

# WHO WE ARE AND WHY WE FIGHT: OUR WISCONSIN REVOLUTION

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## Introduction: What is OWR?

Back not so long ago, Wisconsin -- the Badger State, our proud home -- was a leader nationwide.

We were famous for our economic might and social power, and for being a national leader when it came to democratic rule and environmental conservation.

In the early part of the twentieth century, we created the country's first comprehensive statewide primary election system, putting democratic decision-making in the hands of the many. We instituted municipal home rule and open government.

Thanks to the state's strong labor unions and labor parties, Wisconsin was the first state to implement worker compensation protections, including unemployment compensation. It also passed the first collective bargaining laws for public employees.

In a successful effort to level the playing field instead of lining the pockets of the rich, Wisconsin was the first state to pass an income tax, which made taxation proportional to actual earnings.

For much of the last century, Wisconsin was also a model nationwide and worldwide when it came to public education, from the grade-school level on up. Our state gave birth to the worldwide-famous Wisconsin Idea, which promoted the expansion of the University of Wisconsin and encouraged Wisconsinites to give back to their government by creating legislation aimed at benefiting the greatest number of people.

Historically, we've been famous for defending our environment, too. In the middle of the 20th century, Aldo Leopold helped put Wisconsin at the forefront of modern conservation and environmental ethics, and in 1970, Wisconsin's Senator Gaylord Nelson founded Earth Day.

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But a huge gap separates the Wisconsin of the past from Wisconsin today.

Though Wisconsin used to be a leader when it came to fighting for the people, today, the state is taking power away from the people -- whether it comes to granting corporations control over our schools, farms, elections, taxes, or curtailing the right to organize labor. As a result of these decisions, our democracy is broken: [big money is playing an outsized role](#) in our state's

elections; growing numbers of Wisconsin residents are being [denied the right to vote](#); a large share of Wisconsin's tax cuts [are going to the rich](#) rather than to working people; and working people have fewer ways to advocate for themselves, even as wages stagnate or drop and workers are pushed to work longer hours amidst [exploding inequality](#). The average income of the top .01% in Wisconsin was 399 times the average income of the bottom 99% of Wisconsin residents.

Economically, Wisconsin used to be a leader, but now we're lagging. For much of the twentieth century, Wisconsin had booming manufacturing and agricultural industries. But now, manufacturing [has been in steep decline for the past 40 years](#). Locally-owned family farms have been gutted, and last year Western Wisconsin had [the most farm bankruptcies](#) in the U.S. as a whole. Wisconsin is behind the rest of the country in [private-sector job growth](#) too.

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But despite signs of real crisis, many of our elected officials insist that this is a boom-time for Wisconsin.

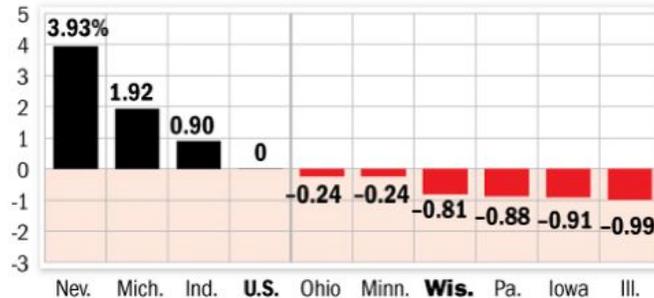
They say that more of us are employed than ever before, and that the state's jobless rate is at an all-time low. They say that Wisconsin is a "top 10" state and a model for the nation when it comes to business climate, as judged by corporate executives.

What they don't say is that in the past 20 years, Wisconsin experienced the biggest dip in the number of middle-class households in the country. Wages for working people in Wisconsin have been stagnant, or in decline.

What our elected representatives don't say is that extreme poverty is on the rise, too. [Over 70% of job openings advertised in Wisconsin](#) this past year were for minimum-wage jobs. And more than a quarter of Wisconsin workers are locked in poverty-wage jobs -- jobs that are insufficient to lift a full-time worker supporting a family out of poverty. Most of these workers also lack access to [employer-provided pension benefit plans](#), effectively nixing their chances at a humane retirement.

### 2016 manufacturing employment for selected states and U.S.

Manufacturing employment was flat nationally in 2016 and declined in 28 of 50 states, including Wisconsin and much of the industrial midwest.



