

WI

MARCH 2010

WISCONSIN INTEREST

FoodShare Fraud

AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORT
BY MIKE NICHOLS

Joe Kearney Steps Up

BY SUNNY SCHUBERT

Rx for Economic Decline

BY JOHN TORINUS JR. AND
THOMAS HEFTY

Hyper-Inflating Grades

BY MARC EISEN



Anatomy of a failure

*How Gov. Doyle
and Mayor Barrett
fumbled their chance to
overhaul Milwaukee's
troubled schools*

BY ALAN J. BORSUK



Editor > CHARLES J. SYKES

The takeover takedown.

Even in a year of notable failures—from the stimulus to health care reform—the collapse of efforts to reform the Milwaukee Public Schools stands out as an epic flop. As veteran education reporter Alan J. Borsuk writes in our cover story, the stars seemingly were aligned for a mayoral takeover of the dysfunctional system.

“[Y]ou had the president of the United States, the secretary of education, the governor of Wisconsin and the mayor of Milwaukee—all Democrats—coming down firmly for what they wanted to see happen in the Democratic-controlled Wisconsin Legislature.

“And they didn’t prevail.”

The debate over the mayoral takeover, writes Borsuk, “could have been a real chance to discuss how to energize the deeply troubled MPS system. It could have been a catalyst for re-energizing the whole subject of improving education in Milwaukee.

“Instead, it became a plodding tour of why

things don’t change easily in Milwaukee....”

Also in this issue, Mike Nichols chronicles the dramatic expansion of FoodShare, the program formerly known as Food Stamps, with a marked indifference to evidence of growing fraud here in Wisconsin. (Sound familiar?)

In an equally compelling account of the triumph of ideology over common sense, Marc Eisen discusses rampant grade inflation at UW-Madison’s School of Education, where all the kids aren’t just above average, they are virtually all straight-A students.

John Torinus Jr. and Thomas Hefty revisit their earlier analysis of the state’s limping economy with a series of prescriptions for creating jobs. Their list is far from exhaustive: I would certainly add tax cuts along with regulatory and legal reform, but that debate is just beginning, as Wisconsin begins to cope with the consequences of a decade’s worth of bad policy decisions.

WPRI > MISSION

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

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

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

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WI

WISCONSIN INTEREST

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Pg. 16

Where stealing from the cookie jar is a SNAP.

Editor's Notes

The takeover takedown.

BY CHARLES J. SYKES Inside Cover

Dispatches

The winter of our discontent (and a bit of karma).

BY CHARLES J. SYKES 2

Guest Opinion

What I learned about progressive education.

BY WARREN KOZAK 4

Frontline Report

Marquette Law School's Joe Kearney quietly becomes a major player.

BY SUNNY SCHUBERT 34

Culture Con

Paul Ryan is acting like a fiscal grownup.

BY RICHARD ESENBERG 38

The Closer

Why our politicians are both juvenile and delinquent.

BY CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER 40

Frontline Report: Marquette Dean Joseph Kearney

Cover Story

The stars were aligned for a mayoral takeover of MPS. What went wrong? Everything.

BY ALAN J. BORSUK 6

Investigative Report

Fraud is rampant in the FoodShare program. Does anybody care?

BY MIKE NICHOLS 14

Inflating Grades

Every student at UW's Ed School is above average. Way above average.

BY MARC EISEN 20

Getting Ahead

A prescription for Wisconsin's economy.

BY THOMAS HEFTY AND JOHN TORINUS JR. 28





Winter Madness

Even for a normally frigid region like ours, this was still the season of our discontent. Abetted by the dysfunctional politics of Illinois, the Asian carp continued their inexorable assault on the Great Lakes, and we learned that Wisconsin had lost 163,000 jobs in the Great Recession.

And, amid the winter gloom, comes word from Madison that the highest-paid city employee is a hard-working municipal bus driver named James Nelson, who pulled in \$159,258 in 2009, including \$109,892 in overtime. And as the new decade dawned, the state celebrated the dubious distinction of having, for the first time in its history, more souls working in government than in manufacturing.

Nice work, if you get the taxpayers to pay for it.

Happy Mother's Day (early edition)

In early February, a 21-year-old Milwaukee man with a comedic turn told police that he was just joking when he put on a ski mask and “pretended” to rob his mother when she got home from shopping.

Mom, who apparently did not appreciate the humor, pulled out a .357 and, police say, “fired several shots,” hitting her son in the groin. Adding to his woes, police didn’t believe his story that it was merely a stunt gone wrong—given his rather extensive rap sheet.

1, 2, 3...Oh, never mind

The credibility crisis extended to the political class. In December, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* revealed that a report claiming that the federal government’s \$787 billion stimulus saved more than 10,000 jobs in the Badger State was “rife with errors, double counting and inflated numbers based more on satisfying federal formulas than creating real jobs.”

In February, the paper noted that a new attempt to count stimulus jobs was “based on new accounting rules that make it impossible to track the total number of jobs created or saved by the program. And the updated guidelines also make it impossible to avoid double counting from quarter to quarter.”

And so it went. Days after Gov. Jim Doyle claimed that a new high-speed train from Milwaukee to somewhere near Madison would create 13,000 jobs, the state admitted that the governor had been

irrationally exuberant, and that the real number was fewer than 5,000.

It’s not easy being green

Belying critics who suggest that he is a man without a richly developed sense of humor, Doyle then continued to push for a global warming bill that an independent study (by our publisher, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute) says would cost the state more than 43,000 jobs. Doyle called the legislation—stop me if you’ve heard this one before—“The Clean Energy Jobs Bill.”

Ryan’s rising star

Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan says he’s absolutely, positively not running for president in 2012, but his political stature is on a giddy trajectory: He was singled out for praise by President Obama; touted as the next vice president by columnist George Will; highlighted in every national publication from *The Nation* to *The New York Times*; and was named the ninth most influential conservative in the United States by the British newspaper *The Telegraph*.

Russ’ falling star

Sen. Russ Feingold’s winter didn’t go as well. The Supreme Court drop-kicked the McCain-Feingold campaign finance law, and, while Ryan was doing the Sunday morning talk shows, the once-mavericky senator was berated by angry citizens at town hall meetings.

Feingold tried to assure constituents that he opposed imposing taxes on so-called Cadillac health-care plans and that he objected to backroom deals like the notorious “Cornhusker Kickback.”

This was awkward, since Feingold had voted for the health-care bill that included both the tax and the kickback. Worse, that election in Massachusetts suggested that even voters in blue states are paying attention to that sort of thing.

Whither chivalry?

Assembly Speaker Mike Sheridan admitted that he had “dated” a lobbyist for the pay-day loan industry, but insisted that he had received “nothing of value” from his female friend. It was undoubtedly a cold and lonely Valentine’s Day in the speaker’s office.



High expectations

The Milwaukee Public Schools marked the New Year by naming a new superintendent despite his history of personal bankruptcy and ethical missteps. School board member Peter Blewett, however, waxed enthusiastic, declaring: “A couple of my constituents were excited about the possibility of him being superintendent because he promised to have coffee with parents.”

At least they aimed high.



Epic fail

Since we are on the topic of mediocrity and the Milwaukee Public Schools, it's worth noting the rather spectacular failure of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett's attempt to take over MPS.

Consider that while Barrett's party controls both houses of the Legislature and the governor's office, he still couldn't line up enough votes for his MPS bill, despite being the Democrats' frontrunner for governor.

MPS continues to spin into educational and fiscal chaos, and the mayor's contribution so far: a few press conferences; a lobbying visit to Madison...and *bupkes*.

There's an ad campaign here somewhere built around the MPS logo, as in:

Worst racial achievement gap in the country: \$1 billion a year.

Unfunded retiree health care: \$5 billion.

The establishment's failure to enact any reforms: *Priceless*.

One for the road

In late December, a new law cracking down on drunk driving was signed into law. At a klieg-lit celebration of political self-congratulation, Doyle declared: “The only safe way with repeat drunk drivers, to keep them from harming people, is to lock them up.” Or not.

Less than a month later, the state granted early release to the first 21 prisoners to be sprung under Doyle's budget. Among them was Brian Boje, a five-time drunk driver. As recently as December 2009, a judge had denied his petition for sentence adjustment, saying it was not in the public interest. If Doyle had any comment on Mr. Boje, we couldn't find it.

More good news

As Jessica McBride reported for WPRI, Boje is about to get a lot of company as a result of Doyle's early-release plan.

“Felons who beat up or point guns at cops or who cause a death while fleeing an officer? They can get time shaved off their sentences now. So can those who batter judges, witnesses, and jurors. Those who cause mayhem or subject someone to false imprisonment? Some stalkers? They can get time off too.”

Raise taxes, lose wealth

Maybe this is what happens when you raise taxes and hammer wealth. A study by Boston College's Center on Wealth and Philanthropy found that from 2004 through 2008, \$70 billion in wealth left New Jersey as affluent residents moved elsewhere, while the state's expected charitable giving declined by \$1.13 billion. One of the study's authors explained, “The migration of wealth out of New Jersey is substantial and significant.”

In other words, New Jersey is “going Galt.” As in John Galt.

Going Galt

A Cheesehead, of course. As columnist Mike Nichols noted, the iconic figure of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* was one of us.

“Rand's Galt was born in Ohio, but didn't stay there long. He became a young engineer in an auto factory in Wisconsin before it, predictably, went out of business. He was an individualist and inventor who, stifled by the collectivism embraced by all the Wisconsinites around him, had to flee our state for a greener pasture—or, actually, valley.

“Sound kind of familiar?”

Karma is a badger

Even as the winter winds howled across the heartland, the season's true climax came with precisely seven seconds left in regulation play, when an ill-timed interception from a former Green Bay Packer dashed the NFC title hopes of the Land of a Thousand Lakes and Al Franken. For a brief, but deeply satisfying moment, karma reached out and shared our pain with Viking Nation.

The word you are searching for is *schadenfreude*.

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



Warren Kozak is a former reporter for National Public Radio and was a writer for network news anchors at ABC, CBS and CNN. His latest book is *LeMay: The Life and Wars of General Curtis LeMay* (Regnery, 2009).

A Parent's Education

The foibles of progressive schooling prompt a search for a better alternative By Warren Kozak

Here's how my formal education began: On a September morning in 1957, my mother and I walked the block and a half to 53rd Street School on Milwaukee's northwest side. We went to the school office, she filled out some forms, said goodbye and "see you at lunch." Here was another Kozak for the Milwaukee Public Schools to educate.

There was, of course, no choice, which made the entire process much simpler. Since we weren't Catholic, the parochial alternative wasn't an option, and if there were any private schools in Milwaukee at the time (there was one), I'm sure my parents never considered it.

There was good reason for my parents' carefree attitude. The public school system in Milwaukee circa 1957 was first-rate. The teachers were committed professionals. The curriculum had not changed appreciably since my parents' day. They were satisfied with their experience and found the public schools perfectly adequate for their children.

Twelve years later I graduated from John Marshall High School. I left for Madison the following fall, and that was that. The city and state had done their part. Now it was up to me.

More than 40 years later, the tables had turned.

Now I was taking my child to school, not in Milwaukee but in New York City, and the process was more complicated and not necessarily better.

After looking at the public, private and religious options, we decided on a private school at an exorbitant cost. What I soon discovered was that, unlike paying more for a suit or a car, you don't automatically get a higher-quality education when you pay top dollar.

My child was accepted at a nearby school that was famous for its brand of progressive education. What sold me were the school's reputation and the nice walk up the street every morning. Even though we live in New York City, this brought back memories of my own neighborhood school.

It wasn't until her second year at this school that I realized reputation is not always deserved and location is irrelevant. I began to question what

exactly progressive education meant or at least how this school defined it. Fundamental skills—reading, writing, arithmetic—were no longer the foundation. Instead, there were creative exercises that, I was told, would teach students practical applications for the basics.

On further inspection, the lessons struck me as silly and overtly political. I saw a clear bias in the teaching of history that included some blatant misinformation. The lessons seemed to be a form of indoctrination. This hardly fostered critical thought.

