



The Miller/Wenhold Wisconsin Report

Vol. 1 Issue 1

June 2008

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Stop Criticizing Lobbyists for Being Involved

By Paul A. Miller
Special to Roll Call
May 21, 2008, 6:37 p.m.

We're damned if we do, and we're damned if we don't.

Regardless of what your personal feelings are about lobbyists, the issue of lobbyists working on candidates' campaigns is and should be a nonissue.

As a lobbyist myself, let me say I am proud of the profession and the value we provide the legislative and political processes.

I guess the adage is if you can't win an election talking about issues, why not win it by bashing lobbyists. This week you can't open a newspaper or turn on a news program without reading or hearing about how Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) has had five top staffers resign from his campaign because of their lobbying ties.

The question I have for people is why take him to task for this? Sen. McCain made a personal decision last month requiring all staff to be "nonregistered lobbyists."

Both parties bash our profession; why bash Sen. McCain for making a decision that tracks both parties' support for lobbying reform over the past two years?

The answer is simple: because it seems scandalous and gets votes.

What we should be asking is why aren't the press and public demanding the other candidates do so as well?

If you believe neither of the other candidates has lobbyists being paid or volunteering on their campaigns, you are living in a bubble.



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If moms, dads, teachers, doctors, lawyers or anti-war activists can work for candidates, why not lobbyists?

Are we really supposed to believe that those who work on campaigns do it just to participate in the process without the hope that their candidate will support issues important to their cause?

If you believe those who work on campaigns do it because they support the candidates' positions and hope they will implement them once elected, then you just described lobbyists and what we do.

Is there really a difference between Cindy Sheehan and her anti-war activists and registered lobbyists? No, both groups are working to get Congress and/or the administration to support their issues.

The only difference between the two is that registered lobbyists have their clients and issues listed with the federal government, whereas Sheehan and others are able to lobby without having to register.

Sen. McCain has done nothing wrong by allowing lobbyists to work on his campaign, the same way Sens. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) have done nothing wrong by having lobbyists work on theirs.

The difference is that Sen. McCain has asked that they not be active lobbyists while working on his campaign. He hasn't hidden the fact that top advisers to his campaign were lobbyists — like the others are doing. The difference is that the other candidates still have lobbyists working for them at the very least as unpaid staff.

And just because they are unpaid should not make a difference. The fact is, they are lobbyists and actively lobbying while working for a campaign.

I don't have a problem with lobbyists working on any of these campaigns. I agree with Sen. McCain that any staff should probably be on leave from their firms during the campaign to avoid any potential conflicts, but they shouldn't be penalized or chastised in the press for being lobbyists.

Would you do the same for clergy who support any of the candidates and help them get elected? I doubt it.

We hear so much about change, but this election isn't bringing change. We are seeing the same old fear tactics being used to woo voters.

This article isn't in support of Sen. McCain, it's about the continued bashing of lobbyists by all candidates. I have to ask my colleagues: When will we all stand together and say enough is enough?





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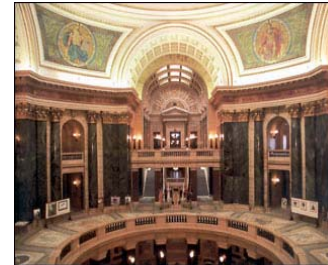
I would ask my colleagues to halt giving or raising money for the candidates this cycle. If we really are as evil as we are portrayed to be, then I think both sides would welcome our willingness to stop contributing to either party for the general election.

Instead of making issues of nonissues that aren't at the top of the public's agenda, let's get back to talking about real issues like providing health care to all Americans, providing jobs to all Americans, providing tax relief to all Americans, providing quality education to all Americans, and implementing an energy policy that will not cost all of us at the pump. These are the issues that the American people want to hear about, not whether lobbyists are working on campaigns.

It's pure politics and gutter politics at that, to bash a profession that protects the First Amendment rights of so many in this country who would not have a voice if it were not for honorable men and women who defend these constitutionally guaranteed rights.

It's appalling for me to hear a well-respected talk-show host refer to lobbyists on his show recently as pigs. Those in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. I seem to recall the press having its own ethical issues a few years back, yet you don't hear us calling them pigs.

Don't we all deserve more from this supposed change?



Governor's Budget Compromise

By: Brandon P. VerValde

Earlier last month, Wisconsin was facing a looming deficit of \$652 million on a budget approved a few months earlier. The job of trying to fix the massive deficit was left up to Assembly Speaker Mike Heusch (R-Salem) and Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker (D-Weston), who met repeatedly with Governor Doyle, and other legislators, to come up with a compromise in the form of the Budget Repair Bill.

This compromise, which was eventually pushed through both houses via conference committee (once a bill has been passed by a conference committee it is un-amendable), was riddled with problems, according to its many opponents. The main reason for dissent was that it only cut \$69 million out of the \$652 million deficit. The bill did, however squeak by the Assembly on a vote of 51-46, with 19 Republicans and 27 Democrats voting against it, and the Senate, 17-16, with Democrat Tim Carpenter (Milwaukee) joining the Republican minority.



