



Abele, Stone advance

By Dominique Paul Noth
Editor, Labor Press

Some thought it would backfire on Jeff Stone that he was the unidentified legislator standing right behind Scott Walker in the nationally aired and mocked video. That was the one in which the new governor alerted the National Guard to get ready as he sought to take bargaining rights away from all the state's public sector workers, allowing them only a limited yearly beg-off for wages.

But it didn't keep Stone from earning a bloc of conservative talk radio voters. These blindly devoted admirers who know a Walker doppelganger when they see one did let Stone advance into the April 5 runoff for county executive. With some 44% of the early tabulation, his reward is facing the best-heeled progressive candidate in memory, albeit a political newcomer, who has studied county government finances for years, Chris Abele.

Like all the primary candidates -- such as Stone, who suggested selling the county's crown jewel attraction, the airport -- Chris Abele made some hasty missteps in the truncated run for the primary. All the candidates in fact inflated where money could be saved in county government in a political mad dash of only a few weeks to make an impact.

Abele's mistakes didn't unhorse him. Not combined with the power of his home mailers and TV ads. They were barely enough to overcome Jim Sullivan, the popular former Wauwatosa state senator, a close



Eyon Biddle

third in the race, which suggests a strong political future.

Indeed, Abele had once backed Sullivan for office (unions actually backed both candidates in this race), and even in a low turnout primary that tilts conservative, Stone could not win half the vote. Abele and Sullivan drew more votes than Stone. That suggests there could be quite a race to April 5.

Both advancers easily beat county board chairman Lee Holloway (about 8% of the vote, a weak showing that Holloway will say didn't surprise him but sure must have disappointed him). He knew he was in trouble largely because of his unresponsive demeanor and the nonstop media attacks for his housing code violations as a landlord. Easily swamped was the fifth candidate, community activist Ieshuh Griffin, who got only about 1% of the vote and also fared a distant third in her simultaneous race for District 10 county supervisor.

There, the runaway winner was MALC endorsed Eyon Biddle, who will face Tearman Spencer. Three other candidates failed to advance, but while

Biddle with 43% of the vote nearly doubled the take of Spencer, his nearest opponent, District 10 suffered again from distressingly light voter turnout.

A statewide race for Wisconsin Supreme Court drew some surprises, not in the winners, but with 400,000 votes it was not the anticipated galloping

Election continued Page 5



Chris Abele



Jeff Stone

House GOP blocks TAA aid to US workers

For years under many administrations, there has been broad consensus that -- at a bare minimum -- people who lose their jobs because of unfair trade deals like NAFTA deserve help and training for finding new jobs. After all, it's the least the United States can do for someone who works a lifetime in an industry, only to see his or her job shipped off to China, right?

But the basic bipartisan consensus to help people whose lives have been turned upside down by outsourcing ended February 9, when the House Republican leadership abruptly refused to schedule a vote to extend help for victims of outsourcing.

The expiring program called Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) provides financial help and training for workers who lose their jobs or see their hours or wages reduced due to outsourcing, offshoring or increased imports. It has been the foundation of many valuable programs, including those run by Milwaukee's HIRE Center and part of the

Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board and has helped thousands of workers retrain and continue good employment in the US.

When John Boehner and the House Republicans pulled TAA extension off the floor, they said they didn't want to pick "winners and losers." But the truth is, they've already picked the winners: CEOs, multinational corporations and Big Banks. And they've picked the losers, too: America's workers. America's victims of outsourcing depend on TAA to have any hope of working again-and now their hope is being taken away.

In response, the AFL-CIO has launched an electronic petition drive reminding House Speaker Boehner that "it's inexcusable that our leaders keep promoting policies to encourage outsourcing. Doing nothing for the victims of these policies is totally unacceptable." You can sign up at act.aflcio.org/c/18/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=1384

WEAC steps in doo-doo with MPS advice

By Dominique Paul Noth
Editor, Labor Press

If you sat down for a chat with President Obama you would probably find him unchanged in his belief, expressed in a 2007 article, that climate change is the "epochal man-made threat to the planet." But you would search his 2010 State of the Union in vain for the term "climate change" or "global warming," or even that dreaded phrase first proposed by Republicans (in the days when Reagan and the first Bush reflected that long-lost GOP flexibility) -- the concept of "cap and trade."

The State of the Union is largely a political address that outlines what can be accomplished, not what should be, and the unyielding attitude in the Senate, and now in the House, forces the president to seek

Comment

other roads than direct attack on global warming in the face of climate change deniers and doubters infecting the Congress.

If this tactical shift was statesmanlike, can the same be said of a speech February 8 by the state teachers' union? It embraced the idea of merit pay for teachers and evaluation procedures that downplayed seniority and included student test scores. These are, to say the least, positions not associated with the Wisconsin Education Association Council.