Ironically, this new form of teaching had evolved after questioning the old form (think Milwaukee 1957). Yet I quickly discovered that this approach was strangely resistant to any criticism itself.

The indoctrination went beyond the history lessons. It permeated the entire culture of the school. No national holidays were celebrated except for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. I believe MLK is an important part of our history, but so are Lincoln, Washington and the veterans we honor on Memorial Day for sacrificing their lives for our freedom.

On Columbus Day, our child was taught the arrival of white Europeans on this continent was really more a tragedy than anything to celebrate. When I raised questions about this, I was first ignored. When I persisted, I was ostracized.

The school could be genuinely bizarre. In the after-school chess program, which our daughter loved, there were no winners and losers (in chess?) because, I was told, all children were gifted in their own way. Competition was oddly snuffed out. Strange since we live in one of the most competitive cities on earth.

I dismissed my worries at first, realizing that I was not an educator. But there was one seemingly innocuous incident that finally made me wonder if we had made the right choice.

It was, of all things, my daughter's first piano recital. In my 1950s mentality, a recital was a big deal, and it meant getting dressed up. I helped pick out my daughter's best dress for the concert.

Upon arrival I realized she was the only child dressed up for the event. Worse, the other kids looked like slobs, with basketball jerseys down to their knees or similar garb. There was no indication the recital was special, even though for many of the kids it was their first time performing before an audience.

Sadly, the recital was typical of the school environment. The older kids were exceptionally rude. Forget about their sloppy dress; they would push ahead of you without ever saying “excuse me.” Those two words were clearly not taught at this school or at least not together.

Many kids were loud, which is not unusual for that age, but nobody corrected their behavior. Indeed, there seemed to be an inordinate number of behavioral issues at this school.

But what finally tipped the balance was this: Our daughter just wasn’t challenged. The “creative” lessons bored her. And I also realized that my wife and I had to constantly supplement her education. We worked with her on basic skills because she wasn’t learning them in school.

It was a teacher from another school who finally opened our eyes when she asked a very simple question: “What do you want to do with your child when she gets home, teach her subtraction or bake cookies? Isn’t subtraction the school’s job?”

By second grade, we began considering other schools. One immediately caught my attention—an all-girls school that is uncharacteristically old world compared to everything else. It has a strict uniform policy. In fact, everything is pretty strict.

When we went on a tour, I witnessed something in the first two minutes that made me long for this school. We were on the elevator when some high school girls got on. They were talking among themselves but not loudly or in an obnoxious manner. Still, an older woman standing in the back said in a quiet but firm voice: “Girls! Shhh!” to which the girls stood upright, apologized and remained silent until they got off.

We were guests, after all. But not for long.

Our daughter arrived nervously on her first day of third grade. But in spite of the fact that she didn’t know any of the other girls and was not familiar with the school’s traditions, she seemed to naturally respond to the learning environment.

This is a school that raises the bar and pushes girls to reach it. It works them hard. And it is competitive—just

like the world outside. Our daughter is exhausted when she gets home. But she is also motivated and happy. And most of all, she is determined to stay in this school, and she knows she will have to work hard to do so. Her grades will have to be stellar. Her behavior, too.

It’s been four years now. She’s learned a lot. So have her parents. I now believe that the “broken windows” theory of policing—that paying attention to the little crimes curtails the bigger crimes—applies to education as well.

I saw a clear bias in the teaching of history. The lessons seemed to be a form of indoctrination.

If children are allowed to come into school with mud on their shoes, we are communicating the wrong message. When children realize they have to clean themselves up—both literally and figuratively—and follow certain rules of behavior, you are telling them that school is important and that education must be treated with respect.

When students are told to address their teachers as Miss Jones or Mr. Wilson (as at my daughter’s new school), instead of Jamie or Stacey (as at her old school), the kids pick up on the fact that teachers are not their pals. They are the adults. They are in charge.

And when the basics are emphasized with a strong foundation in reading, math, science and history (instead of political indoctrination), guess what? This school is considered the best in the city, and this time its reputation is deserved.

This kind of success doesn’t have to be the domain of one private, all-girls school in New York City. Public schools can and, in my mind, should adopt this pedagogy as well.

Strict standards should be the norm because they produce positive results. Any and all politics—be they from the right or left—should be tossed out of the curriculum. The fundamentals should be emphasized. All students should wear uniforms. (It removes the headache of brand names, fosters school spirit, and the kids actually look better.) Teachers should not be called by their first names—even by parents.

In essence, the old approach of the Milwaukee Public Schools circa 1957 should be dusted off, reviewed, and parts of it should be reintroduced. I will bet that any school that does this will see better behavior and improved learning. I have. ■

DEAD IDEA WALKING



Poor strategy, muddled efforts and strong opposition killed the Doyle-Barrett plan to overhaul Milwaukee's crisis-ridden schools

By Alan J. Borsuk

It was an off-the-record conversation early last summer with a major figure in education politics in Wisconsin. I suggested that if a serious move was made to put the Milwaukee Public Schools under mayoral control, the outcome would be decided by a few specific people.

“Gwen Moore?” the source suggested.

No, but what an interesting thought. And it pointed to several key reasons that the proposal, when it came a couple months later from Gov. Jim Doyle and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, faltered from the start, never picked up momentum, and soon became a dead idea walking.

When Moore, the popular congresswoman who is influential among Milwaukee's African Americans, promptly came out against mayoral

Dead idea

control, her decision pointed to three major flaws in the Doyle-Barrett plan:

***** There is almost no evidence that Doyle and Barrett prepared a strategy for building support for the idea before they went public. Was the fight even worth instigating if it had garnered so little support over the preceding years, and there was so little evidence anything had changed?**

It was clear that opposition, particularly in the African American community, was going to be strong, and there was a good chance it would be fatal to the proposal. The debate would be heavily shaped by race-sensitive politics in the following months, and it appears Doyle and Barrett were not ready to deal with it.

***** Doyle and Barrett didn't put up a good fight.** They rolled out the proposal in a stumbling fashion, with little effort to make a case for the change, with few specific arguments for why they were making the push, and with few allies.

Moore, for example, probably would never have supported the idea. But it was a bad omen when she promptly came out against the takeover. When a high-level private conversation was finally held with her, she didn't budge.

Pursuit of the proposal suffered from huge timing problems. Two days after Doyle and Barrett announced they favored mayoral control, word spread that Doyle would not seek re-election, which

immediately reduced his clout and weakened his sway over legislators who would have to approve the plan.

The same weekend that Doyle's election decision became known, Barrett was attacked and seriously injured while trying to help a woman as he left the Wisconsin State Fair. That knocked Barrett off the

stage for several weeks. And the two events led to Barrett becoming the dominant contender for the Democratic nomination for governor—which complicated the task of building support for MPS governance reform even more.



Gov. James Doyle

***** The organizations**

and allies who might have been given pause by the unexpected support for the plan from someone like Moore instead had a golden opportunity to organize opposition. Barrett was offstage, and there was little sign that Doyle or anyone else was mobilizing support for the governance change.

Unions, black community organizations, and left-of-center groups (largely the same array of opponents that has fought the private-school voucher program in Milwaukee) quickly began to hold public events and rally opposition. Their coalition was far more effective than anything supporters of the change mustered.

The debate over mayoral control could have been a lot more than it was. It could have been a real chance to discuss how to energize the deeply troubled MPS system. It could have been a catalyst

for re-energizing the whole subject of improving education in Milwaukee.

Instead, it became a plodding tour of why things don't change easily in Milwaukee and a political exercise that broke almost no new ground.

MPS's problems won't go away, and the next governor and Legislature will have to face the issues of poor achievement and mounting financial ills. The legacy of the failed mayoral takeover will likely create more hesitancy about proposing big changes while adding to the entrenched power of those currently leading the system.

Insiders say Doyle was the prime mover for a mayoral takeover. Talk of mayoral control had been dormant for years. In 2003, mayoral candidate Barrett came out in favor of the idea, but dropped it immediately when he saw how much opposition there was, and how little support. Doyle had never made an issue of MPS governance in his first six-plus years as governor. It was only a subject of idle talk among Milwaukee civic leaders.

But Doyle has shown increasing frustration with MPS and Milwaukee education politics. When school board members, in a move that came without warning, voted in September 2008 to look into whether it was legal to dissolve MPS because of its financial mess, Doyle reacted strongly.

Within a short time, he lined up private philanthropic support for hiring McKinsey & Co., a global consulting giant, to look at how MPS does business. When the report came out in April 2009,

it said as much as \$103 million a year could be saved by changing practices such as paying part-time employees full health insurance and by reining in generous retiree benefits.

Even then, Doyle and Barrett moved cautiously. They created an advisory committee for Barrett on MPS issues, and both the governor and mayor began

to emphasize the need for action if Wisconsin was to win a share of the \$4.3 billion in competitive federal education grants called the Race to the Top fund.

They also began to emphasize the need to pick a top-flight MPS superintendent to replace the retiring William

Andreopoulos. But neither Doyle nor Barrett would directly say they wanted the kind of mayoral control that had attracted attention in Chicago, New York, Boston and Washington, D.C.

It wasn't until mid-August that Doyle told a *Journal Sentinel* editorial writer on the record that he wanted the change—an almost casual unveiling accompanied by no big roll-out.

Doyle and Barrett argued that a mayoral takeover would make it easier to hire a big-time superintendent who could boost Wisconsin's dubious chances of winning the Race to the Top money. But they gave precious few other details of what they thought a mayoral takeover would accomplish.

They apparently decided to not attack the existing school board over the quality of its work, perhaps to avoid personalizing the issue. But the performance of the board in recent years might have given Doyle and



Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett

Barrett strong material to make their case. They might have pointed out the small amount of attention given to student achievement and the failure to address the enormous cost of retiree health benefits.

For sure, one forceful lesson of recent months is how racial polarization permeates anything related to education in Milwaukee. With pretty much the widest achievement gaps between black and white students in the country, you might think Milwaukee would be ripe for rising reform sentiment among African Americans. You would be wrong.

The strong support for the current power structure among African American legislators, NAACP leaders, and others proved highly influential as the mayoral control debate unfolded. While the number of people involved was actually small—several hundred, at most—there was no similar groundswell for a mayoral takeover.

The prospects for mayoral control looked like they were picking up steam when state Sen. Lena Taylor and state Rep. Pedro Colon, with support from Doyle and Barrett, proposed that the mayor be given almost total power over MPS management and budget making, while an elected (but very weak) school board was kept alive.

Taylor's role signaled a split in the Milwaukee black legislative caucus. But it quickly became clear that Taylor and Milwaukee Common Council President Willie Hines, who also supported the mayoral

takeover, were not stirring up support.

State Sen. Spencer Coggs and state Rep. Tamara Grigsby put forth their own plan, which gave the mayor a lesser role in MPS and kept the school board in control. Compromise talks between the two sides, including an offer from Barrett to leave the school board with significant influence, ended with no agreement.

The reason was simple: The two sides wouldn't budge on the core question of whether the mayor

(Barrett or his successor) or the board should have the main say over picking the MPS superintendent and making budget decisions.

Defenders of the elected school board argued it was wrong to take away the people's

right to choose school leaders. It was an interesting argument, given that voter turnout in Milwaukee school board elections is pathetic (sometimes 10% or less) and even lower in predominantly African American neighborhoods. It is not unusual for elections to be uncontested.

Yet elected officials, including school board members, are treated like major figures in much of the black community. Even Charlene Hardin, a board member whose service for 12 years was remarkably lacking in merit, was honored.

Perhaps the most important factor in the dispute is who the school board members are not: They are not appointees of someone downtown. Opponents of mayoral control were strongly motivated by not

**RACIAL
POLARIZATION
PERMEATES
ANYTHING
RELATED
TO EDUCATION
IN MILWAUKEE.**

wanting the existing Milwaukee power structure—white, business-oriented, in many cases conservative—making decisions over who runs the schools.

If there was a key moment in shaping the course of events, it may well have come months before Doyle and Barrett even unveiled their support for a mayoral takeover. That would be the night the Milwaukee School Board elected Michael Bonds as its president.

Peter Blewett had been president for the previous year. A college English professor, he was an early and adamant defender of the elected school board. But he was also the kind of foe whose behavior could have helped those who wanted mayoral control. Blewett was given to pompous rhetoric and defense of the status quo, and he was white.