(from 4th quarter of 2015 to 4th quarter of 2016)

Sources: U.S. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, as analyzed by the Marquette University Law School; Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

Journal Sentinel

What they don't say is that while there may be a boom for certain families and companies in Madison and in a few other cities, the rest of the state is still mired in a deep economic recession -- as are significant pockets of the population in the state's wealthiest cities. What they don't say is that minority populations in Wisconsin are particularly hard hit, with 39% of African-Americans living below the poverty line, and with Native communities struggling. The Menominee Reservation in Menominee County, for instance, ranks as one of the poorest communities in the nation, and posts an unemployment rate of more than twice the national average. What they don't say is that despite all of this struggling, and all of the problems faced by our state's everyday workers, the less-advantaged, and our youth, the top 1% is paying the lowest rate of state and local taxes than any other group in Wisconsin. What they don't say is that Wisconsin's youth suicide rate is [nearly a third higher](#) than the national rate.

It's a tale of "two Wisconsins": the winners and the left-behinds.

But when the politicians say that Wisconsin is winning because the winners are winning, we call their bluff.

We say: Enough is enough.

Our politicians have done enough lying to the people of Wisconsin. Corporate interests aren't the same as people's interests. Ceding corporate control over our schools, our environment, our farms, and our election process isn't a way to help the people. Pointing out that some people are getting rich -- and passing policy that helps the rich get even richer -- isn't a way to address economic crisis in our state.

What's needed is real change, and a movement of Wisconsinites to take back our economy and our politics. Our Wisconsin Revolution was born to address this need.

We believe that Wisconsin is in so much trouble because in the past 20 years, corporate Republicans and corporate Democrats have failed to stand up for working people.

That's why we believe that to fix the mess we're in, we can't just focus on protesting Trump or Walker, or on bringing the Democratic Party back to power.

Our Wisconsin Revolution is a people's movement ready to lead the state in a new direction. Inspired by Bernie Sanders' 2016 run for President, OWR is energized to foster freedom of opportunity for Wisconsinites, and bring an end to the tale of two Wisconsins. After all, we know that the real fight today isn't between the major parties. It's between the oligarchic few and the many.

Our Wisconsin Revolution is a people-powered organization, and it is growing: we currently have a presence in every congressional district in Wisconsin with 26 chapters and counting. As part of the Our Revolution movement nationwide, we have the infrastructure, resources and collective brainpower needed to turn this state around. Through education, electoral and policy work, we are working to transform Wisconsin into a real democracy with a fair economy and a government that works for people, not profit.

Read on to find out more about our guiding principles and how we want to solve the leading problems facing working people today. In the pages of this booklet, we address why Wisconsin is crying out for good jobs and decent wages, and how we propose to fix these issues; why we need basic common-sense protections to ensure clean air and clean water and good healthcare for ourselves, our kids, and our grandkids; and why the presence of big-monied elites and corporations has corrupted Wisconsin's democracy -- and how we can work together to make Wisconsin what it used to be: a leader for workers' rights, environmental protection, and the creation of a genuine democracy.

Like our movement, this booklet was made by people from all across Wisconsin and from different walks of life. Its authors live in rural Northern Wisconsin, in the Driftless area, and in urban inner-cities. They include union activists and public school teachers; college-age students and small-business owners; first-generation immigrants and people whose families have lived in Wisconsin for at least a century. Our hope is that this book will help you build our movement for positive change across this state, whoever you are and wherever you're living.

## Chapter 1: The Haves and Have-Nots

Some folks like to talk about economics as something that's so complicated that ordinary people shouldn't even try to understand it. But really, what's been happening in Wisconsin and nationwide in the past 40 years isn't that hard to grasp.

For decades, our many of our elected politicians have maintained that tax-cuts for the wealthy and for corporations would stimulate economic growth and lift all boats. This hasn't been working out: 40 years of nationwide and Wisconsin-wide tax cuts have not led to more jobs. We have a situation in which Americans have fewer jobs, worse paying jobs, and more economic inequality -- not to mention a cycle of boom-and-bust capitalism which in 2007, led our country to a near economic collapse.

As a result of the trickle-down economic policies pursued, the gap between rich and poor is growing. In the past 40 years, the number of people in the middle class in this country has declined, while the number of people living in poverty is on the rise. Today, 40 million Americans live in poverty. The U.S. has [the highest rate of childhood poverty](#) among its industrial peers.

In the meanwhile, the super rich keep getting richer. Since the 1980s, over 13 trillion dollars in wealth has been transferred from the bottom 99% to the top 1%. Today, the top one tenth of one percent in the United States own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90%.

Thanks to the unbridled growth of corporate capitalism and the steady whittling of the welfare state, the United States has become a land of haves and have-nots, of winners and those left behind.

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Some people might look at this picture and say, "We get what we deserve. Americans have stopped working hard, and now they're paying the price."

