "need" — existed for the electricity. With that enormous regulatory hurdle removed, private companies could now build power plants in Wisconsin.

Lawmakers also flirted with the idea of a fully deregulated Wisconsin electric industry to expand investment in electric generation and transmission. However, California's disastrous deregulation experiment, which sparked shortages and enormous price increases, quickly short-circuited that idea.

**In the end, Act 204 stabilized Wisconsin's electricity market, freeing up private companies to**

***At the peak of this summer's heat wave, Wisconsin's power system was actually exporting electricity.***

build “merchant” plants while still requiring state regulatory oversight. The law required the state’s regulated utilities to purchase “merchant” electricity under long-term contracts. It also gave the PSC joint authority to oversee “merchant” plants that are normally regulated only by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Partial deregulation worked. Since Act 204’s passage, Wisconsin has seen the construction of 25 natural gas-fired power plants, which burn more efficiently, emitting less carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and particulate matter than the plants they replaced. Most are investor-owned power plants that have become an important part of Wisconsin’s generating capacity, especially during peak demand.

In 2001, Wisconsin’s business, consumer and political leadership came together again to address the other critical problem facing Wisconsin’s electric generation system: an outmoded electric transmission system.

The legislation helped form the American Transmission Co., the nation’s first private, multistate company to own and manage a state’s electric transmission system. ATC also connected Wisconsin to the Midwest’s newly formed regional electricity sales and marketing organization called MISO (the Midwest Independent Transmission System Operators). MISO would enable Wisconsin to buy and sell power from neighboring states quickly and efficiently — and allow the state to participate in regional planning for future generation and transmission.

Today, ATC, owned by 29 investor-owned utilities, electric cooperatives, municipal utilities and local governments in four states, maintains 9,440 miles of power lines. Since 2001, ATC has invested \$2.7 billion

in Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota and Illinois — and plans to spend another \$4 billion in the next decade to upgrade old lines and build new ones.

ATC’s job was to plan, finance, site and build new transmission lines, which by itself is very difficult, says Bie, reflecting back on the enormous public battle over the construction of the Arrowhead-Weston line that would eventually link Wisconsin with Canada’s low-cost, renewable hydroelectric power supplies.

“But creating ATC also allowed the utilities to focus on building new power plants, which is also extremely difficult.”

And they all delivered as promised, she notes.

Finally in 2005, the industry and state leaders acted together again — though, admittedly with less consensus. Under Gov. Jim Doyle, the Legislature passed Act 141, which paved the way for a new generation of plants powered by renewable energy sources

such as wind. It requires that by 2015, 10 percent of electricity sold by utilities must come from renewable energy sources.

Since then, Wisconsin utilities have built 10 new wind farms with another major wind facility expected to come on line next year.

**All that investment in power generation plants and transmission lines has come at a price, of course.** Most of that \$15 billion investment required loans that ultimately are repaid by utility customers in the form of higher prices for electricity. Wisconsin’s electricity prices, among the lowest in the Midwest in 1997, are the highest. The average price for electricity (for all types of customers) has nearly doubled since 1990, from just over 5 cents a kilowatt-hour to nearly 10 cents, according to the PSC.



As a result Wisconsin's consumers, notably its businesses and industries that must compete nationally and internationally, are struggling with higher electricity prices as they also wrestle with the worldwide recession and aggressive competition from low-wage countries.

In light of high prices and huge margins of supply, the complaint now is that Wisconsin has "overbuilt"

its system — especially as the PSC considers proposals for even more new generation with very high capital costs, which would push electric rates even higher.

But Wisconsin's energy prices are still below the national average, as the PSC noted this summer in its most recent Strategic Energy Assessment report, which examines the state's electrical needs through

2018. It also pointed out that Wisconsin's personal incomes have grown faster than energy prices over the same period, and that after the construction of new power plants and transmission lines, Wisconsin is well-positioned for a rapidly changing future in the world of electric supply and demand.

"The magnitude and mix of new electric generation" means that "Wisconsin's generation supply future appears in strong shape," the 2018 SEA concludes. And that supply "will be available at reasonable rates."

The new construction did cost a lot of money, admits Bie.

"But the most expensive power you can buy is the power you don't have when you need it. That can cost a larger company a lot of money."

"I'm not wild about these higher rates," says Torinus. "But in the end, I have to lean in favor of higher reliability. We own part of a plant in India. The

lights are always flickering [there], and, this summer, a lot of our customers faced serious disruptions."

**At the same time, however, environmental** questions hang heavily over the electric generating industry. That's because new Environmental Protection Agency rules that go into full effect in 2015 will hit the Midwest's coal-burning plants hard.

The nine states that make up the Midwest Independent Transmission System Operators are home to 70,000 megawatts of generating capacity produced by coal-burning power plants. Of that capacity, 60,000 megawatts will be affected by the new EPA rules, and a substantial portion of those plants face more than one EPA hurdle.

Critics argue that coal-burning power plants are responsible

for the bulk of the emissions of nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, mercury and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. They say that building more coal-fired plants would be a poor alternative to aggressive conservation efforts combined with new investments in alternative sources of energy.

However, lost in Wisconsin's debate over building new, more efficient coal-burning power plants was the fact that those plants would allow the retirement or retrofitting of 26 old coal-burning power plants, nearly 1,000 megawatts of power. None of those plants were equipped with modern pollution controls, which can eliminate almost all the nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and particulate matter, and a majority of the mercury.