Blewett wanted to return as president, but it appears that Bonds was successful in convincing a majority of the school board that he would be a more effective defender of their status. He was a fresh face, with only two years on the board. He had strong ideas on how to change the way MPS does business, and he is a forceful leader. Moreover, Bonds is black.

Only three of the nine board members are black, and there are no other minority members on the school board—this in a district where 88% of the students are non-white.

Blewett withdrew. Bonds won and quickly emerged as a heavyweight. You had to give Bonds credit—he was focused, hard working, and he had lots of proposals for change, many of them involving giving more power to the school board, at the expense of the MPS administration. He drew strong support from many African American leaders.

With the rise of Bonds, the board had a new lease on support from the black community. State Rep. Polly Williams and NAACP leaders lined up behind him. Bonds argued that he was running the board in a new and effective way. While board critics were still dubious, others found it an appealing message. Give him a chance, they argued.

Bonds, meanwhile, openly pointed to the racial connotations of the struggle: No sooner had

a black man been picked to head the board than the white establishment (Doyle, Barrett, Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers, the *Journal Sentinel*, and business leaders) wanted to take away his power.

The fighting among Milwaukee politicians illuminated another key political reality: A lot of the power to control MPS is actually held by people who aren't from Milwaukee.

MPS IN A GLANCE

- Enrollment:** About 82,500
- Composition:** 57% black, 23% Hispanic, 12% white, 4% Asian, 4% other
- Percent in poverty:** 79%
- Percent truant:** 76% (high school)
- Graduation rate:** about 68%
- Test scores:** 40% or less of 10th-graders rated proficient or better in each of five subject areas
- Budget:** \$1.1 billion-plus
- Number of schools:** about 200
- Number of employees:** about 11,000

That included teachers union leaders and Republicans in the Legislature, but especially Democratic leaders in the Senate and Assembly. In particular it meant Russ Decker, the Senate majority leader from tiny Schofield, near Wausau.

Consider this: In November, Doyle played what he probably expected to be a powerful trump card: an education-focused visit to Madison by President Barack Obama.

Obama did not directly endorse Doyle's proposals for governing MPS. But he didn't need to—his presence alone sent the message. And in a telephone interview with me, for use in the *Journal Sentinel*, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who accompanied Obama, made the message all but explicit. While declining to say that mayoral control should be adopted in Milwaukee, he said it was time for major change in Milwaukee and an end to business as usual.

So you had the president of the United States, the secretary of education, the governor of Wisconsin and the mayor of Milwaukee—all Democrats—coming down firmly for what they wanted to see happen in the Democratic-controlled Wisconsin Legislature.

And they didn't prevail. Decker stiff-armed them all. He refused to budge. Doyle called a special session in December to consider education issues, and it adjourned without even discussing the issue.

Theories abound on Decker's motivation. He said he didn't have the votes to make it worthwhile, a matter of considerable debate. Others suggested he

was acting out of longstanding spite for Doyle. Others suggested his alliances with teachers unions were behind his intransigence. Or maybe it was Decker's unhappy relationship with Milwaukee politicians. Or maybe he just thought it was a bad idea.

Assembly Democratic leaders weren't interested either. They said they'd be glad to take action if the Milwaukee legislative delegation united around a plan, which they knew wasn't happening.

In other circumstances, Republicans might have

supported mayoral control. They don't like the way MPS is run.

But on this occasion they were comfortable standing on the sidelines, in large part because Barrett had become the de facto Democratic candidate for governor. No

Republican wanted to

hand him a major accomplishment as the campaign heated up.

In early March, Wisconsin was knocked out of the running for federal "Race to the Top" education grants by states with bolder plans for change. Doyle and Barrett, as well as *Journal Sentinel* editorials, continued to call for mayoral control. But substantial action appeared highly unlikely, at least until after the November election.

Bonds and the board still had the power, and they used it, moving so quickly through a superintendent search that critics said it was just one more effort to forestall legislative action.

Here's an interesting contrast: When Barrett came

THE DEBATE
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out for mayoral control in August, Bonds quit the mayor's advisory committee on MPS and barred MPS employees from cooperating with the group.

But when Bonds asked Barrett to join a dozen community leaders in January to participate in an interview session with the three superintendent finalists, Barrett agreed. For someone who wanted to pick the new chief, Barrett's role ended up being minuscule: In a closed session, he was allowed only to ask a scripted question and was not given the full resumes of the candidates.

Six months after Doyle and Barrett proposed taking the power over MPS away from the school board, the board had not only sealed a deal with a new superintendent, Gregory Thornton, but taken substantial power from the superintendent and given it to itself. The board was in firmer control of MPS than at any time since a reorganization of MPS two decades ago.

Did the idea of mayoral control have merit? That debate was never engaged in a substantial fashion. The record from cities around the country is actually quite mixed. Even in the cities where powerful mayors and powerful superintendents have caused the biggest stir by shaking things up, the actual impact is debatable.

The overall muscle tone of the Chicago schools system clearly seems to have improved since Mayor Richard Daley was given control in 1995. But Daley was also given a big wad of money and other tools when the Illinois legislature acted, and new money was never on the table during the debate about MPS

governance. Furthermore, actual student achievement in Chicago remains poor, and how much it has improved remains a subject of debate.

Some key players stayed on the sidelines of the Milwaukee debate, like former MPS Superintendent Howard Fuller. He felt mayoral control wouldn't do much without other changes, such as overhaul of the teacher contract.

Ultimately, you have to wonder how serious

many political leaders, both in Milwaukee and across the state, are about bringing change to the Milwaukee schools.

The entrenched powers are exactly that: entrenched. Opponents of mayoral control said often that they were not just defending the status quo but want to see real change. But there is little political momentum for ideas they advocate, especially for increasing education spending across Wisconsin.

In the end, opponents of mayoral control were far better

at articulating what change they didn't want than what change they did want. And supporters weren't any better at making a case for what mayoral control would accomplish.

If you asked all 132 members of the Assembly and Senate whether they were satisfied with MPS's performance, the vote would surely be 132-0 "no." But when a plan was put forward to make a major change in MPS governance, it didn't even make it to the floor. ■



Milwaukee School Board President Michael Bonds

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

Fraud... who cares?

By Mike Nichols



The state's FoodShare program feeds 700,000—and appears utterly unconcerned about **cheaters**

Peggy Sullivan was given a government-issued debit card to buy groceries in Wisconsin at the same time she was collecting the same public assistance benefit in South Carolina—a modest scam that earned the 38-year-old more than \$1,000.

Angela Bain, a 20-year-old Milwaukee woman, had \$43 left on a taxpayer-funded “Quest” card when she sold it to somebody else for \$20.

Forty-eight-year-old Kathleen Parr falsely claimed that her son lived with her in Pewaukee for eight months when he was actually living with his father in Mukwonago—a lie worth about \$1,400 in federal food money.

Each woman committed her crime back in 2002 or 2003, and each was convicted of public assistance fraud. Sullivan and Parr ended up with felonies, Bain with a misdemeanor.

They were also guilty of bad timing. Each ran her scam back when Wisconsin's FoodShare program was a mere fraction of its current size—and when the state devoted far more money to detecting fraud.

There is virtually no chance of similar crimes being prosecuted today, says Debby Vanderboom, the recently retired Waukesha County sheriff's deputy who helped nab all three.

While other states clamp down on thousands of food scam cases every year and save taxpayers millions, Wisconsin has taken a wholly different tack.

“We don't want to hear about it,” Vanderboom says of Wisconsin's attitude. “Fraud does not exist.” FoodShare is Wisconsin's name for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. Once commonly known as food stamps

before electronic debit cards were used, the program was created in the 1960s to help fight hunger and improve nutrition. An element of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, it was a relatively modest, often heralded program that helped pull poorer Americans through tough times. Then it started to grow.

Now a \$54 billion annual federal expenditure, the nutrition program is well over three times the size it was just a decade ago. And there is almost no place in the United States where it has grown faster than Wisconsin.

While administrative costs are covered partly by the states, SNAP benefits are funded with federal tax dollars. As recently as 2003, Wisconsin distributed about \$244 million in federal money to about 300,000 FoodShare recipients. Today, some 700,000 Wisconsinites carry Quest cards, and receive close to \$800 million in SNAP/FoodShare money a year.

The leap in both cost and program size is due in large part to the deteriorating economy, but also to looser eligibility rules and—thanks to the federal stimulus program—more money for each individual recipient or household.

Benefit levels vary widely. But individuals in Wisconsin now average a little more than \$100 per month, while average households, in December 2009, received about \$255.

That same month, well over \$80 million in federally funded FoodShare benefits were distributed in Wisconsin—meaning that if spending continues apace, this will soon be a \$1 billion-a-year program just in Wisconsin.

In contrast, just \$187,000 in state and federal money will be spent in Wisconsin to investigate

At an annual cost of **\$54 billion**, the nutrition program is well over three times the size it was just a decade ago.

fraud this year—and that's targeted for a variety of public assistance programs, not just FoodShare.

State Rep. Robin Vos (R-Racine) argued unsuccessfully for more anti-fraud money during state budget deliberations last spring. He believes the state's message is loud and clear: "Fraud is okay."

The reverberations are highly disturbing to law enforcement officials like retired Deputy Vanderboom. While the size of the FoodShare program exploded, fraud investigations tumbled from more than 5,400 in 2003 to about 3,200 in 2008, according to federal data for Wisconsin.

Successful fraud prosecutions—never a Wisconsin priority—plummeted to just 20 over the same time period. Prosecutors have simply stopped prosecuting the vast majority of FoodShare fraud cases in virtually all counties, including the one with the most recipients, Milwaukee.

It appears there hasn't been a single FoodShare fraud case prosecuted in Milwaukee County in at least 10 years, according to the Milwaukee County District Attorney's office.

"If we have issued any, they have been very few in number," says Chief Deputy District Attorney Kent Lovern.

"I'm not even showing referrals sent to us," he says, adding that if cases were brought to the office, prosecutors would review them for possible charges.

Other states do far more.

Minnesota and Michigan conducted at least 85% more FoodShare fraud investigations in 2007 than Wisconsin. And while Wisconsin successfully prosecuted just 20 people for fraud that year (including nine who were convicted and 11 who lost their benefits due to plea agreements), the number of successful prosecutions in Minnesota was well over 1,000. In Michigan, it exceeded 2,400.

Wisconsin's only consolation: 22 states had even fewer successful prosecutions—although almost all used administrative procedures much more frequently to temporarily strip benefits from recipients suspected of fraud.

Minnesota has averaged more than 1,500

"disqualifications"—the term FoodShare administrators use for stopping benefits and trying to recoup money—through either prosecutions or administrative procedures in recent years. Michigan averaged 3,000 a year. Wisconsin in 2007 and 2008 averaged about 50—fewer than all but a handful of states.

Those who worry about rampant fraud in Wisconsin say they are fighting more than budget cuts. They say they are fighting a mindset that it is somehow wrong to investigate anyone in the FoodShare program.

"It is the social worker mentality," says Vanderboom. "You are picking on poor people. I respond by saying that the vast majority who receive benefits are honest, hard-working people who need the help."

Tips about fraud, she adds, often come from people who have low incomes themselves but "are following the rules and struggling to get by—it's irritating to them when somebody flaunts" their fraud.

"The people defrauding the system," adds Waukesha County District Attorney Brad Schimel, "are taking away resources from people who really need them."

No one knows how much money is lost to FoodShare fraud. Wisconsin store owners who cheat the system are investigated by federal authorities and likely (see sidebar) siphon off millions of dollars each year. Investigations of recipient fraud, on the other hand, are handled by the states.

Between 2003 and 2007, Minnesota recouped \$6.5 million lost through recipient fraud, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. Michigan recovered \$16.6 million in the same time period. Tennessee, \$19 million. Wisconsin? Just \$1.9 million.

Vanderboom believes fraud here is just as prevalent as in other states. Says Schimel: "The potential to get away with it is enormous."