Are these traditional champions of better wages, benefits and respect for longtime workers abandoning principle in the face of political reality, as some suggest? Or is WEAC, Obama-like as the union claims, simply exploring conciliation in the face of the intractable anti-union majority in state government?

Obama they ain't. Not when you add in the other big suggestion from WEAC -- immediately rebuffed by such diverse stakeholders as MPS leaders, the



WEAC's Mary Bell introduced the MPS proposal and drew instant criticism from other unions and an angry letter from MPS board chairman Michael Bonds accusing WEAC of playing politics.

local union (MTEA, a WEAC affiliate) and even Mayor Tom Barrett - to break the Milwaukee Public Schools up into smaller districts each with its own board structure.

That helps you understand the reaction of progressives and trade unionists who fear that WEAC, rather than standing by core concepts, was unseemly bending over to slobber the ring of the new Republican majority, a position that leaves them intellectually as well as physically vulnerable.

(The WEAC president who



announced the proposals, Mary Bell, just shares an alphabet relationship to Marty Beil, defiant head of the state AFSCME workers, who wants change to occur across the bargaining table, as is the workers' rights under the law.)

But WEAC deserves more than the knee-jerk reception it's received, particularly since the details are not the "about-face" painted in the media. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, in particular, treated the proposal

WEAC continued Page 7

Trapshooters sought for summer league

The summer Trapshooting League of the Milwaukee Area Labor Council has set its organizational and information meeting for 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 13, at Lakeview Trap and Sports Club, S80 W14401 Schultz Lane, Muskego, WI, 53150, north end of Big Muskego Lake.

This is a Handicap League and requires 6 shooters for a team representing a union or local. Any team can win. The 20 week league at the gun club ends with a free banquet for participants.

For information contact the league's Roger Schmidt at (262) 782-0605. For further directions call Lakeview Trap and Sport Club at (414) 422-9025.

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In Memorium

Less than a year ago, 26 veterans of Wisconsin's first teacher strike were honored by the union they led, American Federation of Teachers Local 212 representing educators at the Milwaukee Area Technical College.

That 40-day walkout in 1969 established the basis for many worker rights in Wisconsin now under threat from the current governor. Among the veterans singled out at the lavish reception attended by 300 persons at the Potawatomi Casino was **Carston Conrad Koeller**, whose career as a teacher and as a mentor to union activists was much discussed in table conversations.

Koeller, 81, succumbed to long illness this year - January 16. Among the mourning family and friends were his bride of 58 years, Merna, and children Randy, Kathy, Gwen, Becky and Rachel.

Carston, grew up on a dairy farm west of Embarrass, Wisconsin, graduated from Clintonville High in 1948 and taught weather science while serving in the Air Force during the Korean War. That led to math and physics studies on the GI bill and a master's degree -- all of which launched him on a professional teaching career that



Carston Conrad Koeller

spanned 32 years. After reinforcing workers rights as a plaintiff in a landmark case against the Muskego-Norway schools, he taught for 27 years at MATC. There he served as president of Local 212 and the Wisconsin Federation of Teachers while also proving a mentor to many current and recent leaders of the union's active concern for civil rights.

His colleagues remember best that leadership and quiet support, but it should be noted that he also spent years working for senior citizens, the Habitat for Humanity, and was a founding member of Peace Lutheran Church in New Berlin.

Union's job training for vets touted in Walker press release

In a national enterprise that its leaders call "more advanced than Helmets to Hardhats," which it also participates in, the national plumbers union has created a training program it totally pays for to turn returning military veterans into skilled plumbers, and also find them a good-paying job close to home.

Wisconsin, by beating out projects underway in Minnesota and Illinois, in January became the first Midwest state in Veterans in Piping, but actually the third such in the nation. Programs in Lacey, Wash., and at Camp Pendleton, Calif., have graduated more than 200 veterans from all branches of service.

Veterans in Piping began in Wisconsin at Camp Douglass with 16 veterans. It offers 20 weeks of training necessary to become an apprentice. It includes 18 weeks of skills training and two weeks of transition to help veterans successfully return to civilian life.

Job placement is guaranteed upon successful completion. The training is paid for by the United Association, a partnership with the Army National Guard and the Department of Workforce Development.

The unemployment rate for young veterans is increasing, but "we are a mighty innovation to change that," said Rick Terven Sr. of UA who credits the commitment of William Hite, general president of the United Association of Plumbers, Pipe Fitters, Welders and HVACR Technicians, known conveniently as UA.

"Our vision of making the Veterans in Piping program nationwide is happening," said Hite, in citing this "much-anticipated expansion to Wisconsin." The union worked with former Gov. Jim Doyle's DWD to smooth the ways.