MISO estimates that the regionwide price tag to meet the new EPA regulations could be as high as \$33 billion, including the cost of closing 100 coal-based power plants now generating 12.6 gigawatts in those



nine states. That capacity will have to be replaced by either new, more efficient coal-burning plants, nuclear or natural gas-fired plants or renewable energy facilities — all of which will be much more expensive.

Thanks to the decisions Wisconsin started making in 1998, the state may have a leg up. Because state utilities began investing more than a decade ago in new, more efficient power plants, transmission lines and environmental controls on older power plants, Wisconsin utilities now generate substantial amounts of electricity from modern, advanced coal-burning technology with the latest environmental controls. That means Wisconsin utilities will receive top priority when MISO coordinates sales of electricity around the region.

More importantly, when the EPA rules go into effect, other Midwestern states will be required to spend billions to upgrade and replace their power plants, while Wisconsin utilities will already have been there, done that. Wisconsin ratepayers are already as much as 10 years into their payment schedules on those 36 new and upgraded facilities, including coal plants with the latest emission controls, new natural gas plants, and new wind farms.

Finally, those new transmission lines are allowing Wisconsin utilities to export their surplus electricity. That revenue will help pay off the new power plants, to the relief of ratepayers. “Wisconsin is on the front edge of the construction cycle,” deadpans the PSC in its SEA-2018 report. “The newer units in Wisconsin have a benefit over the other plants in the MISO footprint.”

**MISO is the real game-changer, utility leaders say.**

To maximize efficiencies of production and

transmission regionwide, MISO is playing an unexpectedly major role in deciding which power plants to close, where to build new power plants and how to best build and maintain an electric transmission system.

MISO also prices and sells large amounts of electricity between states with surprisingly little involvement by the utilities selling and buying the power in the nine-state region. The transactions occur

within five minutes, which means MISO determines where the lowest-cost electricity is available and pulls the switch on the sale.

MISO’s role in the marketplace is enormous. Last year it bought and sold \$27.5 billion worth of electricity to the 374 market participants

in its region. That role will only expand as the electric industry faces changes. Wisconsin should be well-situated because it is ahead of the investment curve.

There is still a lot of work to do. The nation’s energy generation and transmission system faces huge challenges in the way America generates, transports and uses electricity.

But because Wisconsin’s business, consumer and political leadership acted early and decisively, those leaders are still seeing that those early decisions were correct and that they are paying off handsomely to make Wisconsin a winner as the nation’s energy future evolves. ■

***‘The magnitude and mix of new electric generation’ means that ‘Wisconsin’s generation supply future appears in strong shape at... reasonable rates,’ the PSC concluded.***

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*Michael Flaherty is a former Wisconsin State Journal state government reporter who covered the passage and implementation of energy legislation in 1997 and 2001. He is now president of Flaherty & Associates, a public policy strategic communications and public relations firm. He has worked with utilities, consumer groups and environmental groups on energy issues ranging from stray voltage to pipeline siting*