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After the bill passed, though, Governor Doyle used his powerful veto pen to strike another \$200 million in spending. Even with Doyle using some controversial moves, including moving money out of the transportation fund, most conservatives and liberals alike supported his vetoes. Many critics are saying, though, that the legislature will need to address the budget again before the biennium is up, saying that the Budget Repair Bill did not do enough.



“Grade A” Education Lacking in State

By: Brandon P. VerVelde

Wisconsin and our Nation as a whole are lagging behind in education. The reason that the students in Wisconsin are no longer getting the “Grade A” education that they deserve is twofold. There are two factors that are hurting the children, the first being the actions of Wisconsin’s teacher’s union and the second being the shortfalls of standardized testing.

It is unfortunate that Wisconsin’s teacher’s union, WEAC (Wisconsin Education Association Council), has taken one of its taglines of “Every child deserves a good school” and perverted it to mean “Every teacher deserves a high-paying job, despite any and all shortcomings.” Earlier this year, WEAC came running to defend a teacher that was caught with over 1,500 pornographic images on his school computer. While WEAC is saying they’re simply asking for due process in the firing of the teacher, they are spending thousands and thousands of taxpayer’s dollars on litigation through appeals and obscure legal maneuvers, some of which have never been seen before in our state. It’s time for the premier organization for Wisconsin’s teachers to get its priorities straight: the students and their education.

The second reason why Wisconsin’s education system is failing its children is the phenomenon of “teaching to the test.” Teaching to the test is a not-so-new philosophy of teachers only covering the material that the students need to know in order to pass the standardized test that the school has to submit to the Federal and State government. While that sounds harmless, the shortfall comes with subject knowledge and critical thinking skills.



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Now more than ever critical thinking and overall knowledge is becoming a pre-requisite to being hired in an ever-widening array of fields, yet schools and teachers, desperate for that good test grade and the federal dollars that follow them, are bypassing that portion of education for the short-term gain of a higher test score. I

will clarify, though, that I am not blaming the teacher for this phenomenon. The blame is to be cast almost entirely on the government's infatuation with standardized testing.



Wisconsin and the country as a whole can not keep this trend of failing our children going. We are at a precipice, and the current unionization of teachers and the infatuation with standardized testing are pushing us over the edge. It is time to start pushing back.

Breaking The Cycle of Violence

By: Jamel Garrett

A lot of people don't understand that to break violence, you must break the mentality. There is no proper diagnosis as to stop violence, because everybody's circumstances aren't entirely the same. There are several factors that come into play when dealing with violence; you must consider social and economic statuses and the environment that is created in the home.

There are several peace organizations in my city Racine, Wisconsin but a lot of them are out of touch with the people who are actually committing violent acts. This is why we have so many peace organizations being established because everybody thinks that they're actually going to do something different than the next peace organization. We've had marches, protests, and candlelight vigils but nothing behind the scenes.

We don't look in depth enough into the inner city life and ghettos that perpetuate violence, and until we do that COLLECTIVELY there won't be any change, other than the number of peace organizations abroad.



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Flag Burning: A Symbol For All of Us to Think About

By: Jamel Garrett

Is there any justification for the burning of the American flag? Some say the flag that symbolizes patriotism, peace, and honor can't be desecrated in that fashion, or can it be?



The American flag embodies all that America consists of. It is a representation of the people of color captured and shoved into the bondages of slavery.

It is a representation of the millions of dollars that aren't invested in new methods to better equip the poor to rise up in the economy.

It is a representation of the prejudices that are at the sole roots of this country.

America also is a representation of patriotism, relief, and victory.

We have triumphed despite our shortcomings, and stood with firm convictions despite them being unpopular at times.

Yes, this is the flag that I know.

The flag standing over brave men and women that fought courageously to make democracy a reality and the flag that stood over plantations deeply rooted in the south as the sting of the lash whipped through the flesh of slaves.

So is it wrong to burn the American flag? Seriously contemplate the question carefully before you make your decision.



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Wisconsin Leads the Way With BadgerCare

By: Brandon P. VerVelde

Wisconsin's health care costs are only going up, but surprisingly, the number of people without health insurance is going down.



In a report released by the *Wisconsin Taxpayer's Alliance*, a non-partisan group dedicated to "promoting better government and an informed citizenry," health care costs in Wisconsin have been on the rise. In 1985, Wisconsin's health care costs were 6% below the national average, but in 2004 spiked to 6.2% above average. But, despite the rising costs, and defying national trends, Wisconsin's uninsured rates have been dropping, dramatically.

The U.S. average for uninsured went up from 14% in 1999 to 15.4% in 2006, but Wisconsin's considerably lower rate went from 9.5% in 1999 all the way down to 8.8% in 2006. The report brings three reasons why Wisconsin's uninsured rates continue to decrease, despite national trends. The first is that over 67% of Wisconsin employers offer health insurance to their employees, and second, Medicaid enrollments increased by over 87%.