That potential, say critics, is also greater than it used to be because of changes in the way the program is administered. Back in the 1990s,

Wisconsin food stamp recipients had to reapply every three months, which meant they had to appear in person and provide documentation of assets and sources of income. In 2004, the state decided to let applicants reapply once a year instead, and mandated interim reports every six months. Applicants no longer have to apply in person and, once they start receiving the benefit, they often don't have to report changes in household size or in income until their next report or application is due.

Critics believe all the changes made fraud easier to commit, and potentially longer lasting. While it's impossible to quantify the amount of fraud occurring, there are plenty of anecdotal examples. A 2008 Legislative Audit Bureau report, for example, uncovered 10 people incarcerated in state prisons receiving FoodShare benefits.

Auditors also discovered that other people were using the inmates' Quest cards, which isn't a surprise. The FoodShare program allows recipients to have others shop for them. Lost cards can be easily replaced.

Vanderboom points out that all this makes proving somebody is, say, trading his taxpayer-funded card for drugs extremely difficult.

"The drug units are busting dealers and they have three or four food-stamp cards in their possession," says the former deputy. "All these drug dealers have to say is, 'They gave me permission...I went to get groceries for them.'"

Fraud investigations are also stymied because

there are so few full-time investigators—and, often, none at all. The Marathon County Department of Social Services eliminated its sole public assistance fraud investigator on Jan. 1, for instance. Most investigations are now handled by the same county workers who determine public assistance eligibility—and who are processing about 40%

more applicants than just two years ago.

Barron, Ashland, Burnett, Lincoln, Price and Rusk counties were all part of a consortium that, along with the Bad River Tribe, paid private investigators. Due to cuts in state funding, that anti-fraud effort ended last spring.

"It was very concerning to us because we have had some large fraud cases," says Terri Perry, head of the Ashland County Department of Health & Human Services.

The Waukesha County Human Services Department investigator

who helped put together the three cases cited earlier in this story retired in 2004 and was never replaced. Another Waukesha County investigator remains, but she looks into more than 200 cases every year, many involving suspected fraud in other programs.

Vanderboom, a former president of the Wisconsin Association on Public Assistance Fraud, says an investigator needs to spend from 40 to 60 hours preparing a case for the district attorney's office. It is "absolutely impossible [for the remaining Waukesha County investigator] to put a case together for prosecution, time-wise," she says.

In fact, the Waukesha County District Attorney's office has not filed a single FoodShare fraud case since at least 2007. "I should be getting tons of referrals," said Assistant Waukesha County District



Retired Deputy Debby Vanderboom: Tips about fraud often come from people who have low incomes themselves but 'are following the rules.'

'The people **defrauding** the system are taking away resources from people who really need them,' says Waukesha County DA Brad Schimel.



Attorney Barbara Michaels, "and I am here ready, willing and able."

Counties can pay for FoodShare investigations out of their own coffers, and some do. But there is little incentive to recoup state and federal money because counties get to keep very little of it.

The problem, say Vanderboom and others, resides with state officials. They control how much money the counties get for fighting fraud. And if there's no state money, there are no federal matching dollars either.

"We are saying to the counties, 'We are going to stick it to you over and over...but we want you to somehow keep your fraud investigation efforts going, even with less money, when you receive none of the financial benefit,'" Rep. Vos



Rep. Robin Vos: *The state's attitude is 'fraud is okay.'*

complained during the Joint Finance deliberations last spring.

Jim Jones, head of FoodShare in Wisconsin, acknowledges that formal fraud investigations have decreased partly because of budget decisions. His department confirmed that \$1.8 million in state and federal dollars were allocated to counties and tribes in 2008 and \$741,000 in 2009 before shrinking to almost nothing in 2010.

But, says Jones, there is something else to consider: "a change in our focus" from formal investigations involving law enforcement to what he calls front-end prevention that makes it more likely benefits are awarded correctly in the first place.

"We don't always need to put somebody in a Crown Victoria looking at your house at night," said Jones.

Wisconsin turned down 32% of all FoodShare applications, while the denial rate in the country as a whole was 26%, according to USDA data from 2008.

The state has also made big improvements in its FoodShare "error rate," a statistic that tracks

both overpayments and underpayments resulting, often, from mistakes made by either caseworkers or applicants. After years of being higher than the national average, Jones points out that Wisconsin's FoodShare error rate for much of fiscal year 2009 was about 1%—a dramatic improvement.

A rigorous initial review of an application can help uncover some sorts of fraud. For instance, a county Human Services employee might raise questions about how a recipient can consistently report no income yet appear to live self-sufficiently.

The connection between error rates and fraud prevention, however, appears tenuous. Only about 5% of all cases "identified with errors" are referred to fraud investigators, according to a 2005 General Accounting Office study that examined nine states, including Wisconsin.

Vanderboom, for her part, is blunt about Jones' assertions regarding up-front prevention. "That is baloney," said the former sheriff's deputy.

She believes county workers who determine eligibility are not scrutinizing applicants to uncover scams. Nor would up-front prevention do anything to stop frauds that occur after benefits are awarded.

Others point out that, given the enormous increase in FoodShare applicants, the focus has been mostly on just getting people the benefit in a timely manner—something that has not always happened, especially in Milwaukee County, where the state took over direct administration of public assistance programs on Jan. 1.

Making sure deserving FoodShare recipients quickly get the benefits they need, critics point out, is obviously important. But so is fighting fraud.

As Vos told his legislative colleagues last spring: "Nobody is opposed to...benefits for people who are hungry. The question comes down to, do we also want to put the same priority on making sure everybody who is getting the benefit is getting it legally and is not committing fraud?"

To Debby Vanderboom, the answer is clear: Fraud is "everywhere—everywhere, and, unfortunately, investigation is going by the wayside." ■

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

Convenience stores get their cut of a nutrition program

As the number of poor people with Quest cards has grown dramatically in Wisconsin, so has the number of stores—including gas stations and liquor stores with small food sections as well as Papa Murphy's pizza franchises—that accept the government-issued debit cards.

The number of Wisconsin stores participating in the FoodShare program—now about 2,850—has grown almost 50% just since 2004.

Along a 4.3-mile stretch of North Avenue in Milwaukee alone, there are 21 different FoodShare vendors, including the Shell Food Mart, Superior Food & Liquor, two Walgreens and the Jones Grocery and Smoke Shop, in addition to several larger grocers. In West Allis, stores like Becher Liquor & Beer on S. 78th Street, County Beer & Liquor on S. 60th Street, and West Allis Liquor & Tobacco on W. Greenfield all accept Quest cards, according to state data.

One might question how such stores qualify for a federal program designed to provide “supplemental nutrition assistance.” By law, the stores are supposed to carry at least three types of bread or grains, three dairy products, three fruits and vegetables and different types of meat, poultry or fish. They can stock less variety only if 50% of their sales stem from the remaining items.

They can also, however, sell FoodShare recipients junk food through the program—a practice of little nutritional value that the state of Minnesota tried unsuccessfully to ban.

Some items are indeed barred: alcohol and tobacco, any non-food items such as toothpaste or pet food, or anything that is hot or can be eaten in a store. It is also illegal for merchants to offer cash instead of food in exchange for FoodShare

payments—a scam known as benefit trafficking.

Trafficking occurs when a FoodShare recipient, for example, offers a \$100 Quest payment for \$50 in cash. The store owner then collects a \$100 reimbursement from the government—and makes a tidy profit.

A 2006 report by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service estimated that trafficking skims approximately one cent off every benefit dollar—a rate that would translate into fraud losses of approximately \$7 million annually in Wisconsin.

Trafficking scams and the sale of unauthorized items are usually investigated by federal officials—90 or so such investigations occur in Wisconsin each year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Typically, around 11 Wisconsin stores each year are kicked out of the program at least temporarily, according to USDA spokesman Alan Shannon. But it appears all of those were the result of administrative procedures, since federal prosecutors in Milwaukee and Madison cannot recall any criminal prosecutions of store owners in at least 15 years.

Prosecutions do occur elsewhere. A Chicago grocery store owner was sentenced to 57 months in prison in 2006, for instance, for a food stamp trafficking scheme that resulted in a potential loss of approximately \$7 million.

If Wisconsin is like most places, very little fraud occurs at large supermarkets or chain stores, which redeem the vast majority of FoodShare benefit dollars. Data shows that smaller retail stores are much more likely to game the program.

Still, federal authorities are reluctant to limit SNAP to larger stores that have healthier food and far less fraud. Smaller stores are authorized to take part, says Shannon, because some neighborhoods just don't have full-service supermarkets.

—Mike Nichols



About FoodShare

- **Purpose:** Help stop hunger and improve nutrition and health.
- **Size:** Approximately 700,000 Wisconsinites per month receive a total of \$780 million annually in benefits. Part of the \$54 billion federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
- **Eligibility:** Applicants must have a total gross income, before taxes, of less than 200% of the poverty level—about \$36,600 a year for a family of three. Expenses for child care and utilities are also factored in.
- **Benefit levels:** Vary widely depending on actual income, household size and expenses. Individuals average slightly more than \$100 per month, and households average approximately \$255 per month.



When “A” stands for average

Students at the UW-Madison School of Education receive sky-high grades. How smart is that?

BY MARC EISEN

Lake Wobegon has nothing on the UW-Madison School of Education. All of the children in Garrison Keillor’s fictional Minnesota town are “above average.” Well, in the School of Education they’re all A students.

The 1,400 or so kids in the teacher-training department soared to a dizzying 3.91 grade point average on a four-point scale in the spring 2009 semester.

This was par for the course, so to speak. The eight departments in Education (see sidebar on page 23) had an aggregate 3.69 grade point average, next to Pharmacy the highest among the UW’s schools. Scrolling through the Registrar’s online grade records is a discombobulating experience, if you hold to an old-school belief that average kids get C’s and only the really high performers score A’s.

Much like a modern-day middle school honors assembly, everybody’s a winner at the UW School of Education. In its Department of Curriculum and Instruction (that’s the teacher-training program), 96% of the undergraduates who received letter grades collected A’s and a handful of A/B’s. No fluke, another survey taken 12 years ago found almost exactly the same percentage.

A host of questions are prompted by the appearance of

Sky-high grades

such brilliance. Can all these apprentice teachers really be that smart? Is there no difference in their abilities? Why do the grades of education majors far outstrip the grades of students in the physical sciences and mathematics? (Take a look at the chart below.)

More important, what is the real-world educational consequence of this training? Once they're in classrooms of their own, do UW graduates grade their own students with a similar broad brush of excellence?

But I fret too much. Everything is fine. That's what I

was told by the leaders of the UW-Madison School of Education. Let's hear their story.

Simply put, UW-Madison's program is one of the best in the nation. It's ranked #7 in the *U.S. News and World Report* annual assay of the nation's more than 200 education schools. The all-important Curriculum and Instruction department is, in fact, #1 in the nation for teacher training, according to the magazine's survey of education deans.

Prof. Gloria Ladson-Billings, who chairs Curriculum and Instruction, says educators in other states marvel over the quality of UW-Madison's graduates. "They love hiring our students," she says. "Our graduates stand out from the rest."

The complaint that her school is soft and squishy on grades is quickly dismissed. Ladson-Billings doesn't bat an eye as she tells me the grades are so good because the students are so smart.

Here's the context to keep in mind, she tells me: It's darn hard to get into UW-Madison in the first place, and then the School of Education weeds out applicants when they apply for admission as juniors.

"We're highly selective," says Ladson-Billings. "These students have already proven themselves and

'If people are not stretched, they will not develop their talent to the fullest extent,' says Lee Hansen.

established a certain grade point. It's a competitive process, and it pushes the low performers away."