# 30 miles — and

DANE



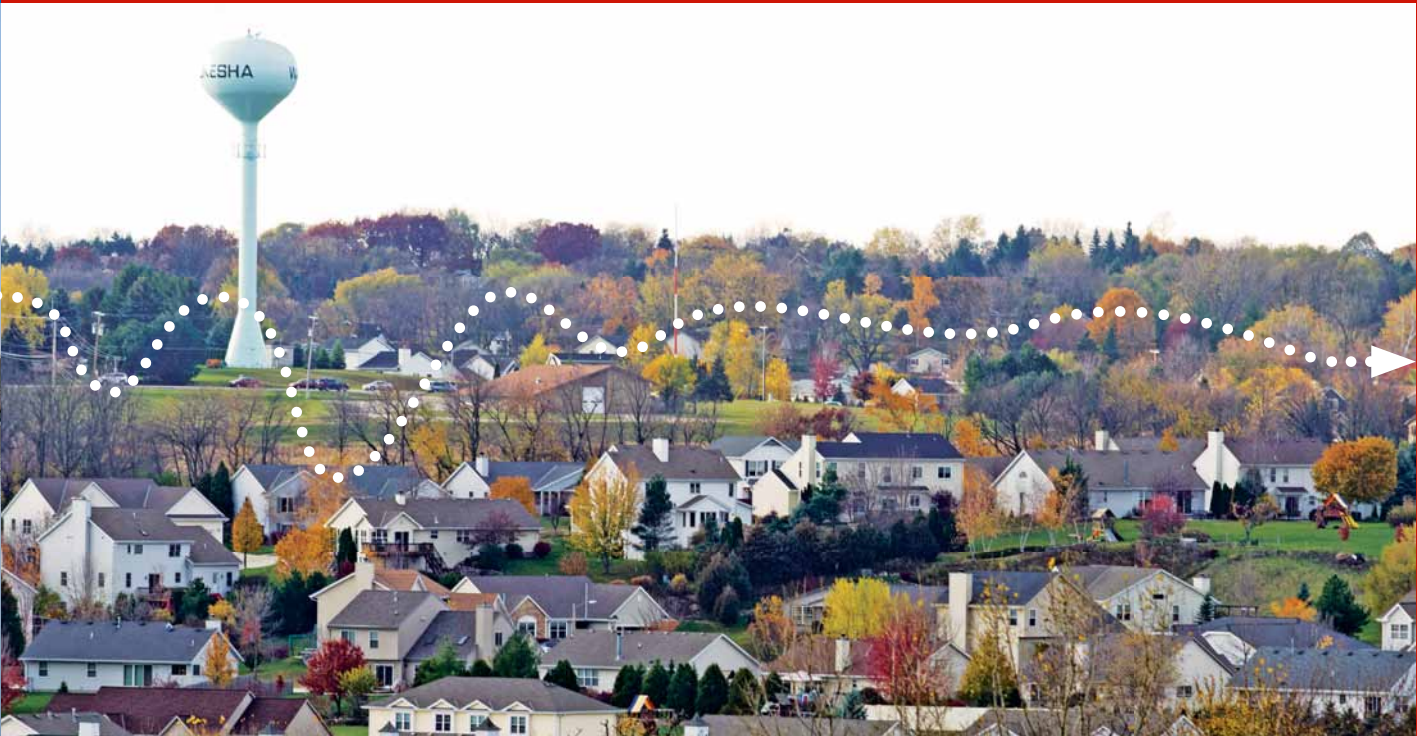
BY TORBEN LÜTJEN

## Dane and Waukesha counties embody the bitter partisan divide in the nation

*Editor's note: How is it that American political parties, for so long shifting coalitions of interests, have become more ideological than the ideology-based parties of western Europe? That question brought German political scientist Torben Lütjen to the battleground of Wisconsin politics.*

*Lütjen, who teaches at the University of Düsseldorf and is a visiting scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is researching a book on the reasons behind political polarization. He's concluded that of the more than 3,000 counties in the United States, Waukesha and Dane counties best showcase the realities of polarization. Wisconsin Interest is pleased to offer his preliminary observations.*

# a world — apart



WAUKESHA

Few people could be more poles apart than bloggers Lisa Mux and David Blaska.

Mux is a liberal from Waukesha County, which encompasses the western suburbs of Milwaukee. The conservative Blaska is based in the state capital of Madison. Mux thinks about moving to Canada or Germany for what she believes is their superior health care. Blaska is convinced that “Obamacare,” which in most European countries would not qualify as a large-scale “government-run” social program, means just another step toward “socialism” — a word that he never hesitates to use when describing the policies of the Democratic Party.

Blaska blogs at *ibmadison.com*. He says that what

he enjoys most about his writing is the heat and the controversy, especially when he antagonizes liberals. Mux blogs at *bloggingblue.com*. She doesn’t like conflict and is shocked by the hatred that often characterizes political debate.

Blaska, apparently, is from Mars, Mux from Venus.

Still, they have something in common, and it was Blaska who put me on to it. “There is someone in Waukesha,” he told me over lunch in March 2012, “that is just like me.”

What he meant was that Mux is part of a local minority just as he is. She is a liberal voice in the conservative heartland of Waukesha County, just as Blaska is a conservative voice in liberal Madison. They

## In Madison, bikers are everywhere. In Waukesha County, SUVs and trucks are king.

share the same fate of belonging to a somewhat exotic species of people who seem to have picked a strange place for their fight and mission.

Madison's position as the center of liberalism and progressive politics in Wisconsin is hardly a secret; when conservatives call it Mad City or refer to it as "70 square miles surrounded by reality," it is not with affection. Waukesha's public recognition as the bedrock of the Republican Party is probably a more recent phenomenon, and liberals have their own choice nicknames for it. "Mordor," referring to the burned wasteland from which all evil springs in J.R.R. Tolkien's epic tale *The Lord of the Rings*, is perhaps the most memorable one I came across, except maybe for the somewhat more precise formulation of "Mordor with lawns."

All of this wouldn't be overly important if not for the fact that today there are many Waukeshas and Madisons in the United States: places that have become heavy strongholds for one party or the other. We owe much of that insight to Austin, Texas-based journalist Bill Bishop and his 2008 book, *The Big Sort*. In 1976, Bishop writes, just about 25 percent of Americans lived in counties where the winner of the presidential election won by a margin of more than 20 percent. In 2004, the number of Americans living in such "landslide counties" had basically doubled.

Forget the simple red states versus blue states map that is broadcast during presidential campaigns, showing a liberal America in the coastal regions and a conservative America basically everywhere else. This map is, of course, an oversimplification. States are huge, and even within heavily blue states, there are deeply red patches, and vice versa.

Where America is really segregated is in much smaller units: counties, communities and neighborhoods. And Wisconsin, this once so widely praised example of political consensus and a civil

political culture, is a perfect example. In the recall election of 2012, 70 percent of all Wisconsinites lived in counties that qualify as "landslide counties."

To put it in a nutshell: Three in four Wisconsinites reside in communities where one party dominates overwhelmingly and where the chances that their



neighbors and colleagues share their worldview are very high. Unsurprisingly, Dane and Waukesha counties are leading the way here, too: Waukesha County went 72 percent for Scott Walker; Dane County, the epicenter of the anti-Walker protests, went 69 percent for his Democratic opponent, Tom Barrett.

Then again, why should it matter that the United States in general and Wisconsin in particular have become places of political strongholds? Why should we not be surrounded by those who mostly agree with us and turn our backs on those who hold opinions that we find, at best, painfully wrong? Why suffer from high blood pressure when we have the chance to live our lives untroubled?