"This is a completely nonpolitical program," noted Terven, "We were caught in the switches with the change of administration."

The first press release under Scott Walker's secretary of DWD, Manny Perez, announced this program as if it were an initiative of the new administration. You would have had to do quite a bit of research to find its heritage. But such was the pressure to prove Walker's programs were creating jobs that Perez seemed to take credit for a union job program for veterans approved under Doyle and fully paid for by the union.

-- Dominique Paul Noth

Bowling

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CRAZY 8'S	88	59
GUTTER RATS	78	69
SLAMMERS	73	74
PIN PALS	73	74
ONE BOARD OVER	65	82
8 BALLS	64	83
<u>IND. HIGH SERIES OVER 500</u>		
GREG MARTIN	602	
WALLY GEISE	594	
BOB WAGNER	569	
DEL GROSS	565	
DAN LAACK	561	
DON WIEDMANN	552	
ROGER BARANOWSKI	531	
GENE HERRICK	503	
<u>IND. HIGH GAME OVER 190</u>		

WALLY GEISE	240
BOB WAGNER	227
GREG MARTIN	224
DAN LAACK	213
DON WIEDMANN	203
DEL GROSS	193
ROGER BARANOWSKI	191
<u>IND. HIGH SERIES OVER 400</u>	
EILEEN WESTERFIELD	591
PHYLISS NAVARRETE	467
RAE MATOWSKI	447
JOYCE KNIPPEL	433
MARLENE CORTEZ	416
<u>IND. HIGH GAME OVER 150</u>	
EILEEN WESTERFIELD	235
JOYCE KNIPPEL	169
PHYLISS NAVARRETE	168
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28 days? Reflect deeper

By Lynnda Guyton

Editorial Assistant, Labor Press

It started as Black History Week in 1926. An organization known as the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History initiated the observance. This organization was founded in 1915 by the black historian Carter G. Woodson. There were three major goals for the future when this organization was started and the same goals remain today: to promote appreciation of the life and history of the black American, to encourage an understanding of the present status, and to enrich the promise of the future.

We may study the history of individual groups, but what we have to remember is that every group and every history is part of the whole. Now, February as national Black History Month is enlightening and informative and brings about a better understanding, which creates harmony for all.

So this is the month set aside to honor those who lived beyond the terror of the middle passage, who endured the inhumanity of slavery, who persevered into freedom. We honor them for their triumphs and the tragedies they suffered as they carried their dreams in their hands.

We honor them for having a dream of a better life in their hearts as they looked to the future for generations to come. As I look at the history and accomplishments that African Americans are making today I can say, "We are somebody."

Black History Month is a time to pause and

remember, a time to find renewed strength from the efforts put forth from those in the past but also to look forward to the future and support and encourage the new leaders coming on board.

The crucial years, during the "Black Revolution" and the "Civil Rights Movement" raised the awareness of black people in the area of housing, education, politics and economic development. In the area of jobs, organized labor has been a driving force and is a key player in the effort to assure the overall success of all working people.

Values have changed, creating a desire for increased knowledge in the black academia, arts and the total black experience. We as a people have to continue to let our youth know the value of a good education, financial management and cultural awareness. We must instill in them the important part we played in history as we remember the accomplishments of Frederick Douglass, W.E. B. DuBois, Benjamin Mays, Paul Roberson, Harriet Tubman, Adam Clayton Powell, Mary McLeod Bethune, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ida B. Wells, and Asa Philip Randolph, just to name a few.

Twenty-eight days is not enough to celebrate the many accomplishments of our past and present African American leaders, but this is something that should be done 365 days a year.

As author John W. Vandercook once said, "A race is like a man; until it uses its own talents, takes pride in its own history, and loves its own memories it can never fulfill itself completely."

Moore attacks Walker's bill

On Feb. 14, US Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-Milwaukee), a former member of the state legislature, spoke out forcefully on efforts by Scott Walker that would nearly eliminate Wisconsin public employees' collective bargaining rights:

"Milwaukee and Wisconsin became what they are today because of our strong and skilled workforce. We know better than most that when our workers thrive, our economy thrives. The facts tell the story clearly - a strong community fighting for workers' rights goes hand in hand with strong middle class wages.

"The governor is cavalierly trying to eliminate rights that Wisconsin workers have historically fought and died for. Public workers are not the enemy. They are skilled and trained workers. They are taxpayers, volunteers, neighbors and friends. They should be invited to the table and treated with respect -- just like they have been historically by Republican and Democratic gov-



Gwen Moore

ernors alike. Just like we do in Washington, leaders in Wisconsin

need to make some tough budget decisions.

"But eliminating the rights of our public workers is an attack on Wisconsin's middle class. It's an attack on our state's rich history. And it's a crushing blow to our working families who are struggling to climb out of this recession. Wisconsin cannot recover and grow again without a strong middle class."