If I'm still harboring doubts, Ladson-Billings offers a presumed clincher: "We have people who love this field. They choose it. They've stayed the course. They're

Sample of UW-Madison Undergraduate GPAs, Spring 2009

Major	#Students	GPA
Curriculum & Instruction	1,395	3.92
Art	1,196	3.66
Women's Studies	1,244	3.5
Journ. & Mass. Com.	1,237	3.5
English	4,191	3.45
General Business	1,221	3.42
Physical Education	1,594	3.4
Marketing	1,125	3.36
History	3,861	3.33
Sociology	2,921	3.32
Soil Science	280	3.3
Philosophy	1,709	3.27
Business School	7,624	3.26
Biochemistry	843	3.25
Accounting	1,636	3.21
Statistics	1,563	3.18
Electrical & Com En	1,364	3.15
Mech Eng. Dept	1,886	3.13
Microbiology	1,057	3.12
Geography	1,400	3.11
Physics	2,510	3.07
Psychology	4,103	3.06
Zoology	2,773	3.05
Political Science	3,463	3.04
Anthropology	1,808	3.03
Computer Science	1,496	3.01
Economics	4,011	2.93
Chemistry	4,716	2.92
Mathematics	4,511	2.78

SOURCE: OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR, UW-MADISON

Grades in the teacher-training program tower over other departments as if based "on a completely different grading scale," says statistician Jeff Henriques.

probably going to be successful.”

Jeff Hamm, an associate dean for academic services, makes the same case. “Honestly, we’re trying to pick the best of the best. We’re not taking average students. They don’t get C’s,” he says.

I received a slightly different and perhaps more

‘It seems at UW-Madison that grade inflation will now stop because grades really can’t go any higher,’ says a critic.

revealing explanation from graduate student Doug Larkin, who says grades aren’t really important because the School of Education focuses on student learning.

“We model for our students what we expect them to do with their students—to keep working with them until they produce high-quality work.”

He adds: “It’s our philosophy. Education is not a sieve. We don’t exist to sort students into grade categories. We work with them until they get it.”

Larkin put in 10 years as a high school physics teacher in Trenton, N.J., before heading to graduate school to prepare for teaching education at the professorial level. Why the career shift? “I hit the limit of change I could effect in the classroom,” he says. “I realized some of the problems we faced weren’t necessarily solvable by an individual teacher.”

Larkin talks about wanting to create “more positive social change” and how the achievement gap between white students and kids in poverty (“the education debt,” as he prefers to call it) is “a cumulative thing related to housing patterns, employment and social services.”

He makes no mention of what role bad teachers, dysfunctional families, or low expectations have in the

Same story, different sample, fall 2008

Department	Senior Grades
Curriculum & Instruction*	3.93
Rehab Psych & Special Ed*	3.92
Counseling Psychology*	3.85
Music Performance	3.85
Dance*	3.77
Art*	3.71
Kinesiology*	3.69
Life Science Communication	3.67
Music	3.64
Educational Policy*	3.63
Journalism	3.61
French	3.60
Languages & Cultures of Asia	3.60
Theater	3.59
Physical Ed Activity*	3.55
Women’s Studies	3.52
Animal Science	3.50
Ed Psychology*	3.50
Folklore	3.48
English	3.45
German	3.45
Literature in Translation	3.42
Biological Systems Engineering	3.39
Integrated Liberal Studies	3.38
Sociology	3.36
Philosophy	3.35
Forest & Wildlife Ecology	3.35
History of Science	3.34
Food Science	3.30
History	3.29
Biochemistry	3.26
Landscape Architecture	3.25
Genetics	3.23
Horticulture	3.23
Geography	3.17
Political Science	3.15
Agriculture and Applied Economics	3.11
Zoology	3.07
Microbiology	3.06
Physics	3.05
Geology	3.02
Nutritional Science	3.01
Econ	2.94
Atmosphere & Oceanic Sciences	2.88
Math	2.75

* School of Education program

SOURCE: OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR, UW-MADISON

Another slice of data—programs with more than 100 seniors in fall 2008—illustrates the abnormally high grades in the School of Education.

Sky-high grades

performance of kids reared in poverty.

Politically, educators these days can be put in roughly two camps—“liberal traditionalists who rally around teachers unions and education schools” and “free-market reformers who believe [in] competition, choice and incentives,” as *New Yorker* writer Carlo Rotella recently put it.

There’s no doubt about the UW School of Education’s orientation. Its students are “very committed to social progress and to social change,” says Hamm. But the skeptic in me keeps wondering: What about educational excellence?

That question is the bone that progressive educators can never quite swallow and make disappear.

Harvey Mansfield, a professor of government at Harvard, complains that compressing all grades at the top makes “it difficult to discriminate the best from the very good, the very good from the good, and the good from the mediocre.”

He writes: “Surely, a teacher wants to mark the few best students with a grade that distinguished them from all the rest in the top quarter, but at Harvard that’s not possible.”

Indeed, concerns about grade inflation are hardly

unique to UW-Madison. This is a topic that periodically roils the academic waters from coast to coast, often with an outright political subtext.

On the left, there is Alfie Kohn, the indefatigable defender of progressive public education. When he’s

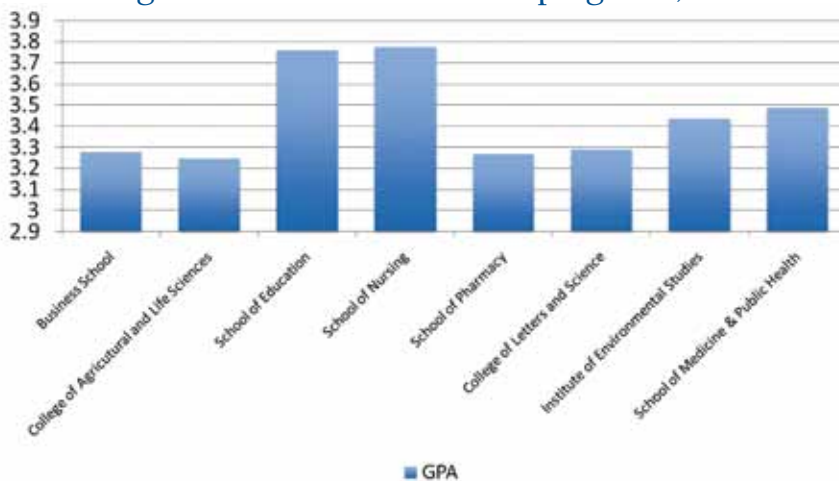
‘Education is not a sieve,’
says a graduate student.
‘We don’t exist to sort
students into
grade categories.’

not denouncing high school honors classes, homework, testing, letter grades, award ceremonies and academic competitions, not to mention keeping score in high school sporting contests, he goes on at great length to deny that grade inflation even exists (which infuriates the statisticians who’ve studied the phenomenon). Kohn, who’s capable of marshaling great outrage when he writes about these topics, denounces any talk of grade inflation as a “dangerous” conservative plot.

Stuart Rojstaczer, who’s put together the most comprehensive database of grade trends at American colleges and universities, harrumphs that Kohn’s claims “ignore data and are without merit.”

Rojstaczer writes that “significant grade inflation is present virtually everywhere, and its rate of change in terms of GPA shift is about the same everywhere.” (He found that the average GPA rose from 2.93 in the 1991-92 academic year to 3.11 by 2006-07. Other data can be cited as well, but doing so would make your eyes roll back.)

Senior grades across UW-Madison programs, fall 2008



When Rojstaczer and I exchanged emails, he told me that his research shows that “education schools seem to have the most lax standards of any schools in the country.”

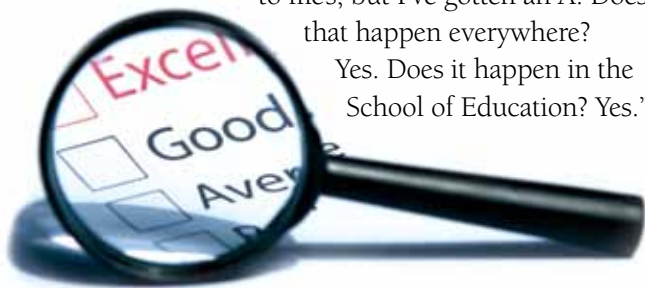
Caitlyn O’Mara, 22, has the passion and enthusiasm you want in an apprentice teacher. The fifth-year senior sees the pros and cons of her training at the UW-Madison School of Education.

She loves the fact that she’s studied with the same cohort of 25 education students since her admittance to the teaching program. She also likes that every semester the program has her in an actual K-12 classroom. And she praises the support the School of Education offers her. In other words, the school does some things very well.

“But I don’t think we’re necessarily held accountable to the school’s high standards as much as we should be,” she says. “And I do think there are people who slide by, who may not go to class. I’m in a group that does not have a whole lot of that, but I can’t imagine it doesn’t happen.”

Earlier, O’Mara pointed to herself: “I know I’ve turned in papers that weren’t maybe as good as the person next to me’s, but I’ve gotten an A. Does that happen everywhere?”

Yes. Does it happen in the School of Education? Yes.”



For Lee Hansen, a retired economics professor at UW-Madison, that’s the fundamental problem with grade inflation: “If people are not stretched, they will not develop their talent to the fullest extent.”

And, hey, isn’t that the essential mission of education: to help kids realize the intellectual potential locked away in their hormone-crazed, easily distracted noggins?

Statistician Jeff Henriques argues that serious grading is indispensable to both teacher and student success in

The UW-Madison School of Education in brief

Dean: Julie Underwood.

Enrollment: 2,987, including 1,875 undergraduates (2008).

Staff: 637, including 139 faculty and 156 graduate students (2007).

Degrees granted: 561 bachelor’s; 242 master’s; 55 Ph.D.’s (2007-08).

Departments: Curriculum and Instruction; Counseling Psychology; Art; Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis; Educational Policy Studies; Educational Psychology; Kinesiology (includes physical education and occupational therapy); and Rehabilitation Psychology & Special Education. Dance is a separate program.

Research centers: Wisconsin Center for Educational Research; Minority Student Achievement Network; Center on Education and Work; and others.

Alumni: 44,450.

the classroom. He teaches introductory psychology and uses grades as a diagnostic tool.

“Grades are an indicator of what different students have learned,” he says. “I also use them as information on how good a job I’m doing as a teacher and to evaluate the changes I introduce into my curriculum.”

Only after I reviewed my notes and looked at their cool pixels on the screen did I realize how utterly commonplace Henriques’ observation was: *Grades are a measure, umm, of success?* Only in an era when just about everyone and their dog get an A would such a truism stand out as exceptional.

But it does.

Like Hansen, Henriques feels students respond to the challenge of tough grading. When he’s made it easier for students—for instance, by posting his lecture notes and slides online—he found they tested more poorly than when he peppered them with chapter quizzes.

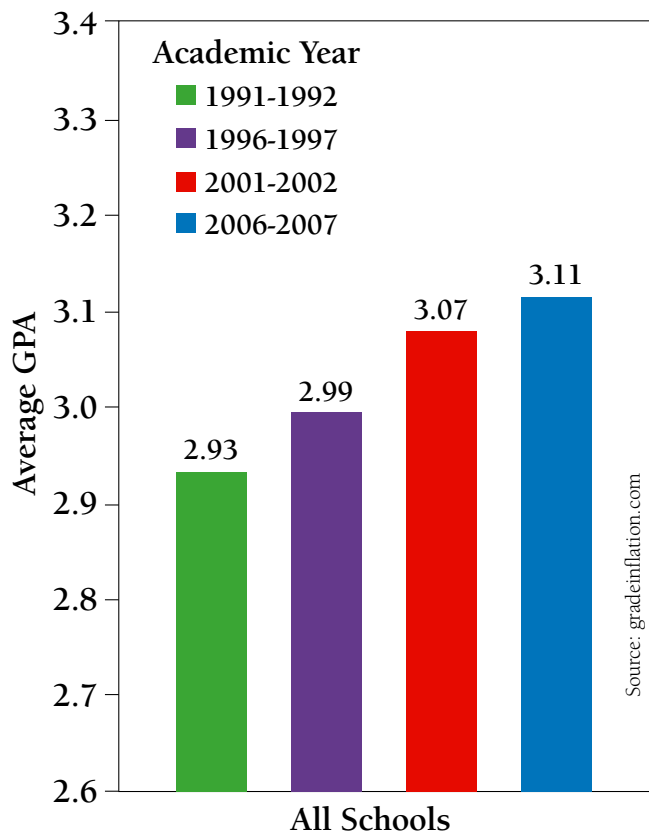
“More and more, I’m coming to believe that we help our students the most if we really challenge them, if we push them to work,” says Henriques.