It probably matters a great deal. A lot of evidence suggests that exposure to different viewpoints is essential to a healthy, functioning democracy. People who are subject to dissent, who are from time to time challenged in their beliefs, are simply more likely to take other positions more seriously.



Dissonant information creates ambiguity and ambivalence, and it makes us more aware that other viewpoints, as false as they appear to us, are no less (and sometimes no more) the product of human reasoning than our own. It definitely does not follow that we have to subscribe to the somewhat



I remember a conversation with the owner of a popular bar on State Street in Madison — one of the places where the liberal heart of the Capitol beats — who told me about his drive to Milwaukee. It was right in the middle of the recall campaign. He had to drive through Waukesha County, became tired and pulled over. Suddenly he noticed all the “Stand with Walker” signs that were totally absent in his hometown.

Before that moment, he had never paid much attention to the hill-after-hill suburban sprawl that is Waukesha County. And then he told me, more serious than joking, something that I think perfectly reveals the nature of the divide: “I felt dirty. When I had arrived in Milwaukee, I wanted to take a shower.” His feet had not even touched Waukesha soil (and never had before, as he frankly admitted), but he nevertheless felt “contaminated” by what he perceived as an alien, strange and even immoral place.

I heard such statements (this one clearly was the most stark) quite frequently when I talked to ordinary residents and political activists in both counties. Polarization is not only a consequence of deep divides

postmodern idea that, as a consequence, all ideas must be regarded as only “relatively” true or false; some reasoning can still be sounder than other.

But acknowledging that these ideas nevertheless stem from reasoning and that they are the product of specific experiences makes it harder to simply debunk them as either totally irrelevant or just downright evil.

There is reason to believe that America has become such a hotbed of ideological polarization because that kind of cross-cutting exposure is missing, and that the country has split into closed and radically separated enclaves that follow their own constructions of reality. This is true not only in the virtual world of partisan media but also here, in the physical world.

And when I say that without deliberation and dissent, we are in danger of perceiving the other side as evil, I am really speaking of a moral conceptualization of the political that partisans on both sides have now deeply internalized.

## By the numbers

	Waukesha County	Dane County
Population 2010	389,891	488,073
White alone	90.6%	81.9%
Black or African American alone	1.2%	5.1%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	4.1%	5.9%
Asian alone	2.7%	4.7%
Bachelor’s Degree or higher, (age 25+, 2006-2010)	39.2%	45.4%
Median Household Income (2006-2010)	\$75,064	\$60,519
% of public employees in workforce	8.8%	22.0%

SOURCES: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES, 2006-10



## A world apart

over policy. In this case it was more a question of finding the other side bizarre and abnormal because of their lifestyles, the way they dress and speak, their tastes and their preferences. These are things not seemingly related to politics, but they are important for defining personal identity.

Yet, despite their profound estrangement, Dane and Waukesha counties, whose borders are merely 30 miles apart and separated only by sparsely populated Jefferson County, are not that different at all. In terms of their demographics, both are affluent, educated and predominantly white.

Most of the characteristics that helped us in the past to understand different political attitudes and ideologies do not contribute very much to explaining the depth of the division between Waukesha and Dane counties. And still, everybody visiting both places can see immediately how different they really are.

We may even leave aside the many stereotypes that nowadays are connected to the debate about the two Americas, although I do indeed suppose that the proportion of latte-drinking, New-York-Times-reading soccer-fans in Madison is higher than in Waukesha, which might in fact have a larger share of beer-drinking, country-music-listening NASCAR-enthusiasts.

More essential is the fact that life in these two places simply follows a different rhythm because of the way that public and private spaces are structured and interwoven with each other. In Madison, bikers and bike paths are everywhere, and if it were the only American city you ever visited, you would think that at least a fifth of all Americans drive hybrid cars.

In Waukesha County, SUVs and trucks are king, and seeing a cyclist must be a rare event, since I didn't see one over a four-week period. Madison is densely populated, and many of its neighborhoods have their own centers with local stores, bars and restaurants. In the midsize cities of Waukesha County, such as Brookfield and New Berlin, a city center is absent, and I

suspect not missed by its residents.

The only town with an urban setting is the City of Waukesha, the county seat and the only spot in Waukesha County where Democrats are close to competitive. James Wigderson, a conservative blogger who lives in the seemingly placid City of Waukesha, told me how other county residents don't like coming downtown because they find the street system confusing and are afraid of getting lost. For those residents, the city is not a draw for shopping or entertainment.

When I told the legendary chairman of the Republican Party of Waukesha County, Don Taylor, a banking executive whose Waukesha State Bank is located in the middle of the city, that downtown Waukesha, with its cafés, art galleries and even one tattoo parlor, was similar to Madison, he replied: "Is that really true? Then it's good I never go there, I guess!"

**The truth is that the spatial structuring of a place is never an apolitical issue.** It is the reason why land use is one of the most debated issues in local politics and definitely the one that seems most illuminating to me in understanding the worldview of the cultural-political majority in each county.

Madison's liberal political leaders love density. Much of their anti-sprawl attitude stems from serious and honest concerns about the environment. But it also follows an aesthetic ideal of a lively, vibrant city in which working and living are not so strictly separated, where people meet in public spaces and use public transportation and where real diversity can be found (although Madison, like every other hipster's paradise, is in many ways one of the most homogeneous places imaginable).