RELATED COLUMN PAGE 4

Official notice

United Steelworker Local 2-232, will have a membership meeting on March 20th, 2011. The meeting will be held at Yatchak Hall, 633 S. Hawley Road at 9:30 a.m. (corner of Hawley and W. Main St.)

Note that 633 S. Hawley Rd. is the new location for all the local's membership meetings. At this one, nominations and election will take place for the position of guide. Any vacancies created by this election will be filled at this meeting.



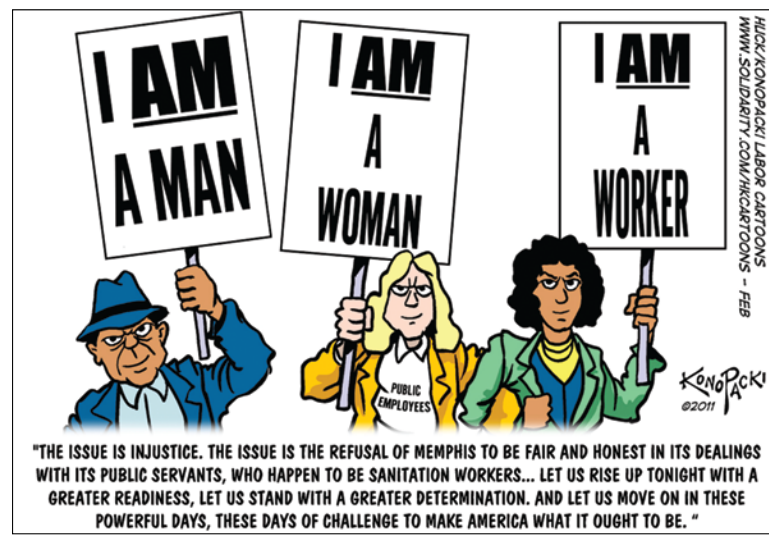
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Leaders expose fallacy of attack on unions

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel editorial board invited a number of acknowledged expert commentators on government service to examine what could be done better and by implication what is wrong with a lot of the current thinking about government.

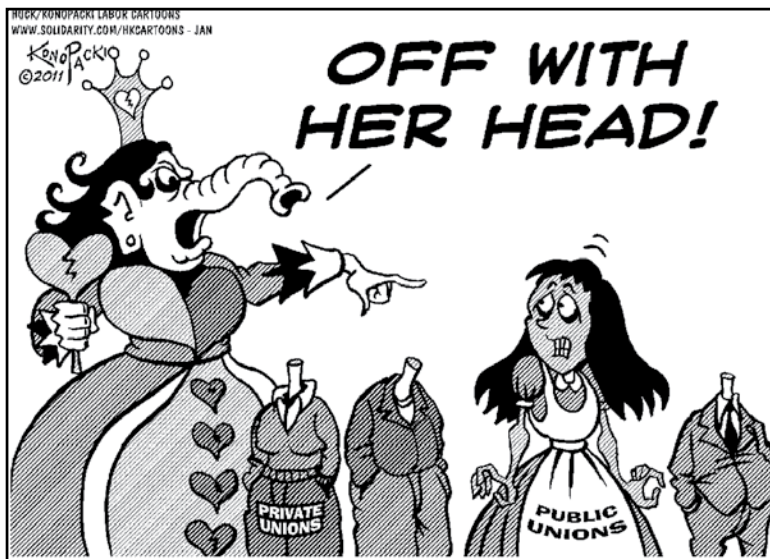
Among the responders: Rich Abelson, executive director of AFSCME District Council 48, which represents county and city employees in the Milwaukee area, and Phil Neuenfeldt, president of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, which represents more than 250,000 workers in both the public and private sector.

They responded together on February 5 - well before Gov. Scott Walker launched a legislative attack on union workers by seeking to change state labor laws to limit bargaining to wages and not compensation and seeking to impose other changes to force unions not to spend political money opposing him:

Let's start out by acknowledging a basic truth: Cheaper is not always better or more efficient.

This is especially true when it comes to government.

If our roads and bridges aren't well-maintained, if a social worker isn't available for an at-risk teen, if there are delays in



processing disability claims due to understaffing, if a parole officer has more cases than he can thoroughly follow up on, these kinds of shortfalls all have very real social and safety costs that don't show up as line items on any budget.

It is politically fashionable at the moment to attack public workers and their unions. At the county, city, state and national level, it is easier to look for scapegoats than to offer real solutions that will create good jobs, increase the tax base and get our economy going again.

Rhetoric that demonizes public workers, seeking deep cuts without recognizing the reality of deep consequences,

does little to balance the books and even less to make sure that vital services are delivered consistently and well.

