



The Miller/Wenhold Wisconsin Report

Vol. 1 Issue 2

July 2008

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Celebrating our Freedom

By Paul A. Miller

This past week we celebrated our Nation's birthday. For most of us it meant a day off of work; spending time with family and friends; attending the parade; attending a barbeque; and watching the fireworks.

As we celebrate these events let's not forget about the men and women who have served in our military, many who have given their lives for the freedoms we celebrate each year on this date. Each day we wake up and go about our very busy lives without truly thinking about our freedoms and the costs endured by some families.

This year let's take a few extra minutes during this coming week to say thank you not only to those men and women serving this great country, but to thank their families for the service of their loved one. Regardless of your thoughts on our current involvement in the Middle East, we have brave soldiers laying their lives on the line each day for us. Many of these soldiers have not seen their families in quite a few months. Let's all say a prayer that each one of them comes home safe very soon.

This country was and still is built on those who defend our freedoms. We don't always wake up thinking about this, but this week is a good time to reflect on what we have and why we are able to have these things.

I want to take this moment to say thank you to all the soldiers from Wisconsin who have and are currently serving. Thank you for keeping my family safe and keeping us a free country. I also want to say a very special thank you to my father George Miller for his years of service of this country. I am proud to call you my father and proud to say you are a veteran of this great country.



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Budget Stalemate

By Brandon VerVelde

In last month's newsletter, I wrote about Governor Doyle announcing his line-item vetoes on the Budget Repair Bill. I continued on to write that "most conservatives and liberals alike supported his vetoes." Shortly after the deadline for the article, Assembly Majority Leader Jeff Fitzgerald (R-Horicon) announced the Assembly Republican's intention to bring at least three vetoes up to the Assembly to attempt to override them by a two-thirds vote. I guess not all conservatives supported his vetoes.



The three vetoes that were at stake were the Governor's changes to K-12 funding, SeniorCare, and the controversial Transportation funding. The override attempt was aimed at restoring exemptions on K-12 funding and SeniorCare, and to restore the \$50 million cap that the Budget Repair bill placed on transfers out of the transportation fund. The Governor removed the cap in order to have more access to the Transportation Fund.

Still in their Special Session, the Assembly gathered to try to override the three vetoes on May 28th. Unfortunately for Assembly Republicans, though, each attempt to override Governor Doyle's changes failed. The Republicans did pick up a number of Democrats in their attempts, but they fell short of the two-thirds needed. On K-12 and SeniorCare, there were 57 ayes, ten short of the 67 needed, and on the Transportation Fund, three more ayes were picked up, still seven short of the magic number.

On a final note, the Wisconsin Legislature finally adjourned for the 2007-2008 session on May 28th. They are set adjourned, except for any special sessions that may be called, until January of 2009.



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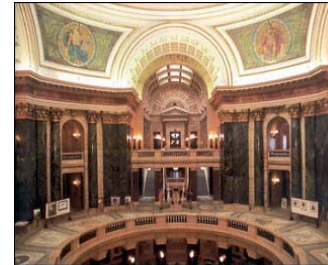
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Does One Person One Vote Add Up

By Paul A. Miller

This election cycle is not only shaping up to be the most costly in our nation's history, but it is shaping up to be one that could disenfranchise millions of voters in the future.



The buzz words for this Presidential campaign appear to be “transparency”, “special interest”, “change we can believe in”, “new direction”, and “my campaign will be lobbyist free.” All flashy and intended to garner support by unhappy voters.

It's obvious the candidates have done their homework on these phrases as all of them scored well with primary voters. The reality however is, they are just slogans with very few if any concrete ideas behind them. The new electoral victory map appears to be scaring the voters into supporting a candidate instead of providing them with details about how you will solve some of the major issues like healthcare, energy, immigration and taxes, facing the country.

The downside to these slogans for all of us is that it appears this rhetoric is winning over voters as one can't pick up a newspaper, magazine, turn on the news or radio without hearing about these warm and fuzzy ideas. What we should be doing as voters is asking candidates to provide us with a detailed blueprint of their plans for the country and the costs to the budget and tax-payer. Submit these to the American people and then let us make an informed decision on who is best equipped to lead our country for the next four years. This is a nice idea, but never going to happen. These candidates are smart people and they won't risk offending any voters as they need every vote they can get this year, even if that means scaring you into voting for them or offering pie in the sky ideas with no actual details behind them.

This year we saw record voter turnout in every state, which was refreshing to see. This is in part because we have an unpopular President and an ongoing war which led many people to get out and vote this time around, but even so, high turnout is good for our country. However, we still hear from people of all ages who say they don't vote because their vote doesn't matter or doesn't count. In many cases these are the same people who complain every time something goes wrong in this country. Maybe these people have it right and the rest of us who vote have it wrong? Maybe our votes don't count like they should.