No wonder that the creation of a light-rail system is a continuing dream of liberals in Madison, albeit one that seems not very realistic. In conversations I had with Madison liberals, Waukesha often served as the prime

## Exposure to different viewpoints is essential to a healthy, functioning democracy.

example of the negative consequences of unrestricted growth. It was hard to sort out in their criticism the line between policy disagreement and their subjective rejection of the suburban way of life.

“You can build whatever you want there,” a liberal member of the Dane County Board grouched. “In suburbia, everybody is the same and nothing ever happens.”

Of course, residents of Waukesha County interpret their lifestyle as the exact opposite of uniformity: a celebration of American individualism. The many freeways and highways cutting through the county and the still remarkably dynamic development of subdivisions and yet another shopping mall are not

complete strangers — are intertwined, lower density/suburban environments support a more individualistic mindset.

It’s almost needless to say that the former experience creates higher support for the welfare state than the latter, even among those who are not direct beneficiaries of transfer payments.

Given the presence of the large university, the high number of state employees and Madison’s long tradition of being a laboratory of progressive politics, the city’s liberal leaning is self-evident and something of a self-perpetuating phenomenon for more than 100 years. Waukesha County’s conservatism, by contrast, is

### At the ballot box: Dane County versus Waukesha County

Year	Race	GOP Cand	Dem Cand	Dane Dem Votes	Dem % of Total	Waukesha GOP Votes	GOP % of Total
2012	President	Romney	Obama	216,071	71%	161,567	66.9%
2012	Gov Recall	Walker	Barrett	176,407	69.10%	154,316	72.30%
2010	Governor	Walker	Barrett	149,699	68.0%	134,608	71.5%
2008	President	McCain	Obama	205,984	72.8%	145,152	62.3%
2006	Governor	Green	Doyle	149,661	70.0%	112,243	63.7%
2004	President	Bush	Kerry	181,052	66.0%	154,926	67.3%
2002	Governor	McCallum	Doyle	97,084	56.4%	88,661	62.4%

SOURCE: GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD, DANE AND WAUKESHA COUNTY CLERKS

*The two counties are opposing strongholds for Democrats and Republicans.*

only taken as proof of economic success but also as an affirmation of an individualistic lifestyle that offers both a maximum of freedom and a minimum of stress and inconvenience.

It is not surprising that sociologists have found that spatial configuration can deeply shape people’s attitudes about the way society should be organized. Whereas dense, urban environments often support the idea of togetherness and create a stronger awareness of how the interests of citizens — even when they are

not only a more recent phenomenon, but seems also more in need of an explanation.

There are many possible reasons. But one thing that is specific about Waukesha County is its difficult relationship with Milwaukee, a relationship that is filled with extraordinary and mutual animosities. This city versus suburbia conflict is nothing special and can be found elsewhere. But there is reason to believe that this one is even more complicated, not only because Milwaukee is one of the most segregated cities in the

## After driving through Waukesha County and seeing all the ‘Stand With Walker’ signs, a Madison man told me he felt dirty and wanted to take a shower.

United States with a long list of social problems that frighten suburbanites.

What is more important, I suppose, is that suburban Waukesha County is not the typical residential area from which people commute to the big city for work. Waukesha County’s economic success has transformed it into a politically and culturally exceptional place. Home to many small businesses, the county itself now supplies many of the jobs for its residents.

Driving I-94 during rush hour, one is surprised to see that there is actually heavy traffic in both directions, and in this case, intuition is supported by the data: Almost as many people now commute from Milwaukee to Waukesha County as the other way around. The extremely negative attitude that many people in Waukesha County have about the city of Milwaukee might, after all, be rooted in the fact that many of them lack any connection to the city itself.

**The structure of a place cannot only shape political attitudes.** It can also attract very different kinds of people, and I think that is what happened, too, over the last decades, as Waukesha and Dane counties appealed to different people from very different places.

It is important to note that both exhibit an extraordinary population dynamic: Many moved away; and even more — many more — moved in. This movement can be analyzed by using the data of the Internal Revenue Service, which tracks the migration patterns of Americans, or at least of those who file tax returns (which means the data encompass roughly 87 percent of the adult population). The patterns of migration that we find here are very different.

In the last 20 years, more than 85 percent of those who moved to Waukesha County came from a different county within Wisconsin, making out-of-state migration an insignificant factor. That most of the migration comes from Milwaukee is also not unanticipated. However, the number of migrants from

Milwaukee County is still impressive: Between 1990 and 2010, when much of the flight to the suburbs had already happened, more than 184,000 people moved from Milwaukee County to Waukesha County, accounting for more than half the total migration to Waukesha County.

Dane County’s migration pattern is a very different story: More than 40 percent of its new residents came



from outside Wisconsin. Keep in mind that this does not involve the large student population, since most students do not file tax returns. The leading county from which Dane draws its new residents outside Wisconsin is Cook County, Ill., home of Chicago and one of the most populous counties in the United States. Given its proximity, that’s not a big surprise.

However, other counties over the years that rank high in out-of-state migration to Dane County are maybe more telling: King County, Wash.; Alameda County, Calif.; Middlesex County, Mass. These are also heavily populated counties, so maybe the migration to Madison is not out of the ordinary. But these are also heavy Democratic strongholds or “landslide counties” — affluent, highly educated and mostly located in the fastest growing parts of the nation. In short, Dane County gets many of its new residents from other “blue” counties whose demographic structures are similar to its own.