Sky-high grades

As for the School of Education's approach to grading, Henriques pauses and politely offers: "I would say it's not really helpful in distinguishing between students or in evaluating the curriculum if they try to make any changes."

Earlier, when I emailed Henriques my interests in the story, he put on his statistician's hat and compared the grades of senior education students to the grades of seniors in other programs—and found the bunching of the Ed School scores so extreme that they appeared "drawn from a different distribution from the rest of the university."

Onward and upward GPAs



Researcher Stuart Rojstaczer reports "significant grade inflation" at 70 colleges and universities, including UW-Madison, that he tracked over a 15-year period. In the 1930s, the average grade was about 2.35 on a four-point scale, he says. By the 1950s, it was about 2.52.

Put another way, the ubiquitous A in Education doesn't compare to an A in Chemistry or Mathematics or most other disciplines.

Another telltale discrepancy emerged in a comparison of ACT scores to the grades of UW System graduates over a three-year period. Not unexpectedly, Ed School grads had a higher GPA (3.6) than other graduates (3.3) at UW-Madison. Their aggregate ACT score, however, was lower compared to other graduates, 26.5 to 27.6. (System-wide, among the 13 UW campuses offering teacher training, the ACT spread between education and other graduates was even bigger.)

The higher grades/lower ACT scores of education students is one more reason to wonder if they are as smart as their grade point averages seemingly demonstrate or as their professors believe.

Grade inflation is the elephant in the room that academia would happily ignore. I was surprised at how many otherwise garrulous UW-Madison professors bit their tongues and faded into the woodwork when I asked them about it.

I also was blown off by a national educational group that agitates for improved teaching as part of a reformist agenda. And I came up empty-handed when I sought to interview education experts at Teachers College in Columbia University. The press person told me that the "two people [who] would make the most sense on this are not willing to say anything publicly about a competing institution."

The reason for the conspicuous silence is probably this: Nothing is going to change.

Reality is that grade inflation is a logical product of university dynamics, as Valen Johnson, a biostatistician at the University of Texas and author of *Grade Inflation: A Crisis in College Education*, told me.

"Reforming the system isn't in anyone's interest," he explains. "The faculty doesn't want to assign lower grades because they'll get more complaints, and their course evaluations will get lower, and fewer students will enroll in their classes."

The bottom line is that tough-grading profs run the risk of being penalized in tenure and salary decisions, he says. Students, of course, “don’t want grade distributions to go down because it hurts their chances of landing a good job or getting into graduate schools.” As for administrators, “they certainly don’t want to deal with grade inflation, he says, “because if they do then both the faculty and the students get upset.”

The stalemated discussion usually plays out once a decade or so at UW-Madison. Concerns about grade inflation well up, op-eds are written, committees are formed, conferences are held, and nothing happens.



‘Reforming the system isn’t in anyone’s interest,’ says author Valen Johnson.

Johnson learned this lesson firsthand at Duke University in the 1990s when he spearheaded an unsuccessful effort to recalibrate student grade point averages to reflect the different grading policies of professors and departments. He did a book’s worth of research on grading patterns and found “incontrovertible evidence” that grading practices differ by academic field.

As you might guess, the humanities were the most lenient, and the natural sciences, math and economics the toughest in grading.

Johnson sees “deep philosophical divisions” producing the standoff. Traditionalists see grades as maintaining academic standards and providing a summary of student achievement. Liberals think praise and encouragement (and awarding good grades) will motivate students to do better. Hip postmodern professors, meanwhile, see grades as culturally biased and fatally tainted by false objectivity.

Out of this philosophical muddle emerges Curriculum and Instruction’s Lake Wobegonish world

of A’s for almost everyone. When I asked Johnson if he sees things turning around, he dryly observed: “It seems at UW-Madison that grade inflation will now stop because grades really can’t go any higher.”

How this plays out with students, of course, is the real question. For all the A’s that are handed out in the School of Education, Caitlyn O’Mara isn’t

sure that things are as topnotch as the classroom GPA would seemingly indicate.

There’s a curious refusal among students to confront one another, as if one opinion is just as good as another, she says. “We can’t have those honest

discussions about inclusion and race, because there is a level of political correctness.”

She cites as an example: “Nobody wants to talk about why [K-12] grades can be predicted by socioeconomic status and racial status. We don’t have an open dialogue about that.”

Still, O’Mara praises what she says are “the fantastic ideas” she’s taught on incorporating social justice into her teaching. “But you walk into the classroom and you get kind of a reality check,” she admits. There may not be the time, resources or institutional support to pursue any of it.

“I go to my methods courses early in the week, then I teach in my practicum classes later in the week and I get the wind knocked out of me,” she says matter-of-factly. “What I read about is not what I experienced. I wasn’t prepared for the kind of challenges I meet in the classroom.” ■

Marc Eisen is a reporter and editor in Madison.

Getting Ahead

Eight steps to reinvigorate the ravaged Wisconsin economy after a decade of decline

The economy dominates every political and policy conversation these days. Some people know what they're talking about, most do not. Two who definitely know of what they speak are Tom Hefty and John Torinus Jr. Both Tom and John have run successful businesses, and, over the years, both Democratic and Republican governors have sought their advice.

That explains why Hefty and Torinus dropped a bombshell last summer when they pronounced that Wisconsin had descended to Alabama-level wages. Their report in the July issue of Wisconsin Interest was a page-turner. Some have even said that their report factored into Gov. Jim Doyle's decision not to seek reelection.

But their work was not finished. Over soup at a local Hartland restaurant, I challenged them: "Can you chart the roadmap to recovery?" It's one thing to diagnose the problem, quite another to provide the cure. We want a cure. They cautioned me that many voices need to be heard, but took the challenge. What you see here is their roadmap for economic recovery. Some ideas are new, some are not. We think you will find their proposals for economic recovery intriguing.

George Lightbourn
President, Wisconsin Policy Research Institute



BY THOMAS HEFTY AND JOHN TORINUS JR.

In the July 2009 issue of *Wisconsin Interest*, we wrote that Wisconsin had fallen behind in the race to create jobs and raise family incomes. We found that the Doyle years were a decade of economic disappointments. The state failed to create new jobs while descending to Alabama-level wages.

By 2008, Wisconsin ranked 47th among states in five-year personal income growth. Our job growth was less than half that of neighboring Illinois, Iowa

and Minnesota. And this was before the recession, which left the state reeling from job losses almost 20% greater than the national average. By December 2009, Wisconsin had lost a stunning 176,700 jobs—a 6.1% decline in the workforce—over the previous two years.

Since our July report, there has been mostly bad news. *Forbes* dropped Wisconsin to 48th in its 2010 business ranking of the states. The Pew

Center on the States named Wisconsin one of the 10 worst states for fiscal stability, as it connected the dots between the state's dismal economic performance and the huge revenue gap in the state budget.

While the good news includes the state holding on to vulnerable jobs at Mercury Marine in Oshkosh and Republic Airlines in Milwaukee, no one disputes that Wisconsin has stumbled badly. Economists from the left, center and right all agree that the situation is dire. But what to do about it?

We would argue that when you're near the bottom, a viable and quick strategy would be to follow the example of successful states. "Watch and Learn," as the headline said in *Site Selection*

magazine's review of best states for business. The magazine focused on Texas and North Carolina. But Wisconsin doesn't need to look that far for models of success.

We can learn from Iowa's job growth, and from Minnesota, where per capita income is 20% greater than Wisconsin's. But learning from others is a difficult lesson for a state still coasting on the fading glories of governors like Bob La Follette, Pat Lucey and Tommy Thompson. The notion of Wisconsin exceptionalism is deeply held. Unfortunately, the recent exceptionalism is not the right kind: Wisconsin has been exceptionally bad at economic development.

Here are eight ideas we think could turn Wisconsin around:

1 Get government to work better.

You might be surprised to see this on a list of economic development ideas. We think it is

critical. A focus on government efficiency is long overdue. First, it sends a message to employers, workers, and retirees that Wisconsin is serious about being a good steward of tax dollars. And the savings can be redirected to investment in Wisconsin's economy and to finance tax reform.

There has been no statewide effort focused on government efficiency since the SAVE Commission in 1995. Yet there have been well-publicized examples of government waste in failed

computer systems, fraud in the state child care system, and undermanagement of health care costs.

Instead of looking for efficiencies or the elimination of out-of-date programs, Gov. Doyle directed last year that all state employees—efficient or not, state-

funded or supported by federal grants—take unpaid furloughs. Not surprisingly, given the lack of focus on improving efficiency, Wisconsin was the only state in the Midwest to raise personal income taxes in 2009.

Tying government efficiency to economic development is not new. The Brookings Institute recently recommended that Maine "trim government to invest in the economy and finance tax reform." Brookings recommended a strong, high-level, expert commission with power to "force legislators to achieve transformative efficiencies."

Wisconsin was a leader in governmental reform in the early 20th century. The La Follette era was characterized by independent, citizen-led agencies such as the Wisconsin Industrial Commission, with strong input from the experts at the University of Wisconsin—the "Wisconsin Idea" in action.

A government efficiency commission would

Imagine a sign on the state border:
"Welcome to Wisconsin.
Hostile Bureaucrats Ahead.
Please contact our ombudsman
for protection at 800-WIS-JOBS."

prepare a package of recommendations, and then the Legislature would vote it up or down, much like Congress did when it received the military-base closing recommendations of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. That way, special-interest lobbying for entrenched programs would be neutralized.

2 Connect education and work.

Wisconsin faces a paradox. Spending on education has been consistently strong, yet our workers lag in college degrees. As a result, economic growth and wages have lagged. Part of the problem arises from the lack of a state economic development plan. Without a plan, there is no guidance for education leaders on whether to emphasize biotech, engineering or journalism.

Wisconsin is an education factory. The UW System has 13 comprehensive campuses and 13 two-year schools, while the vocational-technical system offers 16 colleges with 52 campuses. These and the 20 private colleges are invaluable assets for the state. But in 2007 only 25.4% of the Wisconsin workforce consisted of college graduates—well below the national average of 27.5%.

Our universities need to be tied tightly to the economic focus of the state. The successful research triangle in North Carolina was built on just such connections between the state's top universities and the state's market-leading companies. Linking our colleges to jobs is very doable. For example, when the insurance industry said it needed to hire young graduates who had minored in insurance, four Wisconsin private colleges stepped forward with insurance programs.

In short, the state's education plan must be connected to its economic development plan, which comes first. All parties will benefit when that happens.

3 Build on our economic strengths with a cluster strategy.

Harvard's Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness defines clusters as "critical masses in one place of linked industries and institutions—from suppliers to universities to government agencies." Think Silicon Valley. Think the wine industry on the West Coast. Think the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Colorado.

We need to put a fine point on our cluster strategy. Simply identifying broad areas such as biotech or agriculture isn't focused enough. Indeed, the cluster strategy is not new to Wisconsin. It was first recommended at the UW economic summits early in the last decade. But few steps have been taken to implement the strategy.

Why is it so difficult in Wisconsin? The answer is evident every time you see a picture of a politician handing out an oversized check. Those cardboard checks make for great political theater, but they also encourage poor economics. Politicians dislike the cluster strategy because it limits their political handouts—and photo opportunities. Feel-good politics lead to scattered and diluted use of scarce economic development dollars.

Which industries offer the best opportunities? One way to find them is to look at technology strengths—the number of patents. Wisconsin leads the nation in patents in three categories—X-ray and gamma-ray medical devices; papermaking and related technologies; and marine propulsion. Ergo, we already have clusters here and in other industries. They just need more recognition and support.

4 Emphasize new business and entrepreneurship.

Last November, the Kauffman Foundation reported that nearly all net job creation came from young companies, those less than five years old. Where will the new jobs come from? The answer is new firms. Yet Wisconsin's rankings for small

business are at the absolute bottom. Creating a positive climate for new ventures begins with attitude and salesmanship. Show that the government cares about entrepreneurs. Treat them as the avatars of growth.

Look around: All of Wisconsin's great companies—including Quadgraphics, S.C. Johnson and Epic Systems—started here.

