

WisDems: “I respected Scott Walker. Then I worked for him.”

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Today, former Walker cabinet appointee Peter Bildsten is once again denouncing his former boss for putting himself before the people of Wisconsin, this time in an [op-ed](#) for *The Atlantic*. Bildsten documents how the Walker administration politicized government agencies with the explicit purpose of boosting the governor’s presidential prospects and serving his big donors. The article details how he and other cabinet members were shut down when they tried to fix problems like road quality, predatory payday lending, or the deterioration of the state’s corrections facilities. He also explains the lengths to which the Walker administration went to avoid transparency. Bildsten is one of four cabinet members who has spoken out against Walker this year.

Read excerpts from the piece below. [The Atlantic: I Respected Scott Walker. Then I Worked For Him.](#)

By Peter Bildsten

I joined Walker’s administration at the very beginning, in 2011, and at first I enjoyed my job and respected the governor. I thought he was more of a technocrat than a partisan, driven to improve governance of the state he loved.

...Even early on, however, I noticed that not everything was as it should be. At more than one Cabinet meeting, the Secretary of the Department of Administration, Mike Huebsch, told us never to send him or the governor any electronic documents of consequence, and to avoid the use of our state-issued cell phones. “If you send me an important report electronically, I won’t open it,” I remember him saying, “and if you call me on your state phone, I won’t answer it.” If we had any important

documents, they were to be “walked over” and hand delivered to the governor’s office. **As a result, open record requests by the media or political opponents would be almost futile. This lack of transparency would be a hallmark of the Walker administration.**

...Later, when Walker titled his 2013 book *Unintimidated* and bragged about how he “stood up to union thugs and protesters,” I thought back to how he regularly ducked in and out of the capitol via a tunnel, always escorted by a heavy security detail. *Unintimidated* is not exactly the word that comes to mind, but Republicans in Washington accepted Walker’s self-image and talked him up as a strong presidential contender.

...And the more they talked, the worse life in Walker’s cabinet became. The technocrat I had respected vanished, replaced by a partisan who thought the White House was in reach.

After he won his recall election, Walker rarely attended cabinet meetings anymore, and radically reduced the number of one-on-one’s with cabinet secretaries. **He took more far-right positions, probably because he thought they would play well with the Republican base.** Funding for public education and our University of Wisconsin system was cut dramatically. Our infrastructure continued to deteriorate to the point that we ranked 49th in the nation in the quality of our roads and bridges.

...Throughout 2014, Walker was traveling the country, gearing up for a presidential run. He was a regular on Fox News, and courting big-money donors. **Our marching orders, meanwhile, were to play up each and every administration “success,” and to take care of special interests. Our agencies became politicized.**

...When a lobbyist for the payday lending industry asked to meet with me to discuss yet another request for regulatory “relief,” I rebuffed him. Fifteen minutes later, I got a call from the governor’s office directing me to give full consideration to the lobbyist’s requests because he represented big supporters of the administration. I did, but it was another straw on the camel’s back. **It seemed to me that, for Walker, political friends and donors came first.**

...Walker wanted to do right by Wisconsin when he was first elected governor—or so it seemed to me. But the longer he was in office, and the more public attention

*came his way, the more he changed his focus from improving the lot of the people of his state, to improving his standing with the Republican Party. **In so doing he made decisions that were bad for Wisconsin—and, if the latest polls are right—ultimately bad for his political aspirations as well.***