Hopefully, we all can agree that we want our front-line public employees such as firefighters, teachers and nurses focused on the job at hand rather than worrying about how to support their families or wondering if the pensions that they were promised are going to actually be there by the time they retire. By giving workers a voice on the job, public-sector unions help ensure that all citizens receive good value for their tax money.

We all must be vigilant, lest our public services cross the line



Rich Abelson

from lean and mean to frail and ineffective. Wisconsin already ranks 44th in terms of total number of state employees per capita based on U.S. census data. And according to an April 2010 study by University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee researchers Keith A. Bender and John S. Heywood, public-sector employees' total compensation is 6% below their peers in the private sector; this study considered both pay and benefits.

Union negotiations are the most democratic way to make sure that government workers have the tools and incentives that they need to do their jobs properly.

And let's not forget that what's best for workers is not always at odds with the bottom line. Through their unions, public workers frequently negotiate to lower costs. For example, in Milwaukee County, AFSCME Council 48 was the catalyst in making wellness and disease management part of the health care package offered to employees that has saved significant money on health care costs.

These types of preventative measures save lives and dollars. In the City of West Allis, the union was the impetus behind an innovative economic package



Phil Neuenfeldt

that was directly linked to the city's revenues. This innovation saved money and protected public services.

No one, with the possible exception of a few shortsighted politicians, benefits when the relationship between public workers and taxpayers becomes adversarial. At the end of the day, we all live in the same communities; we all reap the rewards of good government and we all suffer when corners are cut. The road to economic growth and future prosperity is not paved with inferior public services.

Public employee unions play a critical role in negotiating real government efficiency, which must take into account the quality of the services delivered. The labor movement at large is calling on our elected leaders to stop dismantling public employment and start thinking of ways to rebuild the private sector with jobs that include family-sustaining wages, health care and retirement security.

Walker's threat to use the National Guard in his fight against public workers caused the immediate launch of a "Not My Wisconsin" website www.notmywisconsin.com

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AFL-CIO Milwaukee Labor Press
Editorial and Business Office
633 S. Hawley Road, Milwaukee, WI 53214
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E-mail: dom@milwaukeeelabor.org

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State public workers earn less than private ones, study shows

The Economic Policy Institute, a non-partisan think tank, has released the results of a vigorous study that compares the compensation of Wisconsin public employees to the compensation of Wisconsin private sector employees and finds that -- despite pervasive myths to the contrary -- Wisconsin's public employees are in fact undercompensated in both wages and benefits.

Known for a liberal membership, the EPI rigorously compensated for that reputation in its methodology. This was a simple "apples to apples" study that controlled for education, years of experience, gender, race, citizenship and organizational size. The results are being shared with the GOP dominated Madison legislature by the state AFL-CIO.

"Public employees - such as teachers and nurses - provide quality services that protect and enrich Wisconsin's families, for less than their private sector counterparts," said Phil Neuenfeldt, president of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO. "Unfortunately, politicians' attacks on public service workers not only hurt the middle class -- they hurt the children and families that depend on these vital public services."

According to the report done by University of Rutgers Professor Jeffrey H. Keefe, the annual wages of public sector employees are 14.2% lower than wages for comparable workers in the private sector. Even when benefits, such as health care and pension plans are also considered, total public employee annual compensation is still 8.2% lower than their private sector counterparts.

Election

From Page 1

runaway for the incumbent David Prosser. He advanced with a strong but not dominant 55% despite name recognition and ads backing him from the Club for Growth.

That put the top vote-getter of his three opponents, JoAnne Kloppenburg within striking distance for those who know the history. She is a highly regarded prosecutor, an assistant attorney general.

While Prosser is the lower-rung conservative on the Supreme Court, insiders have long speculated that for partisan GOP feelings he opposed judicial censure for fellow conservative Michael Gableman -- a big factor in the current gridlock among the supremes on the court, which only a new presence will likely break.

New public financing rules for this election to this point have kept obscure big third party money away and give April 5 voters a chance to focus on issues and judicial conduct.

In some ways, the county executive primary was a warm-up -- because of the reality that we do it all again in April of 2012, since the new exec will be filling out the term of Scott Walker.

But one year from April 5 on could either set a new direction the voters like or continue



JoAnne Kloppenburg

an old direction that has created devastating problems for county government. And the old looks less pleasant every day given Walker's tactics as a governor.

It also means the county executive contestants need to make a strong impression to establish an agenda and beat off any fresh challengers in 2012.

In the other Milwaukee County supervisor race, District 14 to replace (now state senator) Chris Larson, Steven Krueger drew more than 48% of the early count to face Jason Haas (35%), beating out the third candidate, Gregory Dickenson.

