

Ryan Owens: UW-Madison Thompson Center aims to improve public leadership

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A recent Gallup poll revealed that only 19% of Americans trust government in Washington, D.C. to do what is right. And no wonder. Many of our politicians refuse to work with each other to solve problems that effect real people. That culture must change.

We aim to change it at the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership.

If there is one thing that defines the enduring spirit of Americans—and certainly us Wisconsinites—it is our ability to solve problems by working together. We understand that when we listen to each other and cooperate, we can solve any problem. It's a simple idea that has worked well in the past: Identify a problem. Come together. Combine your knowledge. Solve the problem. Repeat. These are the truths that characterize the Thompson Center.

Our mission at the Thompson Center is to understand public leadership and apply leadership to contemporary problems. We will provide an environment to study, discuss, and improve leadership objectively and professionally. We must produce more effective public leaders today. And to produce them, we will identify and understand effective public leadership, teach leadership skills to future generations of leaders, and reach out to policymakers with the research we perform.

This fall, we will host a bipartisan conference dedicated to identifying leadership skills among public leaders in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the state and federal government. Our goal will be to uncover useful leadership practices and inform our public leaders about them. This spring, we will host a conference on criminal justice reform. Our question: how can we reform the criminal justice system in a way that improves justice for all, saves money, and protects

individual liberties? We will examine prosecutorial discretion, prisoner re-entry, and civil forfeiture reform. Similarly, in the coming years, we will examine health care reform, transportation reform, tax reform, and other areas in need of improvement. At the Thompson Center, we are united in our desire to improve public leadership.

People want to see public leaders from both parties work together in a spirit of trust. We aim to help those leaders in doing so. We are fortified with the knowledge that there are many public-spirited leaders in Wisconsin now from both political parties. We are eager to work with them to accomplish great things and help move Wisconsin forward.

— *Owens is a UW-Madison professor of political science and acting director of the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership.*