

Wisconsin Idea is Still under Attack

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MADISON - Gov. Scott Walker's attack on the Wisconsin Idea did not end with his botched attempt to re-write the University of Wisconsin's mission statement. The substance of the attack is ongoing in his state budget.

The Wisconsin Idea is as simple as it is compelling. The fundamental rationale for our public universities is the on-going "search for truth" which elevates the lives of students to higher purposes than mere money getting and extends "knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of the campus" in order to "improve the human condition."

The Wisconsin Idea as it developed over 100 years was not mere lofty language. The words were matched by financial commitments decade after decade which, built our public education system brick by brick. Now Walker, with his slashing education cuts, is undercutting these investments

This commitment to learning as a gateway to social progress, and the fundamental belief that it is within our power to bridge the gap between the world as it is and the world as it can be, motivated generations of Wisconsinites much poorer than ourselves. Year after year farmers and shopkeepers and industrial workers put their nickels and dimes together to invest heavily in building our world class university system, our highly rated public schools, and our renowned technical colleges.

The idea that we don't have the money is absurd. We are a far richer state than we were 100 years ago and even 50 years ago. Walker wants us to think we live in an age of limits, but they are self imposed. In Walker's narrow ideology giving large tax giveaways to large corporations with no strings attached and turning down millions of dollars of federal health care money are more important than continuing our generational commitment to education.

This attack on the Wisconsin Idea goes beyond funding. Walker's scheme to spin off our universities, stripping public accountability from a system the people of Wisconsin built together, cuts the UW system off from its public charge. At its core, the Wisconsin Idea is about connecting our universities to the public and its needs, applying cutting-edge knowledge to our social and economic problems to advance opportunity and better society.

Walker's brand of conservatism is not interested in such knowledge. In Walker's doublespeak, forcing people off health coverage is innovation, wind farms are a greater threat to human health than fossil fuels, slashing money for education is reform, the failed voucher school experiment is a success, dismal job creation numbers are a comeback, \$7.25 an hour is a "living wage," gutting unions will raises wages, and a budget deficit is a surplus. No wonder Walker wants to scuttle Wisconsin's century-old "search for truth" and the application of knowledge "beyond the campus."

The visionaries who framed the Wisconsin Idea, and the generations of average people who made it a reality, had great dreams for our future, and acted on those dreams. We should continue to follow in their footsteps.

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