In the only Milwaukee Public Schools board race on the primary ballot, South Side District 8, Meagan Holman drew 51% of the votes. She will likely face Ed Heinzelman, though a third candidate, Candy Jo Lesniewski, was nipping at his heels in election night counting.

The tightest race in the primary was for Milwaukee County Circuit Court Branch 18, headed by the two-some with experience on the bench and political recognition.

In first place, but in a squeaker vote that will worry him, was incumbent Pedro Colon, a recent member of the Assembly. Close behind was Chris Lipscomb Sr., whose brother is a county supervisor and whose family is known name in politics. A close third place was Roy Korte.



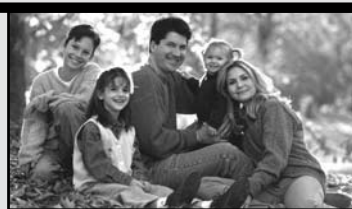
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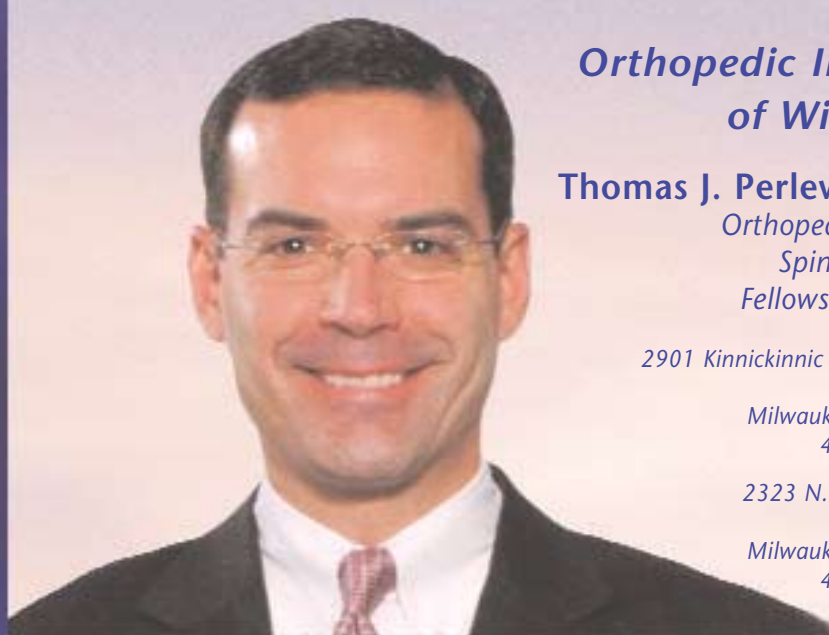
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TSA action opens airports to worker voice

After years of GOP rhetoric against the basic principles and years of activism by unions and public officials in favor of restoring some basic rights for federal airport workers, the Transportation Security Administration under President Obama in February gave an important if not complete victory for the two largest federal employee unions that have long pushed for the ability to negotiate on workers' behalf.

In limited fashion it effectively reversed a policy established under President Bush when TSA was created.

"The safety of the traveling public is our top priority, and we will not negotiate on security," said TSA Administrator John Pistole, who announced the decision in Washington, D.C., after a review that spanned several months. "But morale and employee engagement cannot be separated from achieving superior security."

Pistole's decision excludes bargaining on any issue that the TSA considers security-related, including the deployment of

security personnel and equipment. Also excluded from bargaining are issues including compensation, testing, job qualifications and discipline standards.

But now, "many issues will be up for negotiations, including seniority, shift biddings, transfers and awards," AFGE President John Gage said. "I can guarantee that after AFGE negotiates a contract, TSA will not rank anywhere near the bottom of the Best Places to Work survey, as it currently does at 220 out of 224 federal agencies."

Actually, AFGE (the American Federation of Government Employees) and the National Treasury Employees Union are competing in an election campaign to win the support of about 45,000 officers who screen airline passengers and baggage. Yet though they lacked bargaining rights, 13,000 TSA members had already signed up as union members, most with AFGE, to signal their desire to have a union.

The election is being closely watched by the entire organized-labor movement

because the TSA officers are currently the largest group of workers now engaged in a union-organizing effort in the country. Republicans have argued that airport screeners should not be allowed to unionize and bargain collectively. It has become partisan debate on Capitol Hill, at times threatening to hold up major pieces of legislation. Just this year Sen. Roger Wicker, a Mississippi Republican, introduced legislation that would formally prohibit such action.

Pistole, the former deputy director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation who has served as head of the transportation agency since last June, may



John Pistole

have defused much of the debate. Using powers granted to him by Congress under the original act, he reversed original policy and authorized collective bargaining by airport security personnel on a limited set of topics, which include rules governing who gets priorities for vacation time and shift assignments, how workplace transfers take place and how employees are recognized for commendable work.