The facts tell a different story. Actually, the facts show that in the past forty years, little has changed in the average number of hours worked a week in the U.S., even as the proportion of people working very long workweeks has grown. Additionally, with more women employed than ever before, *more* Americans are employed today than at any other time in history.

Others might look at this picture and say, “Why is there a problem if there’s a gap between rich and poor? Doesn’t that gap actually give poor folks an incentive to work harder?”

The truth is: not really.

Inequality breeds more inequality, instead of leading to a leveling of the playing field.

Here’s how it happens. Wealthier families help their kids pull ahead of less-affluent kids. They give them a leg up in preparing for school, in getting into fancy colleges, and in launching good careers. For this reason, wealthier kids are [“born on third base.”](#) To get to home base and take home the American Dream, they [hardly need to a break a sweat.](#)

Once the top-earners “make it,” they are unwilling to make the public investments needed to make sure that all families thrive economically.

Given all of this, we shouldn’t be surprised that the data shows that schools with high concentrations of low-income students also find it more difficult to recruit and retain high quality teachers and administrators, which are the key to improving the quality of schooling. Compared to more affluent kids, in America today, low-income children have lower future earnings, employment opportunities, and health and mental health outcomes.

In other words, the more unequal a society is, the more unequal it will be in the future -- particularly in a system (like the United States) where the wealthy have outsized influence over economic and tax policy. The vicious cycle of a widening wealth gap just gets worse and worse.

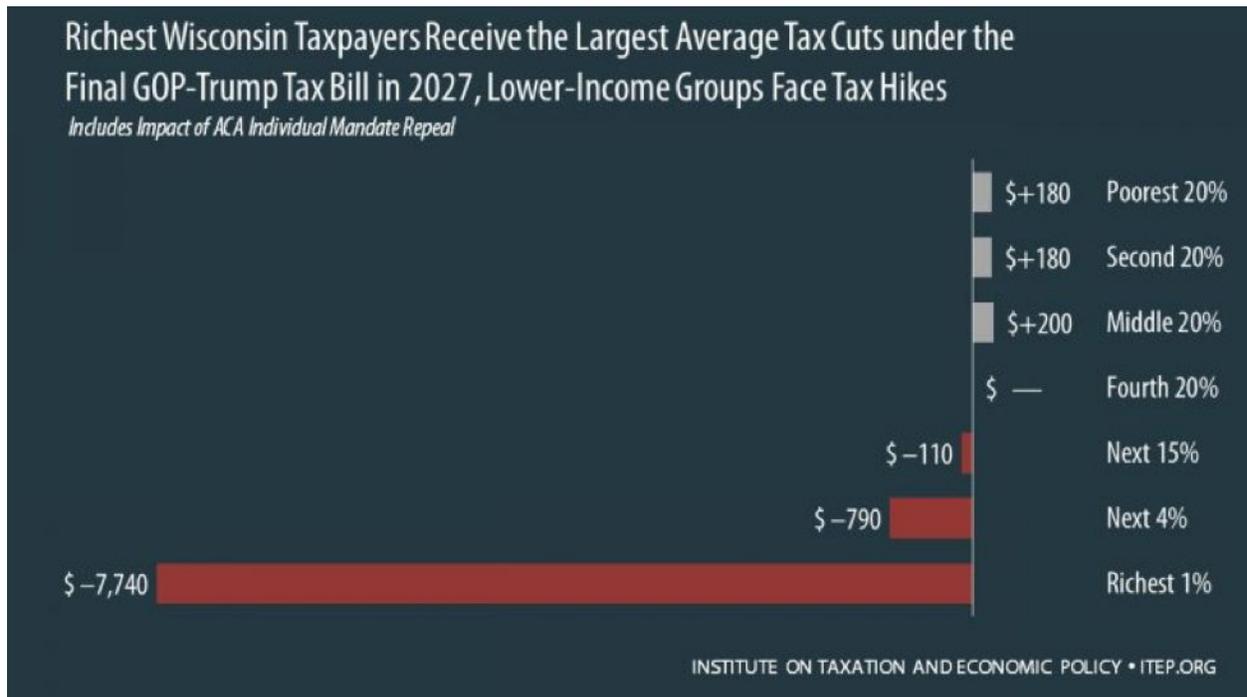
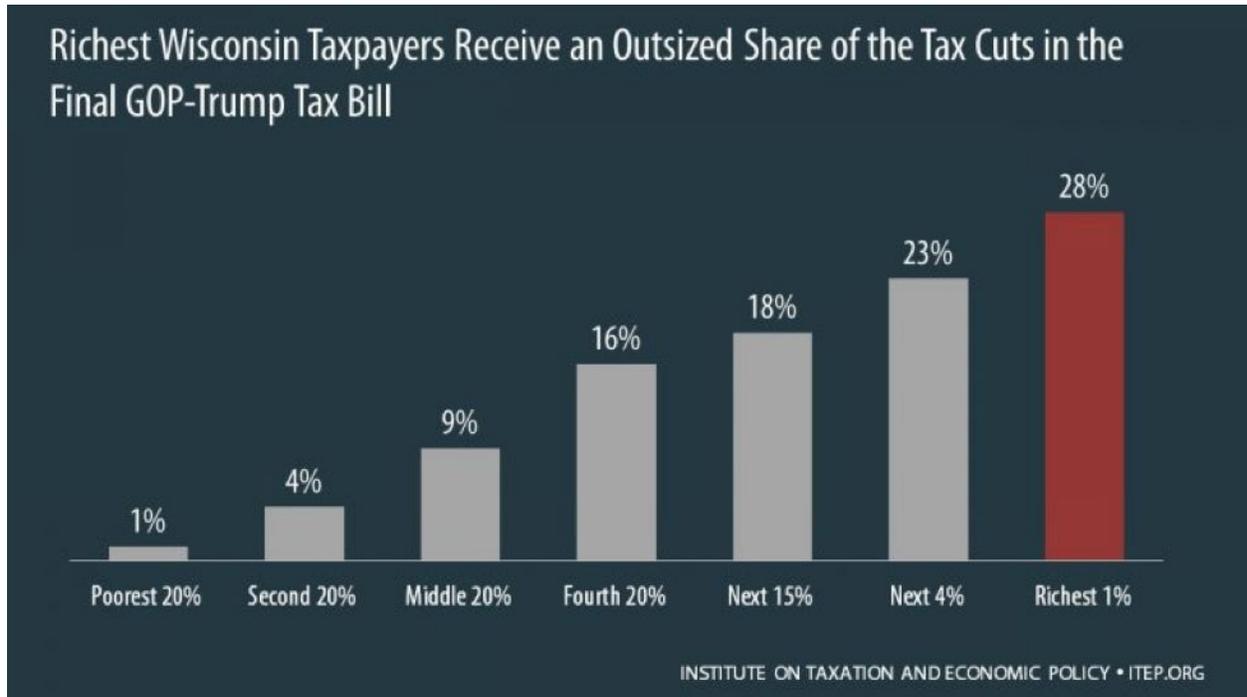
In Wisconsin, the gap between haves and have-nots is stark.