But Wisconsin is not hospitable to new business. It is widely understood that state agencies have a reputation for being difficult, if not outright hostile. What is government's response? Democratic legislative leaders are pushing for creation of a state ombudsman. This is a tacit admission of failure. Rather than an ombudsman, we need an administration that holds cabinet agencies accountable for creating a positive business climate.

Can you imagine a sign on the state border declaring: "Welcome to Wisconsin. Hostile Bureaucrats Ahead. Please contact our ombudsman for protection at 800-WIS-JOBS"?

We suggest that rather than an ombudsman, the state needs a governor who holds cabinet agencies accountable for creating a positive business climate.

Second, new ventures need funding. The tax credits created in the Doyle years are good, but by themselves have proved ineffective. More than 30 states have created venture funds that invest side by side with private investors. Most state venture funds have private sector management. Some funds use public employee pension assets. Some are funded by state bonding. Studies show that the state venture funds are cost-effective in creating good jobs.

Wisconsin has long lagged in early-stage investments. This has to change. With the state's

huge investment in education, we have many smart, innovative people. Let's keep them here rather than see them migrate to Minnesota, Illinois and the coasts. If capital is made available here, they will leap to start new companies. In this arena, private financiers and investors need to lead the way.

Third, the state should support regional small-business efforts. The entrepreneurial ecosystem created by the group Biz Starts Milwaukee has aided the creation of 19 new high-growth companies in less than two years. That rate of about one a month needs to be doubled.

If most net new jobs come from young businesses, why not devote the same percentage of the economic development budget to high-growth startups? Similarly, rather than concentrate budget authority in Madison, why not transfer the new-business budget directly to regional organizations?

One of the charms of this strategy is that it doesn't cost much. High-growth start-ups can be launched with \$250,000 to \$1 million. Success is more about creating the right set of attitudes so that entrepreneurs are coached, supported, funded and applauded. Much of the funding comes from private sources and not the taxpayer.

5 Focus, focus, focus!

Call around state government to find the center for economic development efforts. Good luck!

Wisconsin has a confusing number of offices all engaged in this vital work: the Department of Workforce Development, the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority and the state Department of Commerce. Noticeably lacking is a Department of Job Creation.

Our universities need to be tied tightly to the economic focus of the state.

Today, Commerce has primary responsibility for economic development, but it also handles petroleum recycling and clean-up, county-fair ride safety, building inspection, ski-lift safety, homeless shelters, and on and on. There is no focus.

With Wisconsin's economy in crisis, we don't have the luxury of supporting such a scattered and formless department. The Department of Commerce needs to be erased. We need to start over with a Department of Job Creation. Its other programs can be transferred to other agencies. We need a Department of Job Creation with a singular, laser focus.

Further, we believe the Department of Job Creation should report to an independent board similar to the Board of Regents. Its secretary should report to that board. We need to keep our job-creation efforts a safe distance from the non-strategic political process.

6 Target economic development funding.

In Wisconsin, much of the development funding goes to "community development," not to job creation. It's no surprise that Wisconsin has not attracted a major corporate headquarters in nearly two decades.

In other states, major high-tech companies have received grants of \$40,000 to \$60,000 per new job created. Smaller companies receive less. Wisconsin needs to get in the game. But with the state's fiscal situation so dire, where can Wisconsin find the bucks to attract jobs?

Begin with tightening up government management and reallocating the saved money to job development. Beyond that, we'd like to see more venture investing by the State of Wisconsin Investment Board. As one of the largest public pension funds in the country, the board's resources could be a difference-maker. In fact, the board committed to increase venture investing early in the Doyle administration, but follow-through has been poor.

The state should also be bonding for economic development. Wisconsin already has an agency to do that, the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority. However, WHEDA's bonding power for economic development has not been used. Apparently, the authority does not grasp the urgency of the moment.

What we're suggesting is hardly new. Other states have used pension fund investing and development bonding. Both require professional management without political interference. The success of the Ohio Third Frontier Fund is a good model for Wisconsin. It combines pension fund investing, state bonding, and a state venture fund to achieve targeted growth objectives.

7 Invest in sustainable development and green jobs.

Don Nichols, emeritus professor of economics at UW-Madison, once suggested that Wisconsin pursue a "Connecticut strategy" of attracting high-paying jobs from nearby New York and Boston. Why not use our lakes, forests, and streams and high quality of life to draw jobs from Chicago and the Twin Cities?

Every report on sustainable economic development cites the importance of quality-of-life issues. Yet for a state rich in natural beauty, we perform poorly by this measure. This is another Wisconsin paradox. *Forbes'* 2010 ranking of best places for business put Wisconsin at 48th overall. Yet the magazine ranked Wisconsin 11th in quality of life.

Reality is that Wisconsin's quality of life does not overcome our lackluster business climate. This can be changed with the right plan.

Second, green jobs are expected to increase. The skills that produce cars can produce wind turbines and water systems. But that also requires a savvy economic development plan and coordination of university research and public utility investments.

If wind turbines are being produced here, they

need to be shipped across the country. That requires bridges, highways and railroad connections. Wisconsin is coming late to this game—growing green industries. But it deserves attention.

8 Get our fair share of federal spending.

One of Wisconsin's major economic weaknesses is the dearth of federal dollars coming into the state. This includes program aid to state and local government, procurement of private-sector goods and services and the salaries paid to federal employees. On a per-person basis, we rank a dismal 48th among the states in federal spending.

Thus, while Wisconsin sends \$45 billion in taxes to Washington each year, only 86 cents of each dollar is returned here. Pending health-care and carbon-control legislation could make the imbalance even worse. In contrast, almost every rapidly growing state enjoys strong federal funding.

What does this shortfall mean? If

Wisconsin were to have the average federal employment, the state would gain 22,000 high-paying jobs: The average federal worker earns \$79,000 per year, compared to the average wage in Wisconsin of \$39,000.

Following the lead of the late Sen. William Proxmire, Wisconsin politicians of both parties have railed against "pork barrel spending." Yet they continue to vote for appropriations that send disproportionate funding to other states. While other states get "pork," Wisconsin gets thin gruel.

Iowa with its strong record of recent job growth offers important lessons. Twenty years ago, Iowa ranked 48th in its return on federal dollars. Today, it ranks 24th, receiving \$1.10 for every dollar it sends to Washington. That's one more reason Iowa's

economic growth rate is now double Wisconsin's.

The economic impact of Wisconsin's weak performance in Washington goes beyond the direct dollars. Also lost is the multiplier effect of how the federal spending would generate new economic activity. Using a straightforward multiplier of 1.5, the \$4 billion shortfall in federal spending translates to a \$6 billion impact on the Wisconsin economy.

Put another way, the federal shortfall produces a negative impact of \$1,100 per person in Wisconsin. That shortfall alone is roughly 40% of the difference between Wisconsin per capita income and the national average.

Simply stated, any successful economic development strategy must address federal spending in the state. This is most definitely not to argue for greater federal spending, but for

Wisconsin gaining a more equitable share of existing spending.

Our ideas are meant to prime the pump. Many more will be needed to find the right strategy.

We are hopeful that research by Deloitte Touche, a national consulting firm hired to conduct an independent assessment of the state's economy, will lead to an economic summit and detailed proposals for rebuilding the Wisconsin economy.

The good news is that we won't need to reinvent the wheel. Starting from near the bottom, we can quickly adopt the best ideas from successful states.

We close by saying that job creation is not an ideological issue. Nor is it the turf for any one political party. Job creation should be on the lips of every candidate for office, just as it should be high on the agenda for leaders in the private sector.

Economic prosperity is everyone's business. ■

Forbes dropped Wisconsin to 48th in its 2010 ranking of state business climates.

*'I just ask questions,
and then I try to find
people who can
answer them,' says
Dean Joseph Kearney.*



ON THE FRONTLINES OF REFORM
WITH WRITER SUNNY SCHUBERT

Stepping Up

Marquette takes a bigger role in Milwaukee's policy debates

Just north of the new Marquette Interchange—the busiest intersection in the state—rises the new Marquette University Law School building, Eckstein Hall. The glittering edifice is a concrete symbol of the school's increasing importance in Milwaukee's public life.

The man behind both the building and the law school's growing prominence is Dean Joseph Kearney. He has built not only a landmark facility, but also a powerhouse public policy group that is changing the course of civic discussion in Milwaukee.

Determinedly self-effacing, Kearney, 45, refuses to take credit for the school's wider vision,

insisting that he is building on tradition.

"I just ask questions," he says, "and then I try to find people who can answer them."

Kearney's main question: "Is there more we can do to drive public policy debates while still maintaining our neutrality?"

While most law schools encourage students and faculty to provide free legal counsel to needy individuals, Kearney envisions Marquette Law School taking the lead in tackling bigger issues, from reforming Milwaukee's troubled public schools to exploring ways to lift the region's most disadvantaged citizens out of poverty.

And he has assembled what traditionalists might feel is an unusual crew to help him with the answers: a vibrant faculty of mainstream academics, working lawyers like Michael Spector, retired state Supreme Court Justice Janine Geske and former journalists Mike Gousha and Alan J. Borsuk.

Kearney—an Irish Catholic product of a Jesuit education at Chicago’s St. Ignatius Prep School—seems a natural for Marquette, which is also a Jesuit institution.

He earned his bachelor’s degree from Yale and his law degree from Harvard before spending a year clerking for the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in northern California. He then moved back to Chicago and joined the prestigious Sidley & Austin law firm (coincidentally, where another Harvard law student, Barack Obama, met his wife-to-be Michelle while working as a summer intern).

On a blind date in 1995, just before he left Chicago for Washington, D.C. to clerk for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia for a year, Kearney found his own soul mate: fellow lawyer Anne Berleman, who graduated from Harvard law a year after he did.

They married and settled happily in Chicago. If Kearney thought about Milwaukee at all during those years, it was as the home of the Brewers, American League rivals to his beloved White Sox.

But by 1997, Kearney was feeling the urge to try something new. Also, he and Anne had started thinking about children. (They have three boys, ages 11, 9 and 6.) Milwaukee, with its big-city amenities but more laid-back lifestyle, appealed to them. So Kearney took a job teaching at the Marquette Law School.

“I had promised Anne we would never move more than a hundred miles from Chicago,” he says. “Well, it’s 99 miles to the parking lot at Comiskey Park.”

Marquette’s law school, whose first students attended night classes back in 1892, has a long tradition of public service. Kearney’s predecessor, the revered Dean Howard S. Eisenberg, was known statewide for his personal pro bono work on behalf of criminal defendants and his insistence that Marquette law students and alumni use their legal

skills to help the disadvantaged.

Kearney became dean in 2003 following Eisenberg’s death. “When I asked my wife if I should apply for the job, she said, ‘Well, you’re going to work all the time anyway, so you might as well be dean,’” he recalls with a smile. At the time of his hiring, he was 38—the youngest dean of any major law school in the United States.

Intent on widening the scope of the law school’s commitment to community service, he hired Mike Gousha. A former newsman with WTMJ TV, he would seem an odd addition to a law school faculty, but Kearney prized Gousha’s deep understanding of the Milwaukee community and his “very thoughtful

Kearney has assembled an unusual crew of vibrant faculty, working lawyers and former journalists.

and deliberative approach.”

“When he retired in 2007 after 25 years in daily broadcast journalism, I cold-called him,” Kearney recalls. “I told him we could give him a platform from which he could delve into public policy issues.”

Gousha, whose father had been superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools, has a lot of connections. “He brings in leaders in politics, non-profits, education, law enforcement,” Kearney explains. “We invite these people in for informal lunches with our students, and they help us have civil, intelligent discussions of the issues.”

Pleased with the Gousha hire, Kearney decided to advertise for another journalism-based faculty job—and ended up with award-winning *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reporter, editor and columnist Alan J. Borsuk.

“Alan, after he graduated from college, told his mother he wanted to work for a year, then would probably go to law school,” Kearney says. “Thirty-seven years later, he’s finally in law school, but not as a student.”

Borsuk, an expert on the Milwaukee Public Schools system, will be working with Gousha to investigate and expand the search for a solution to MPS’s seemingly intractable woes. He also writes for the Law School faculty blog and *Marquette Lawyer* magazine. (As a freelance writer, Borsuk contributes to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and analyzes the political struggle over MPS in this issue of *WI*.)