Pistole has made sure negotiations will take place on a national level, not with state or local union affiliates.

The nation's security officers are tentatively scheduled to vote in early March for which of the competing unions have the right to represent them, or not to have a union at all. But if

they choose a union, they will not be able to turn to it to bargain for such traditionally negotiated topics as pay, retirement benefits, job qualification rules, disciplinary standards or issues related to security procedures, like what security equipment they must use or when and where they are deployed.

This would allow the agency, a division of the Department of Homeland Security, to rapidly reassign security officers in response to a particular threat or to change security procedures or equipment without having to consult collective bargaining rules, an agency official said.

Union leaders believe that they can introduce proposals that respect such concerns once the rules allow workers and management to actually talk.

Calendar

Visit www.milwaukeeelabor.org for updated events

Wednesday, February 23

Executive Council Meeting
2 p.m., 633 S. Hawley Rd.

Wednesday, March 2

Monthly Delegate Meeting
Elections as needed for officers and executive council
6:30 p.m., Serb Hall, 5101 W. Oklahoma Ave.

Tuesday, April 5

General Election
Polls Open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., Vote Your Choice but Make Sure to Vote!

Wednesday, April 6

Monthly Delegate Meeting
6:30 p.m., Serb Hall, 5101 W. Oklahoma Ave.

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WEAC

From Page 1

as a capitulation, but that newspaper has become notorious for excesses of its own. On education issues, it labels everything it likes as reform even when reactionary, and sometimes seems to embrace the vision that the nice lady who sits next to you at church can teach your first grader better than a devoted experienced professional.

It's a weird pundit longing for the days of the little old country schoolmarm who worked for free among the bullies in the hopes of meeting the handsome cowboy. We all have that myth, but some of us are smart enough not to editorialize about it.

Truth is, as a bit of journalistic research would reveal, nationally both the NEA, which WEAC is a part of, and the AFT, another union of teachers, have been in discussion about merit pay and different evaluation systems -- admittedly slowly and somewhat under the gun. In fact, in Milwaukee the MTEA agreed months ago to such discussions, largely unreported in the media.

So WEAC is actually in line with a national effort even while unions are simultaneously fighting off a lot of media inspired nonsense.

Yes there are veteran teachers who burn out (much like veteran welders, corporate executives and bankers for that matter), but the vast majority stick hard and learn more than the bright college students who do burn out in huge numbers after two years of teaching. Yes there are business people who can help run schools, but trained educational professionals are pretty darn good with budgets and even better don't look for profits on the backs of the students. The media still feasts on

the overstatements, which may also have impelled WEAC to broach the idea of merit pay.

There are, of course, two big problems with the idea. The biggest one in the context of teaching is no evidence, none really, that merit pay improves teachers. The other is: who decides who gets the bigger money? The school board official with the cousin who wants the job?

Despite these gigantic hurdles, the unions have faced the new order and suggested careful discussions should take place. WEAC actually offered a very limited idea, though you sure can blame it for changing ground after years of stubbornness. Now it says teachers who tackle hard-to-staff positions and additional responsibilities should receive extra compensation, as should teachers who earn national board certification (most already will earn more).

This is hardly an across the board embrace. In fact, if a union's chief job is to protect the wages, safety and respect of its workers, even without evidence that merit pay works it's a good idea for the rank and file. (Personally, I would prefer to first see facts that it will work, but then, I'm not a conservative.)

WEAC now says that seniority alone should not be the determinant (I think that is a big change for the union) but what it supports is a careful system of peer review combined with student test scores to determine advancement - clearly a big stick to throw underperformers out of the schools entirely.

Note that no laws need to be changed to do this and that elected officials and appointed local school boards play almost no part, and principals only a side role in the WEAC model. Note, too, that the weakest and most reactionary of the so-called reform ideas was not included -

using student evaluations of teachers as a weight in keeping them employed.

Many educational specialists are not crazy about student test scores being a factor, since that can lead to teaching the test to keep your job. (The balance wheel is peer review.)

But imagine a world where courts would take children away from parents who receive a negative evaluation from their kids. For every abusive parent that would be exposed, there would be a dozen good but tough parents who could lose their kids, especially when their kids realize they have that power. This in a nutshell is why using student evaluations have proven dangerous in judging if a teacher should keep a job. So that idea is being laughed out of most educational treatises and was not included in WEAC's outline. Expect it to resurface in Republican counter-proposals.

WEAC's change on the state level is only remarkable if you consider the rhetoric and postures of the past, and I do think the new political climate is responsible, including US Education Secretary Arne Duncan's push for merit pay, again without evidence that this works, and less reliance on seniority, again without clarity on what else WILL work.