There is, I believe, indeed an element of residential segregation that explains how these places have become increasingly homogeneous. Certainly, people do not consult an election atlas to find out where they can mingle with other partisans. The “big sort” is more driven by lifestyle choices and tastes and preferences than by concrete policy issues.



Having spent several months in both Dane and Waukesha counties, I didn't really need the numbers to know that this “sort” was happening, and more importantly, that it is likely to continue.

It was sufficient to talk to those who stand in opposition to the local majorities. True, some are natural contrarians who love going against the grain, who love being the troublemaker and who say that they wouldn't want to live in a community where everybody thinks just like them. And I met others who dislike the political philosophy of their place but say that it seldom affects their everyday lives because they just avoid talking politics.

But many more, according to my impression, do indeed feel isolated, not taken seriously, and frustrated by what they perceived as the ignorance of those who hold power. And ignorance is not the worst of it.

I heard harassment stories that range from subtle

social pressure to downright mobbing. These were people who told me that their cars were keyed because of Republican bumper stickers or who complained that their campaign signs were stolen by their neighbors. Every so often, it was hard to tell where harassment ended and paranoia began.

Some stories, though, bordered on hilarious. The leader of the Republican Party of Dane County tried during the first months of his chairmanship to keep his name out of the media for fear it would hurt his business. How he expected to publicly represent the party wasn't exactly clear, and he became known as the “secret GOP chair.”

It seems, finally, like a vicious circle: Homogeneous places like Waukesha and Dane counties pressure political “minorities” — subtly or crudely — into silence and into retreat from public life. These outliers sometimes give up and just want to get away from a community where they feel reviled for their opinions. That decision, however, makes these places even more homogeneous — and so the cycle continues.

No wonder American politicians have become more extreme and less willing to compromise. Many of them are sent to Madison or Washington, D.C., by voters who live in an echo chamber and cannot imagine contrary viewpoints worthy of consideration. In such a climate, every compromise is deemed a weakness and surrender, when in fact compromise is what politics is all about.

So I conclude: As Waukesha and Dane counties drift apart, so does the nation. ■

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# Still the fighter

*Howard Fuller's allies have changed over the years, but not his commitment to the poor.*



Forty years ago, Howard Fuller was an angry young man working as a community organizer for an anti-poverty program in North Carolina. He had an Afro, wore a dashiki, toyed with Marxism, and spoke disparagingly of racial integration.

He went by the name Owusu Sadaukai, which means "one who leads his people" in Kiswahili. He visited Africa and briefly took up arms with Communist-backed "freedom fighters" trying to overthrow the Portuguese colonial government of Mozambique. Back in the states, he founded a blacks-only university, as well as African Liberation Day, which for several years in the 1970s drew thousands of

marchers in a variety of U.S. cities.

Today, Fuller, 71, lives in Milwaukee and is a nationally known leader in the education reform movement. And while once he was a darling of the left, today he's a hero to conservatives for challenging the teachers unions and championing the school choice movement.

Dissertations and books have been written about Fuller's remarkable life, and he was featured in the emotionally charged documentary about failing inner-city schools, "Waiting for Superman." He's been showered with enough awards to paper a wall, including four honorary doctorates.

He once debated Illinois state Sen. Barack Obama, telling the future president bluntly, “If you think [school reform] can be done within the existing system, you are dreaming. . . . I’m going to tell you right now that if you are going to change public education in America, you’re going to have to do something about the teachers union contract.”

Still, a couple of things haven’t changed.

For one, Howard Fuller is still angry.

“How can you not be angry?” he demands heatedly as we sit in his office at the Institute for the Transformation of Learning, which he founded.

Sunshine streams through the windows of the ivy-covered building on the Marquette University campus and catches the sparks in his eyes.

“People are suffering — people are really suffering!” says the tall, spare man who’s still as lean as he was back in the day when he played basketball for Carroll College.

“We all ought to be angry. The objective conditions for poor people in this city have gotten worse, not better.”

Fuller still believes in the concept of social justice, that the “haves” of this nation owe the “have-nots” help to overcome hundreds of years of discrimination and poverty.

The best way to do that, Fuller believes, is through education — which too many schools in Milwaukee and elsewhere are failing to provide for low-income children.

And while this former superintendent of Milwaukee’s public schools is famous for his criticism of the school district, he admits that the best solution to the problems of educating poor and minority students still eludes him.

Fuller is on the front lines. He is chairman of the board of the CEO Leadership Academy, a charter high school in the Washington Park neighborhood.

The school began as a private voucher school launched by a group of black clergymembers; CEO

stands for Clergy for Educational Options.

It has 194 students, all minorities. Last year, 57 percent of its graduates went on to four-year colleges or universities. It operates not under the auspices of the Milwaukee Public Schools, but under the City of Milwaukee. It has a longer school day than Milwaukee public high schools, a lower student-teacher ratio, and its students wear uniforms.

Fuller teaches there. He grades papers. He takes students with him as he flies around the country to help other communities with their schools.

But in terms of student achievement, CEO

Leadership Academy is not where he wants it to be. For example, its 10th graders scored “proficient” or “advanced” only half as often as public high school students on the Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Exam.

Fuller is deeply disappointed.

“We are not a great school,” he says and sighs. “We are trying to become one. Every board member, every teacher cares deeply, but we’re not getting the job done.”

It can be done, Fuller knows, because he is living proof.