We just completed one of the most bruising Presidential primaries in our nation's history. Along the way we saw record voter turnout, which again, was great to see. However, one could make a case that the one person one vote rule really didn't matter this year. In the Republican primary you had winner take all, which means that the person with the most votes won. You didn't have that in the Democratic primary and we should all ask why.



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In 2000 the Democratic Party criticized the Republicans accusing them of highjacking the election from Al Gore who received more of the popular vote than George Bush yet George Bush was elected President. We saw the Democratic Party point to Florida where they claim the votes weren't counted and the will of the people was undermined by the Electoral College process. We saw yet again in 2004 the Democratic Party make the same claim except this time they said voters in Ohio had their votes highjacked by Republicans.



What we aren't hearing this year is anyone from the Democratic Party or press, making the same accusations against their own party for the exact same things that just occurred in the Democratic primary for President, that they accused Republicans of in 2000 and 2004. According to the rules of the Democratic Party one person one vote still applies. What doesn't apply is that the person with the most votes wins. According to the Democratic primary rules, the will of the people doesn't necessarily win out.

What the Democratic party has said to voters is we will allow you to vote and we will spend hundreds of millions of dollars getting you to the polls, but at the end of the day we don't trust your decision-making and have created a system whereby we will anoint Super Delegates (or Democratic elites) to ultimately decide who the candidate will be.

This process goes against everything this country stands for and tries to promote in other democratic countries around the world. It's amazing no one was talking about this. We had tens of millions of people vote in the most historic Presidential primary in our history, yet we are not certain whom the real nominee is because it wasn't a winner take all system. It was a race decided by the elite few in the Democratic Party.

The question to the American people is why don't we deserve a better system? Why does one party believe that the American people aren't smart enough to decide who they want as their next leader? The only answer one could conclude is the Democratic elite don't believe the American people will make the "right" decision.

This would seem to be an arrogant way of thinking. The heads of the Democratic Party are basically telling voters that we want your votes and your money, but at the end of the day we will ultimately decide for you. Doesn't sound like the government by the people for the people our Founding Fathers had envisioned.

As voters we should all be outraged by this process. One person one vote should actually mean something or what's the point in voting? We need to demand the rules be changed by 2012 so that the American people elect our leaders and not the elite of any one party. Our system of government is built on that philosophy and it's principles we ask other countries to live by.



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We deserve more and we are smarter than the elites give us credit for. If the slogan is change you can believe in, then why not give us real change and it begins with ensuring our votes count for something more than television drama.



As voters we hold the power. Let's begin using it by demanding the rules change so that our votes do count. We shouldn't head into an historic election with an asterisk next to any candidates name because we aren't sure they truly won their party's nomination since the votes of the people really didn't elect the nominee.

We should all support the need for a change in how campaigns are waged, but it has to start with the parties and the rules they make. Until changes in how votes are counted we will be no better than we were four years ago regardless of who the candidate is.

Candidates have complained about "special interests" running Washington for too long, maybe we should ask the candidates to cut their ties with the "special interest" elite party leaders. Voting is a privilege and should actually mean something. It's time our candidates understood that.

The Great Lakes Compact Debate

By Brandon VerVelde

The Great Lakes Compact, officially the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Compact, made significant headway in May. Called in on a special session, Wisconsin legislators met and debated, and eventually approved the Compact with overwhelming bipartisan support. Now that Wisconsin has joined Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, New York, and, most recently, Ohio in approval, the Compact is waiting on Michigan and Pennsylvania to pass in order for it to be sent to Congress for consent.

What is it?

The Great Lakes Compact is basically an agreement between the eight states that are in the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin. The Compact sets terms and regulations on large diversions of water out of the basin and the lakes. It prohibits almost all diversions out of the basin, with very stringent requirements for communities that "straddle" (half-inside and half-outside the defined "basin" area).

The Compact also creates a council that identifies and reviews water conservation and efficiency objectives, and approves or denies proposals for diversions for the straddling communities. The council consists of the governors of each state, or their representative as approved by each state.



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The Controversy

The main point of controversy comes from the council's power with approval of proposals for diversions. According to the original Compact, unanimous consent from the council is required for approval of almost all proposals for diversions. Essentially, it places ultimate veto power on each governor. Some legislators in Madison, most notably Assembly Speaker Mike Heusch (R-Salem), have said that it places an undue burden on Wisconsin. "If, for example, a community outgrows its well capacity, or a business wants to relocate or expand in Wisconsin but needs Great Lakes water, all it would take is for one single state to object and the entire project would be refused," Heusch said in a statement. Ultimately, though, the Compact passed the Assembly unchanged.