But WEAC looks vulnerable by only opening the door to discussion now, not so much on principle as necessity. It is clearly trying to reestablish itself as an important player in state politics in the face of a new majority likely to ignore its wishes. And this is a no-quarters environment given GOP recent behavior. (A jobs bill session with no single bill adding jobs?) This just isn't the time for WEAC to play the frog to the GOP scorpion given the economic waters we are all paddling through.

Far more divisive was the MPS idea, particularly given that the state union is flying in the face of its local union, 8,000 or so in Milwaukee, and is particularly vulnerable to the charge that it has been absent from Milwaukee concerns. Too typically it spoke without advance consultation, from on high, as it were, from its Madison podium.

Its proposal also seems to be part of a curious attack on a new manager of MPS who has only been in office since July. Barrett once wanted to run the schools himself, but he rightly and quickly pointed out to WEAC that Supt. Gregory Thornton has been promised two years to turn things around.

The community may want to make that three years, given the savageness of the attacks on

Thornton by the media and some elected officials, and now WEAC. Thornton has been hammered on every side as he attacked costs structures, worked with the unions to bring in business money, fought parents on failing schools and challenged the board's speed in supporting his tactics.

As reward, the newspaper and bipartisan officials have inflated the number of empty MPS schools, suggested profit for taxpayers where there would be massive loss of revenue, ignored MPS' record as the city's finest and most cost-effective absentee landlord and dismissed MPS' understandable concern about giving its empty buildings away for a buck to competitors.

How Thornton has maintained humor and tact in the face of all this may well be the local lesson in statesmanship, though I will concede, as Barrett does, that it is too early to know if he can solve the bureaucratic nightmares. Intelligence and a steady hand may work, but the jury is still out.

Except for WEAC, which has piled on to the atmosphere of intemperate impatience. That simply exposes its own slowness to change, and raises questions about not just its core values but also its continued importance in state politics.

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New NLRB unnerves GOP, acts on basic rights

It has alarmed the GOP and won praise from both Democrats and old-school Republicans who think limited understanding of labor laws has unfairly tilted the playing field. The simple truth is the agency that enforces the nation's labor laws has emerged as a key player in the clash between business and organized labor over worker rights.

The National Labor Relations Board has been flexing its muscle as a fuller board under the Obama administration by cracking down on businesses that fire employees during union organizing drives and by reconsidering some business-friendly decisions made during the previous Bush administration.

It recently proposed a new rule that would require every private employer to display posters explaining union rights. And in January it threatened to sue four states over laws that guarantee the right to a secret ballot in union elections, arguing that these laws are misleading and abridge the NLRB's mandated authority.

The moves are a rare bright spot for a labor movement that has lost more than 1.3 million members over the last two years and failed to win federal legislation that would make it easier to



New NLRB board member Mark Pearce paid a visit to Milwaukee in November.

organize new members. It has, as the nation's biggest newspapers report, from Chicago Tribune to the Wall Street Journal, unnerved big business and also provoked GOP lawmakers, who are expected to question the board's activities at congressional hearings over the next months.

Even though they lack votes in the Senate, some Republican lawmakers are trying to black-mail the NLRB into backing down, by suggesting it could see its budgets cut.

Insiders say that, on the contrary, look for the board to go even further in the coming months, seeking to correct the balance it perceives was lost under previous leadership. The

NLRB is looking at speeding up the time frame for union elections to as little as 10 days after organizers at a work site collect enough signatures. That would be a huge boost for unions and a blow to companies like retail giant Wal-Mart and laundry company Cintas Corp., which have successfully fought off unions for years and now count on having at least a month or two to mount union resistance campaigns.

NLRB chairwoman Wilma Liebman told the Associated Press that the Republican critics are launching misguided efforts to portray the board as radical. She sees an agency that is "reinvigorated" and finally back to enforcing labor laws after years of malaise.

"There are those people out there who would prefer that the board be dead or dying," she said. "Now that it's alive and sitting up in the hospital bed, they are upset about that. Some are even angry because they'd just as soon it stay dormant."

The five-member board, which also referees labor-management disputes and oversees union elections, has three Democrats and one Republican - with another GOP seat vacant. The balance shifts depending on

which party controls the White House.

Pressure is also coming from the Chamber of Commerce, which fears the board's decisions will allow unions to gain a foothold in businesses where they have had trouble in the past. "They seem to be shifting to a mindset that says their mission is to expand union membership regardless of what the law might be," said Glenn Spencer, the chamber's executive director.

AFL-CIO general counsel

Lynn Rhinehart wonders if the board is being unfairly targeted for simply doing its job and enforcing the law.

"It's just really not that remarkable what is going on over at the board," Rhinehart said.

"This is an agency that was set up to protect workers' rights to organize and to have a union. To the extent this board's initiatives advance that right, we support them."

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