**Howard Fuller was born in Shreveport, La.,** and raised by his mother and grandmother.

“My father was not in my life,” he says. “I met him once, when I was 30. I was giving a speech somewhere, and afterward he came up and introduced himself and said he was my father.”

Fuller pauses, looks out the window.

“It meant nothing to me.”

“I owe everything to my mother and grandmother,” he says. The family moved to Milwaukee’s Hillside Housing Project when Fuller was 6.

“I tell the kids in my school, ‘I ran the same streets that you are running, so don’t try to fool me!’” he says with a grin.

His mother folded towels in an industrial laundry,

*Once Fuller was a darling of the left. Today he’s a hero to conservatives for championing school choice and challenging teachers unions.*

working on her feet eight hours a day, until she got a job as a ward clerk in the Milwaukee County Hospital. Fuller believes all the lint she inhaled at the laundry contributed to the lung condition that killed her at age 88.

His mother and grandmother believed fervently in education, he remembers. "There was never any question about me completing high school." He went to Carroll College in Waukesha and became Carroll's first black graduate.

He earned a master's degree in sociology at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland before heading for North Carolina and a 10-year stint as what one newspaper called a "controversial, young activist."

It was during those years that he became involved with a group of black students at Duke University who complained that what they were learning at Duke was "completely irrelevant" to their lives.

So they founded Malcolm X Liberation University, which operated for three years before succumbing to a lack of money.

Still, the memory of their youthful idealism makes Fuller smile even now. "That 'young me' helped produce the 'old me' that's still fighting today," he says.

### **In the late 1970s, Fuller moved back to Milwaukee.**

"I had a responsibility to the neighborhood where I grew up," he says. He sold insurance, then got a job at Milwaukee Area Technical College.

In 1982, Democratic Gov. Tony Earl — "Yes, there actually was a governor before Tommy Thompson," he jokes — tapped Fuller to become secretary of the state's Department of Employee Relations.

While Earl is the politician whom Fuller respects the most, he also grew to like Thompson, who as head of the Assembly Republicans was known as "Dr. No."

"I met with Tommy and told him, 'Look, I know you are probably going to vote down everything I propose, but before you do that, I'm going to come to your

office and explain what I'm doing, so at least you know what you're voting "No" on.'"

After leaving state government, Fuller returned to Milwaukee to become dean of Milwaukee Area Technical College and earn a doctorate in education at Marquette.

He also resumed a role he'd had in the early 1980s: that of the Milwaukee Public Schools' most vocal critic.

He chided the district unmercifully for spending the most money per student of any district in the state and getting the worst results in student achievement.

He opposed desegregation efforts, arguing that instead of busing black children to white schools, the district should focus on improving black neighborhood schools.

Desegregation implies "that anything that is all-black is

inferior. I don't think that in order for black people to be successful, you have to be with whites.

"When integration started in Milwaukee," he adds, "the whole thing was done on the backs of the black kids. Black schools were closed, blacks students forced to ride buses everyday, all to benefit white kids."

From the start, Fuller supported the controversial Milwaukee school voucher program, which lets poor children attend private schools by taking the state's portion of the city's public school aid money and letting it "follow the child" to private schools.

Although now considered the most successful school voucher program in the nation, the program is derided for its supposed harm to the public schools, both by depriving the public schools of money and by cherry-picking students.

The program, which began in 1990, probably would not have been approved by the state Legislature without the efforts of Fuller and then-state-Rep. Polly Williams (D-Milwaukee). They helped form a coalition of Milwaukee Democratic legislators who worked with Republicans to enact the program.

Fuller was an unlikely candidate to lead the Milwaukee Public Schools, so unlikely that his appointment in 1991 wouldn't have been possible

*'I owe everything to my mother and grandmother,' he says. 'My father was not in my life.'*



without action by the state Legislature to waive the requirement that superintendents have at least three years of teaching experience. Since then, other districts have hired “outsiders” like successful businesspeople or retired generals as superintendents.

Fuller’s four-year tenure was, he says, “the most difficult job I’ve ever had in my life. Also, the best.

“I was running on adrenalin for four straight years,” he says. “I felt so deeply about trying to help those kids.”

The concepts Fuller advocated as superintendent — site-based management, empowering principals to hire and fire, closing failing schools and giving parents a voice in school management — are standard today in the reform movement. But 20 years ago, they were very new ideas, and they put Fuller into collision-mode with the powerful Milwaukee teachers union.

By 1995, when a union-backed slate of school board members was elected, he was tired. “I refused to die a death of a thousand cuts,” he says.

One good thing that happened during those tumultuous four years: He met his wife, fellow education reformer Deborah McGriff.

After leaving MPS, he joined the Marquette faculty and founded the Institute for the Transformation of Learning. In 2000, he launched a nationwide coalition, the Black Alliance for Education Options.

**It is difficult to overstate Fuller’s contributions to Milwaukee, to the lives of its black residents, and to the nationwide education reform movement.**

For Kaleem Caire, president of the Urban League of Greater Madison, Fuller has been both a teacher and an inspiration. Caire first met Fuller almost 20 years ago, when Caire was working for the Department of Public Instruction. He later worked in Washington, D.C., for the Black Alliance for Educational Options, another Fuller-founded organization.

Caire said he learned important lessons from Fuller.