The number of Wisconsinites in the middle class keeps decreasing, and the number of people in extreme poverty is growing.

But instead of addressing these issues, most of our elected politicians seem keen on continuing to grow the gap between haves and have-nots. Not only have Wisconsin’s taxes since 2011 overwhelmingly benefitted rich state residents; [analyses show that Trump-Ryan’s final tax bill](#) will make the situation worse.

Starting from next year, more than half the benefits of the tax changes will go to the top 5% of Wisconsinites. Additionally, because tax cuts for the middle class will time out in 2025 (whereas tax cuts for corporations are huge and permanent), starting from 2027, both the middle classes and lower-income groups will see their taxes going up. For the bottom ⅓ of

Wisconsiners, experts predict that the new law will actually raise taxes by \$360 million. It will also [drive another wedge](#) between white Wisconsin families and families of color.



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**Like across the U.S., there are deep connections between racial and economic inequality in Wisconsin.**

The 2017 Race to Equity report showed that Wisconsin is one of the worst states in the country to be born Black. This was according to all kinds of indicators, including unemployment, income, education, and incarceration rates.

In 2015, white workers make up slightly less than 4% of the state's unemployed population, while almost 12% of African-American workers in Wisconsin were unemployed. This is much worse than the national average, where the unemployment rate for Blacks is about double the white unemployment rate. Here in Wisconsin, we're looking at a rate that's [almost three times as high for African-Americans](#). When it comes to household earnings, the median income for a black household in Wisconsin is \$29,000 annually -- half of what a white household in Wisconsin earns. Data also shows that the poverty rate among African-American families (31%) is over five times the rate for white families (5.8%), making it the second worst poverty rate disparity in the nation. Once again, children are particularly hard-hit. Four in ten Black children in the state are living in poverty.

If we zoom in and look for instance at how folks in Milwaukee are struggling to survive, we can get a better sense of how racial and economic inequality can lock families into a cycle of poverty -- a cycle from which it's really hard to break free.