What It Comes Down To

The Great Lakes Compact comes down to two things. First, it's good for Wisconsin overall. If approved by all the states and Congress, the Compact will protect Wisconsin most treasured asset, both by the most basic need for fresh water, as well as the billions of dollars in tourism revenue and tens of thousands of jobs that it generates each year.

Second, the communities that happen to be defined as a "straddling" community, there is hope. Unlike current federal law (the 1955 Great Lakes Compact), which says that any governor can reject the diversion proposal, even for no reason at all, the new Compact provides standards that the council and individual governors must abide by in their decisions. "[The Compact] sets up a reliable system for communities near the basin, cities like Waukesha and New Berlin, to receive Great Lakes water," Governor Doyle said when he signed the Compact.

Gas Prices: Is Drilling A Solution

By Brandon VerVelde

Just about everyone feels the pinch, and no, you aren't dreaming. That is a four, as in four dollars, usually more, per gallon of gas. But with all this talk of record high prices, what are the candidates for president doing about it? Last month, John McCain laid out his plan to help alleviate the United States' dependence on foreign oil and the record-high gas prices, and the energy crisis in general.

One of the main facets of his plan is simple: the United States has oil, why not use it? With America being jerked around by OPEC at the expense of the small business owner and average American, the time has come for the United States to encourage new drilling instead of outlawing it. "When it comes to energy, what we really need is to produce more, use less, and find new sources of power," McCain said last month while outlining his plan, "The current federal moratorium on drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf stands in the way of energy exploration and production . . . it is time for the federal government to lift these restrictions and to put our own reserves to use."



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Critics of McCain's plan claim two pitfalls with it. One being it's too environmentally unsafe and the second being that drilling for new oil could take decades to actually see results that will affect oil supply. First, drilling for oil has never been more environmentally friendly. Nowadays, oil drilling can have almost no impact on the local environment whatsoever, and protecting the environment is one of McCain's top priorities. "We need to encourage production in ways that are consistent with sensible standards of environmental protection," McCain said.



Second, while it may be true that new drilling could take some time to mature, the very act of the United States bucking OPEC and trying to find our own oil will not only drop prices but also encourage increased production by those very countries. As soon as they realize that we have the ability to revolt against their oil, they will increase production and, in turn, lower prices. Right now the United States has its hands tied, and OPEC is milking us for everything we are worth, which happens to be hundreds of billions of dollars.

John McCain's plan also includes investing in alternative fuels, promoting energy efficiency, reforming our transportation sector, as well as addressing the volatile oil futures market. McCain's plan has what is needed for the United States to free itself from the bondage of energy. His plan is simple and straightforward, yet still has the substance and ideas to actually succeed. Maybe we will remember the four-dollar gallon of gas as nothing more than a bad dream, after all.

Is Wisconsin "United for Changing" Families?

Governor Doyle's new Department of Children and Families took effect the first week of July. The new cabinet-level department is meant to promote strong families throughout the state, with a special focus on Milwaukee. The message touted by Governor Doyle when introducing this expansion is very similar to the message of the presumptive Democratic nominee, Senator Barack Obama: strengthen families to strengthen America. Perhaps Wisconsin is a model of the change for which Obama is campaigning?

The Department of Children and Families merges parts of the Department of Workforce Development with the Department of Health and Family Services. No new funds were allocated, and no extra jobs were created. The department's creation was merely to better organize programs. Goals for the new department include raising the bar on early education, and creating programs to get fathers involved in their children's lives. According to Secretary Reggie Bicha, the department was necessary because of the change in family structure in the twenty-first century. In an interview with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel he said, "Go down the list of unique traits of families of the 21st century. We need to be evolving our programs to better meet their needs." These same words could be used to describe Obama's stance on the American family.



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According to the candidate's website, Obama would expand early childhood education, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), require employers to provide seven sick days, and strengthen fatherhood. Sound familiar yet? Obama's website states that today four times as many children live without a father than in 1960. He has re-introduced the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act to hold fathers accountable for child support payments and fund programs that support father involvement.



Obama's Father's Day speech could not have been clearer: fathers need to get their act together and get involved. Wisconsin's new Department of Children and Families will make fathers a special focus, including a coordinator whose responsibilities are solely to involve fathers in their children's lives. This program is unique because most previous programs have been aimed at helping single mothers.

These similarities put Wisconsin residents in a unique position. Over the next few months they have a chance to see how these new programs impact their lives and communities. They get a rare preview of what one of the presidential candidates has to offer. Will the new programs unite Wisconsinites for "change they can believe in?"