*It is difficult to overstate Fuller’s contributions to Milwaukee, to the lives of its black residents, and to the education reform movement.*

For instance, just as Fuller’s fight for school choice allied him with Republicans, Caire also has found friends on the right in his struggle to overcome liberal resistance to his proposed Madison Preparatory Academy.

“People say ‘What happened to Howard? Has he become a Republican?’” Caire says with a laugh.

“I tell them ‘No, he’s not conservative at all.’ But as he taught me, in politics, the lines start to blur after awhile. You take support where you can find it.”

Caire says Fuller also inspired him to keep going in the face of setbacks. “Howard’s been at it for a long, long time. If he can find the strength to keep fighting, so can I.”

Fuller is consulting on the effort to rebuild New Orleans’ school system through charter

schools. He is also exploring the potential of a teaching method called “blended education,” which enables students to learn at their own pace via personal computers, with the teacher acting partly as a facilitator instead of a lecturer.

And while his life’s work has focused on improving education for black children, his efforts have benefited white as well as minority students.

Trying to put his views in a historical context, Fuller says, “The civil rights movement took place at a time when the United States was trying to teach the rest of the world that democracy was better than communism,” he says. For that lesson to be true, the country had to stop systematically oppressing people of color.

“From a political standpoint, the interests of white people and black people converged at that moment in time.”

His hope for a second convergence — of the sincere desire of everyone of every race to improve our nation’s schools — is what keeps Howard Fuller fighting. ■

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## Que pasa Republicano?

*To win again, the GOP needs to appeal to Hispanics*

Following the 2012 presidential election, pundits of all stripes began appealing to retroactive prescience to explain what cost Mitt Romney the presidency. Whatever their pet issue, it suddenly became the reason Romney blew it — the Republican “war on women,” climate change denial, etc. Members of the Star Wars fan club thought Romney got hammered because he didn’t take up the cause of Ewok independence.

But the most cited reason for Republican failure was the fact that Hispanic voters continue to drift away from the GOP. According to exit polls, Mitt Romney received 27 percent of the Latino vote, down from the 31 percent John McCain received in 2008 and down even farther from the 44.1 percent George W. Bush garnered in 2004.

In recent years, Republicans have tried to appeal to Latinos by stressing the similarities of their core beliefs: Hispanics are industrious and family-oriented, and their religious convictions make them a natural constituency for the GOP.

Earlier this year, I sat down with Gov. Scott Walker, and he explained that if Republicans stuck to a message of freedom and lower taxes, Hispanics would become allies. “The vast majority of Latino voters I know in Milwaukee County and statewide are very much driven by the small-business, entrepreneurial, hard-work mindset, and they really don’t want the government in their way.”

“I try not to ‘silo’ voters. I try to listen to what their concerns are,” he said. “I’ve actually spent a lot of time with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and... I realized that their members care about barriers to growth in small business — excessive regulations, excessive litigation, property taxes are too high, the sorts of things that I talk to everyone about. So I don’t say, ‘Here, my Latino message is going to be different than my message anywhere else out there,’ and I think voters appreciate that.”

But as Hispanics continue to jump ship, Republican campaigns become less about persuasion and more about simple math. There just aren’t enough white voters to maintain the GOP’s slim margins of victory in swing districts.

Still, as Walker’s statements indicate, it is simply not in the Republican DNA to start slicing up voters by race. Democrats are the ones who see voters in groups and tailor their message accordingly. Republicans see voters as individuals and expect their messages of liberty and self-sufficiency to have broad appeal. For Republicans, appealing to minority voters is like speaking a second language.

But it is something they have to do.

There is a small, fairly well-reasoned contingent of

## Slicing up voters according to race is simply not in the GOP DNA.

conservatives who would support modifying the Republican hardline stance on immigration. Despite the left’s dismissal of George W. Bush as a right-wing ideologue, he proposed the “guest worker” plan in 2004, accurately recognizing, I think, that we’re not just going to pack up 12 million illegals and ship them home. That plan was burned to the ground by his own party.

Republicans would be wise to follow the Jack Kemp “bleeding-heart conservative” blueprint. Kemp and his Empower America cohort Bill Bennett were outspoken proponents of immigration, calling immigrants “a blessing, not a curse.” In 1994, Kemp and Bennett opposed California ballot Proposition 187, a measure to bar illegal immigrants from obtaining public services.

Some Republicans think putting a Hispanic conservative on the ballot will bring Latinos home — as if Marco Rubio alone is the answer. But the record shows that Hispanics will vote against other Hispanics if they don’t reflect the interests of the group as a whole.

For Republicans, a lot is at stake: Without Hispanics, they may become a permanent minority themselves. ■

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*Christian Schneider writes for The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, National Review and other national outlets.*

AUTHOR OF *A NATION OF VICTIMS AND DUMBING DOWN OUR KIDS*

CHARLES J. SYKES

# A NATION of MOOCHERS

AMERICA'S ADDICTION  
TO GETTING  
SOMETHING FOR NOTHING



## Praise for *A Nation of Moochers.*

“Charlie Sykes’ *A Nation of Moochers* provides a much-needed wakeup call for a nation approaching two perilous tipping points: a moral one and a fiscal one. With our country facing unprecedented challenges and stark political choices, principled leaders will benefit from Sykes’ clear vision, keen insight and intellect. If we’re serious about getting our nation back on track, then we would be wise to follow the lessons laid out in *A Nation of Moochers*.”

– Paul Ryan, Member of Congress

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