But probably the most important factor in keeping Wisconsin's uninsured rates to a minimum is Wisconsin's efforts to insure low-income children and their parents through BadgerCare. BadgerCare saw an incredible 254% increase between 1999 and 2006.

While last summer the Wisconsin legislature may have shot down, and hard I might add, any efforts for universal health coverage through the state, Wisconsin remains as an example of stellar health coverage for low-income families through the BadgerCare program. If only other states would follow in Wisconsin's footsteps.



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Is Wisconsin Doing Enough to Bring Business Into the State

By: Brandon P. VerVelde

Wisconsin's tax environment is in dire shape, and back in August of 2007, Governor Doyle gave a stellar example of why. On August 23, Doyle announced a \$2 million grant for the Gehl company out of West Bend. The money was "to help Gehl Company expand their research and development and headquarters facilities in West Bend" and to "retain 191 jobs and create 87 new [ones]." Let us just examine that for a moment.



Gehl said that they wanted to move out of the state, and make their \$20 million expansion somewhere else, but because of all the money that the city of West Bend, Washington County, and the state of Wisconsin gave them, they decided to stay. All totaled, the money came to over \$7 million. Simple math shows that taxpayers are footing a bill of over \$25,000 per job, and over \$80,000 per *new* job.

But my question is, why are the taxpayers paying businesses millions of dollars to stay in Wisconsin? The answer: we are taxing business out of business, and it takes the millions of dollars in incentives for them to stay.

Instead, Wisconsin should have a tax climate that encourages businesses like Gehl, and many others like it, to stay and expand in Wisconsin without massive government handouts. Wisconsin's taxpayers can not afford to keep forking over millions of dollars whenever a business hints at leaving, and companies aren't going to stop their leaving until the tax environment changes.



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At The Races

Davis Opts Not to Run

Representative David Travis (D-Waunakee) has said that he will not be running for re-election to the 81st Assembly District, and there are already six Democrats running to succeed him. The 81st is typically a strongly Democratic district, and no Republicans have filed or announced candidacy. The six Democrats are Peng Her, Eric Englund, Tim Kiefer, Justin Sargent, Kelda Helen Roys, and Michael Roys.



Jo Egelhoff of Appleton is running to succeed Rep. Steve Wieckert (R) of the 57th Assembly District. Egelhoff said that he is running to represent “the people and the pocketbooks of the 57th Assembly District” and one of his priorities will be to “stop the insane raiding of our pocketbooks.” Assembly Republicans currently hold the majority by three seats.

Gard v. Kagan: Round 2

John Gard has officially announced his intent to run against Rep. Steve Kagan (D-Green Bay) for the 8th Congressional District. Touting his theme, “I would have voted differently,” Gard attacked Kagen’s votes on abortion, illegal immigration, and the federal budget and taxes. “On issue after important issue, I would have voted differently than Steve Kagen,” Gard said at a news conference on April 27. Gard ran and lost to Kagen in 2006.

Sen. Dan Kapanke (R-La Crosse) has his hands filled this election. Democrat Tara Johnson announced her bid to unseat Kapanke, who has represented the 32nd Senate District since 2004. Johnson, the vice chair of the La Crosse County Board, said she is running a campaign of “working hard, of innovation, collaboration and solving problems” and has promised the 32nd Senate District that she will “hear what matters most to them.”

Ryan Introduces Road Map for the Future

America faces a choice between two fiscal and economic futures. In one, ever-rising levels of government spending overwhelm the Federal budget and the U.S. economy with crushing burdens of debt and higher taxes. It is a future in which America’s best century is the past century.



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The second future is one in which the principles that created America's freedom and prosperity are restored. It is the path set out in my plan, *A Roadmap for America's Future*.



Currently, we are on a path of unsustainable Federal spending. The main problem is the looming crisis of entitlement spending. The well-intentioned social insurance strategies of the past century – particularly Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid – are headed toward financial collapse.

Not only will these programs grow themselves into extinction, they will immensely burden our economy and budget – piling massive amounts of debt on future generations, crippling our ability to compete in the international marketplace, and dramatically reducing Americans' standards of living.

We can and must set a different course. But the time for talk has passed. We need a plan. Based on the input of many, I developed *A Roadmap for America's Future* to:

1. Ensure universal access to health insurance, fulfill the missions of Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, and make these programs permanently solvent.
2. Return Federal spending growth to sustainable levels and lift the debt burden looming over future generations.
3. Promote sustained economic and job growth and put the U.S. in a position to lead – not merely survive – in the international marketplace.

It's an ambitious proposal. Not everyone will agree with every aspect of it, and that's fine. But if nothing else, it's my sincere hope that it will spur Congress to move beyond simply rehashing the problem – to debating and implementing actual solutions for the American people.

It is a real plan, with real proposals, real numbers to back them, and real legislation to implement it.