

Walker, Republican Leadership Spoiling Wisconsin

Written by Mike McCabe, Blue Jean Nation

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ALTOONA, WI - I am not a government worker. I do not qualify for civil service protection. I have never been represented by a union in the workplace. But the assault on Wisconsin's civil service system deeply concerns me, saddens me, frightens me and angers me all at the same time. This affects me because it's not just a government employment issue, and it's not just a union issue. This is about Wisconsin's soul.

Where our state's current rulers are taking us is a place Wisconsin has been before. Wisconsin once had a spoils system. A little over a century ago, the people of our state were well acquainted with political patronage and cronyism.



Citizens and their elected representatives responded to those corrupt conditions with sweeping reforms, including the establishment of the civil service system, done under the slogan "The Best Shall Serve the State." Not the most loyal. Not the most well-connected. Not the most faithful supporters. The best. The most qualified.

That system has done Wisconsin good for 110 years. It has been updated and modernized many times since then. But it has remained an objective, merit-based system for hiring and firing. It has remained true to the original intent that the best shall serve the state.

What is being done now is not an update. It is not modernization. It is the replacement of an objective, merit-based civil service system with a subjective system, one that can easily morph into a [spoils system](#). Those pushing this legislation keep saying decisions will continue to be based on merit. But the point is, those in charge of government agencies will no longer have to base their hiring and firing decisions on objective standards of merit. They will be able to consider political loyalties, they will be able to take connections into account, they will be able to look at campaign donations and time spent working for the party in power.

If they are able to, you can bet they will.

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Finally, it is important to point out that this assault on Wisconsin's civil service system is not happening in isolation. The dark impulses that inspire the dismantling of 110-year-old safeguards against government corruption are the same ones behind the continuing attacks on our state's laws requiring the public's business be done out in the open and in plain sight. Civil service protections are targeted for the same reason Wisconsin's Government Accountability Board was abolished. Our state's current rulers need to do away with obstacles to cronyism and patronage for the same reason they can't stand independent, nonpartisan oversight of their activities. And for the same reason, they felt the need to shield suspected political crimes from John Doe investigations.

Civil service, open records, the GAB and John Doe criminal probes all threaten their grip on power, they all hinder the current rulers' ability to serve a privileged few at everyone else's expense. That is what this latest legislation targeting civil service is all about . . . making sure their power and privilege cannot be questioned and cannot be challenged.