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At The Races

Abrahamson Out of Gate Early

Shirley Abrahamson is out to an early start on her 2009 re-election campaign as Chief Justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Abrahamson is faced with what is sure to be her toughest election in her tenure since 1979, especially after seeing the millions of dollars spent by candidates and outside groups to elect Justices Annette Ziegler and Michael Gableman the last two years. In a fundraising letter released by some of her endorsements, Abrahamson wants to “be able to mount the type of stellar campaign that we have seen her conduct in the past.” Special interests and partisan politics aren’t “what the citizens of Wisconsin want or deserve,” the letter goes on to say.



Unknown Tries to Unseat Benedict

Chuck Benedict (D-Beloit) is up against a seemingly unknown Republican challenger, Michael Hahn, for his re-election to the Wisconsin Assembly this November. Hahn, a former member of the Army National Guard and veteran of the Iraq War, faces an uphill battle against Rep. Benedict, as the district leans strongly Democratic. “That may be,” said Hahn in a conversation earlier this spring, “but no better to surprise the Democrats with an underdog comeback than in a supposedly ‘safe’ district.” Rep. Benedict won his last re-election by a 58-42% margin.

Sensenbrenner Challenger Touting Change Candidacy

Most people in the 5th Congressional District don’t think that anyone could reasonably challenge the 15-term incumbent known as F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. Jim Burkee, however, does. Burkee, an Associate Professor of History at Concordia University – Wisconsin, started his campaign nearly a year ago, when he and a colleague decided to run a joint campaign, one as a Democrat (who has since dropped out) and the other as a Republican, to unseat Rep. Sensenbrenner. “Washington is fundamentally broken,” Burkee writes in an open letter to the citizens of the 5th, “When I’m in Congress . . . I will work with anyone—Democrat or Republican—who’s willing to help me change Washington for a better America.”

Ryan Challenge Ready to Spend to Unseat Incumbent

The citizens of the 1st Congressional District will be seeing what could be a very credible Democratic challenge to 5-term incumbent Paul Ryan. The challenger is Marge Krupp, of Pleasant Prairie. Krupp, a former chemical process engineer for S.C. Johnson and Son, Inc., and Abbott Laboratories, is now a full-time Democratic candidate for the 1st district. The three major issues that Krupp is running on are 1)Ending the War in Iraq, 2)Working for Real Solutions to the Health Care Crisis in America, and 3)Supporting Working Families, according to her campaign web site. Krupp said she plans on spending up to \$2 million to unseat Rep. Ryan.



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Who Leads Wisconsin?

We now know who the Republican and Democratic presumptive nominees for president are. The question now for voters is who is best to lead this country for the next four years.

The 2008 elections is historic. For the first time in years we don't have a sitting Vice President running for the Presidency. The first time since John F. Kennedy we will have a president who is a sitting Senator. And, we could see the first African American elected president.



With all the history this election will bring it will also bring about the same politics as usual the candidates have fought against. Both candidates are touting their independent streaks and how they are going to change to tone to campaigns by focusing on the issues.

This is all great talk, but thus far the talk has not been backed up by either candidates. The public has long complained about the effect money has in politics. It was refreshing to see both candidate originally agree to accept public financing. This was short lived as both candidates have now backed away from that promise. This should be troubling for all of us. If you are touting your change credentials, shouldn't you live up to the promises you made to voters early on? Or, should you get a pass because you couldn't raise money early on or weren't expected to be the nominee and you made statements to help you gain votes?

Both candidates made a conscious decision to support public financing only to back away from it once they became their parties nominee. Why do this? The answers simple. This race could be our first billion dollar presidential race and each candidate knows that it will need more money than the public finance system can provide them.

I don't have an issue with either candidate not wanting to accept public financing. The race to become president is expensive, but what I am disappointed in is the failure of each candidate to live up to the promises made to voters. Both have said they support change, but yet both are raising hundreds of millions of dollars to tear the other one down. Politics of personal destruction and both candidates know that so when you hear "I'm the change candidate" or "I'm going to change the tone in Washington" don't believe it. Both candidates know this is what people what they want, but they don't vote that way.

According to the most recent polls Wisconsin is going to be a battle ground state with Senator Obama currently leading Senator McCain by 5-7%, which means its almost a tie with the margin of error.

Wisconsin could be the state that tips the election for both candidates this year. This is great to see and I hope Wisconsin voters see this and demand more from the nominees. We want to hear real solutions to the issues we are facing. Don't make promises you can't keep. Wisconsin voters may not agree with you on all the issues, but if you provide us real solutions we will give you a chance. Were tired of rhetoric. We've been through a lot with the recent floods. Tell us how (in detail) how you will make things better over the next four years. Our votes depend on it.