

Paul Spink: To fix Wisconsin, Walker must go

Posted on Tuesday, Sep 4, 2018

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

Labor Day is a chance for us to reflect on the proud history of American labor unions. For more than 100 years, labor unions across the country have represented working people and won major victories against the predatory advances of big business.

100 years ago those victories looked like 40-hour work weeks, weekends, & secure retirement. In fact, Wisconsin AFSCME, the union that represents State, County & Municipal employees in the public and private sector, was founded in 1932 by workers who desired secure retirement. One of the early victories of our union was the creation and stability of the Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS), which is still in place and fully funded today.

Over the years, union victories have become part of the American workers' understanding of what a job is. Healthcare coverage, retirement programs, and safety standards are all in place today because our parents and grandparents refused to be treated without respect in the workplace.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

However, over the last 7 years, Wisconsin has seen the devastating effect of a Governor that has declared war on workers. Our members have seen 7 years of policies that have made it nearly impossible to do their job providing critical services to the public.

It is vital to share how troubled the public sector has become because the services public employees provide affect every citizen in Wisconsin.

From repairing roads, keeping our schools safe and clean, and collecting our garbage, public workers provide countless services that make our communities function. But, with Walker's war on workers, it is becoming more and more difficult to hire and retain staff. Unsafe working conditions, budget cuts and forced overtime push individuals who are called to public service into other fields.

To make up for the co-workers who are leaving and are never replaced, public employees must work harder than ever to deliver the high quality service citizens of Wisconsin deserve and expect. All over the state, stories of veterans care nurses working dozens of hours of overtime each week or custodial staff being forced to come in and work on a weekend they had asked off are commonplace. Every day it is becoming harder to maintain high quality services with less and less resources. The people who depend on public sector services, our veterans, our neighbors and our kids deserve better.

If we wish to dig our state out of the pit we are in, we must start with revitalizing our public sector. When FDR wanted to rebuild our economy during the great depression he turned to the public sector – hiring people to build roads, schools and parks. If Wisconsin wishes to re-energize our economy we must do the same.

We need to rebuild our roads, invest in our schools and treat our government employees with respect so we can hire and retain quality workers.

We know our current Governor will not make the right decisions to get our state back on track. In fact, we have seen him do the opposite at every opportunity.

It is critical that we elect a Governor with the integrity and courage to invest in the public infrastructure necessary for a prosperous state. Until we do, Wisconsin will not be able chart a course for economic recovery.

We need a better way forward, and Tony Evers has offered that vision. We hope that you will stand with AFSCME Wisconsin in support of Tony Evers.

— *Spink is president, AFSCME Wisconsin.*