Kearney also found a new job for adjunct professor of education law Michael Spector. A longtime Milwaukee lawyer, Spector is former chair of Gov. Jim Doyle’s Task Force on Educational Excellence and vice president of the UW System Board of Regents.

Spector will encourage a community conversation on the public schools by bringing in speakers from academia, unions, government and other stakeholder groups for forums and other public events.

Under Kearney’s leadership, the law school established an Office of Public Service, and he helped capture a grant from state Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen to address the mortgage crisis among the city’s low-income residents. Ongoing programs like legal aid clinics in Milwaukee’s underserved neighborhoods get his backing.

Kearney has also encouraged Professor Janine Geske—a high-profile former justice on the Wisconsin Supreme Court—to ramp up her efforts to promote restorative justice, which is loosely defined as using the law to help victims of crime.



Such efforts have boosted the law school’s public image, which seems to please Marquette’s president, the Rev. Robert Wild, a man whom observers see as matching Kearney in brains and energy.

“Under Father Wild’s direction, the university has invested in the law school in a way we had not seen in decades,” says Kearney.

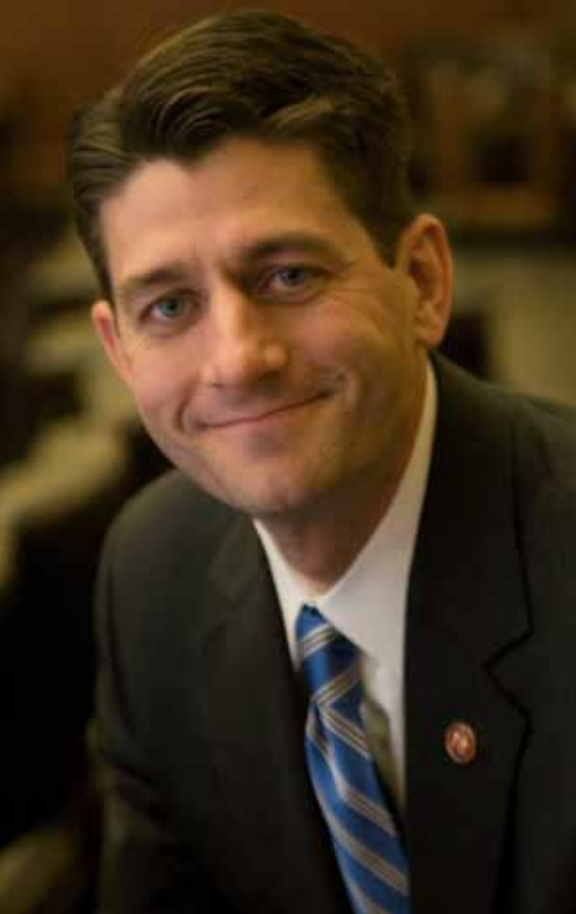
The school’s increasing visibility also helped Kearney in one of his biggest challenges: raising money for the new law school building.

When completed, Eckstein Hall—named after law school alumnus Ray Eckstein, who built a barge and tugboat empire on the Mississippi River—will be “the best law school building in the country,” says Kearney.

Eckstein contributed \$51 million—one of the nation’s largest gifts to any law school by a single individual. Another prominent alumnus, Joseph Zilber, kicked in \$30 million.

“The law school is a cultural institution in the region as well as the city of Milwaukee,” says Kearney. “We want to be the law school of the 21st century, and I think we’re in position to do that.” ■

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



'Debts no honest man could pay'

Paul Ryan, unlike the president, acts like a grownup in facing the entitlement tsunami

BY RICHARD ESENBERG

In his State of the Union Address, President Obama invoked great crises in American history like Bull Run and Omaha Beach. He referred to the stock market's crash on Black Tuesday and that Bloody Sunday in 1965 when civil rights marchers were brutally beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

On all these occasions, we were tested and compelled to "answer the call of history." The president sees a similar challenge before us today.

He's right. But it's not clear that he understands why.

In the coming years, both liberals and conservatives will have to face the limitations of their preferred nostrums. Government spending (or, as we are admonished to call it these days, "investment") does not pay for itself. The state can do things that contribute to prosperity, but often does little more than move money from one pocket to another.

At the risk of losing my membership in the Vast Right Wing Conspiracy, tax cuts don't always pay for themselves either. The famed Laffer curve represents sound economic theory, but it is...a curve. As tax rates are reduced, further reductions offer increasingly diminishing bang for the buck.

Thirty years of mostly conservative rule has—at least on the federal level—substantially improved the tax climate, with spectacular results. But it has not reduced the size of government. Nor has it stopped the entitlement tsunami that threatens to swamp us as retiring baby boomers drop out, turn on and tune in to www.socialsecurity.gov.

Like Bruce Springsteen's "Johnny 99," we've got "debts no honest man could pay."

This may mean that being the out party is going to be a lot more fun than actually having to govern.

For a generation we have known that Social Security and Medicare are a pair of financially voracious tigers chewing their way through the front door.

Some critics blame the George W. Bush administration for failing to act, but the Obama team has continued to cower behind the couch. The president has submitted budgets with deficit projections that, according to his own Treasury secretary, are “unsustainable.”

When challenged, Secretary Timothy Geithner’s response was essentially: “Yeah, somebody’s going to have to do something about that.” For his part, the president wants to punt the problem to yet another commission.

But we have a pretty good idea of where the president wants to go. Almost certainly, he will turn Reaganism on its head. “In the present crisis,” Obama is likely to say, “government is not the problem, it is the solution to the problem.” In politics, like fashion, everything that was once “out” becomes “in” again. The president seems likely to take us back to 1979.

I was there. Not a good idea.

A contrasting view is offered by our own Congressman Paul Ryan in his “Road Map for America’s Future 2.0.” As columnist Robert Samuelson puts it, Ryan has “done something no one else in Congress or apparently the White House has done: design a specific plan to control long-term government spending and budget deficits.”

Of course, no good deed goes unpunished. Democrats have unleashed a coordinated onslaught of vitriol against Ryan. His plan must not be engaged. It must be destroyed. Critics attack the hard choices that Ryan asks us to make without suggesting what spending cuts and tax increases they would prefer.

That type of response is precisely how we got into this mess.

I am not prepared to endorse every aspect of Ryan’s plan.

The complete elimination of capital gains taxes and the taxation of dividends is probably a political nonstarter and may itself have unintended and undesirable consequences.

But it is refreshing to see a politician finally deciding to act like a grownup. It is startling that this difficult conversation was decided, not by our (formerly) popular president offering “hope” and “change” and enjoying huge congressional majorities, but by a (formerly) obscure congressman from Janesville, Wisconsin.

Ryan’s plan updates Reaganism for the 21st century. It

lowers marginal tax rates but recognizes that it is not possible to do so without broadening the tax base. It returns Medicare to solvency but only by introducing restrictions on benefits for upper-income folks.

Ryan would move Medicare from the fiscally unsustainable single-payer system to a market for insurance, but he recognizes that, given the nature of health care, this will require subsidies and regulated exchanges. His broader proposal for health care insurance does much the same thing.

Social Security and Medicare are a pair of financially voracious tigers chewing their way through the front door.

Ryan’s roadmap has been criticized for reducing Medicare spending. But that is not a flaw; it’s the objective—and an unavoidable one. Obamacare would have done the same thing by centralized administrative fiat rather than by creating a market that would retain incentives for efficiencies and innovation.

The difference matters and will increasingly become the battleground on which Democrats and Republicans will fight. Conservatives must battle the Leviathan, but we must remember that the goal is not simply smaller government but the common good that we believe requires limited government.

Paul Ryan has made an excellent start. ■

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



Youthful indiscretions

Our politicians are both juvenile and delinquent

The ubiquitous television commercial plays nonstop, making it the aural wallpaper of our lives: Bob Dylan's "Forever Young" remixed over modern beats, reminds us that the fountain of youth can be found in a sweet carbonated beverage.

It's not the first marketing campaign to promise us eternal youth, and it won't be the last. In fact, as we get older, commercials sell us on being even younger—in 10 years, Pepsi is probably going to promise me I can enjoy life once again as a fetus.

But these marketing campaigns bring up an interesting question that filters beyond culture, into the way we're governed: Is the world really short on people who are acting *too* grown-up?

When I was a kid, it used to be that we were always in a rush to grow up. Someone's older brother always had an awesome new R.E.M. tape that gave us a window into what college life was like—and we'd do anything to get a piece of it. At age 16, my friends and I sneaked into a Washington, D.C., bar, and I sat stunned, enjoying poetry readings next to a guy *with a beard*.

Today, our feelings on age seem to be the exact opposite. People my age are now obsessed with youth culture. Grown men measure their cultural status based on whether they're beating 16-year-olds in online Xbox games. Women in their 30s and 40s giggle about the Jonas Brothers and seek refuge from real life in tales written for teenage girls about nubile young vampires.

Ask any woman, and she'll tell you she'd rather be Megan Fox than Margaret Thatcher. (Although in college, I found out you can quickly turn the latter into the former with a bottle of Bacardi and a light switch.)

Our government leaders have caught on to the juvenalization of the American public. If there are any two

personality traits that characterize young people, it is their avarice and their inability to think long term. And there is no better way to describe today's elected leaders.

Politicians on the national level promise us universal health care while ignoring how they're going to pay for it. They run up trillions of dollars of debt, selling our future to China. They spend billions of dollars on farcical economic "stimulus" efforts that seem to only benefit political cronies, while America continues to hemorrhage jobs. As if children on a playground, they hurl puerile epithets like "racist" and "teabagger" to impugn their ideological opponents.

Wisconsin's leaders on the state level aren't any better. Despite being required to pass a balanced budget, the state currently faces a \$2.7 billion deficit. Wisconsin's governor and Legislature simply can't resist the urge to buy more government than it can pay for. This isn't at all unlike what would happen if I let my 6-year-old daughter loose in Toys R' Us with a credit card.

All of this, of course, reflects a society that doesn't mind being lectured on the environment by the likes of Leonardo DiCaprio. Or having Jessica Alba tell them who to vote for in a presidential election. Or being told not to wear fur by Pamela Anderson.

I, for one, have come to grips with getting older. I wouldn't trade the life experiences I've had, people I've met, books I've read, food I've tasted, for anything. Sure, I could do without my belly button sagging sadly over my belt, and

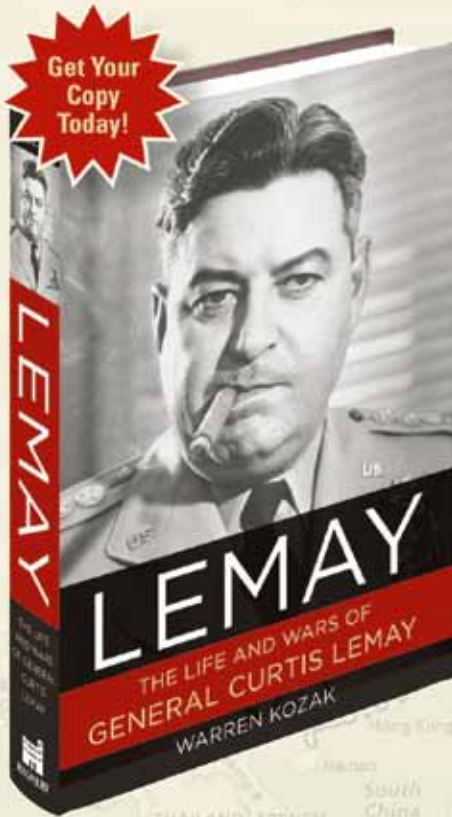
Grown men measure their cultural status by their ability to beat 16-year-olds in online Xbox games.

I'd prefer it if my nose hair didn't look like two hamsters were having a boxing match in my nostrils.

But with age comes experience, and I'm hopeful I've translated what I've learned into being a more responsible adult.

This is a lesson our political leaders need to take to heart. As Flannery O'Connor implored, we need to start "pushing as hard as the age that pushes against you." On both the national and state level, we need adult supervision. The issues of our day will remain intractable until the people we choose to represent us just...grow up. ■

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



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