Milwaukee is one of the poorest cities in America. It tops the charts for incarceration and for rates of infant mortality. Milwaukee also has incredibly high eviction rates. With landlords evicting about 16,000 adults and children every year, eviction has become a fact of life. Once residents have an eviction on their record, many landlords will not rent to them, making for a cycle of job loss, worse housing, and more evictions. In this way, eviction doesn't just perpetuate poverty; it [creates new poverty too](#).

Consider the case of a 29-year-old African-American woman from Milwaukee, who became pregnant following a sexual assault.

As the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reports,

The mother grew up in a predominantly white Milwaukee suburb, attended college in the South, moved back to Milwaukee and began a professional career.

The sexual assault was more than horrible enough, but when she discovered she was pregnant, she did not know what to do. She said she delayed getting prenatal care, considered getting an abortion, and tried to hide her condition from family and friends.

Then, according to the woman and to court records, she began to have trouble with her landlord. In April, her electricity was cut off. Believing her situation was temporary, she bought battery-operated lanterns and was able to cook on her gas stove.

She took a leave from her job to deal with her pregnancy and her dispute with her landlord. Eventually, she was laid off. As the heat of the summer set in, she spent her days in parks and in fast-food restaurants. By July, she was hospitalized for a life-threatening blood pressure condition called preeclampsia.

Her son was delivered by cesarean section. He weighed 2 pounds, 3 ounces. A week later, still not healed from her surgery, the boy critically ill, the mother was in court challenging her eviction.

On Aug. 15, her son still in the hospital, the landlord had her belongings removed from the home and placed on the lawn. Most of her things were looted.

The woman spent her days at the hospital and her nights staying at hotels, or with family and friends, or sleeping in her car. She returned to work, but when her son was discharged from the hospital in October, she had nowhere permanent to take him.

The mother was at work when, on Nov. 23, while he was being cared for by his grandmother, the boy succumbed to bronchopneumonia, with prematurity as a contributing cause, and became one of an estimated 88 babies to die in Milwaukee in 2016.

"Anyone who doesn't know how hard life can be," the mother said recently, "look at my life in 2016."

As stories like this show, we are facing a moral and economic emergency in Wisconsin and nationwide.

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Our Wisconsin Revolution believes it's time for real change. Our platform propose concrete solutions for solving, or at least seriously diminishing, racial and economic inequality.

Not only do we call for common-sense legislation that takes a racial equity lens; in particular, we recognize housing as a human right and call for states, counties, and municipalities to significantly increase resources to expand affordable housing stock, and remove constitutional and statutory barriers to affordable housing creation. We also call for strengthened protections for residential tenants, including but not limited to requiring good cause for eviction and increasing tenant remedies for landlord abuses or violation of habitability standards.

Because we recognize that racial and economic disparities show up very visibly in our criminal justice system, we oppose efforts to turn local law enforcement into an extension of immigration and customs enforcement; advocate community policing; call for an end to mandatory minimum sentencing, excessive jail detention, poverty-inducing court and jail fees, and all racial disparities in arrest rates; and we call upon the state of Wisconsin to make prison truly rehabilitative by providing greater opportunity for treatment, counseling and education, and by easing re-entry through social, medical, and job search assistance.

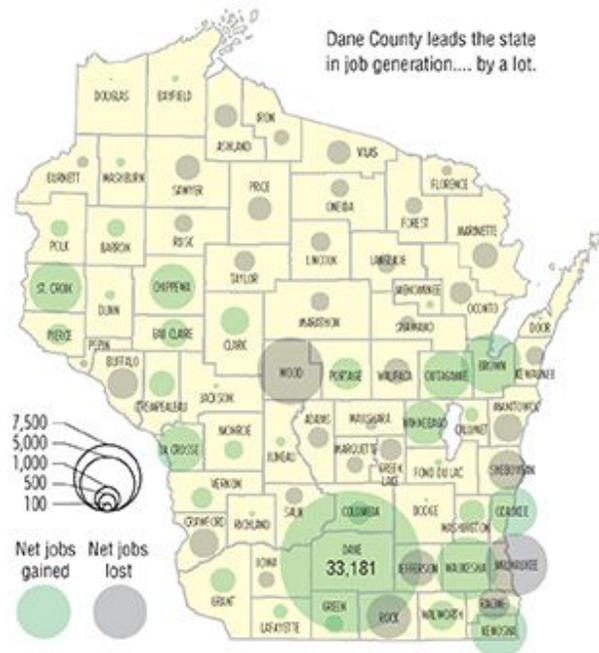
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**If the gap between Wisconsin’s White and Black population is huge, so are the differences between different parts of the state.**

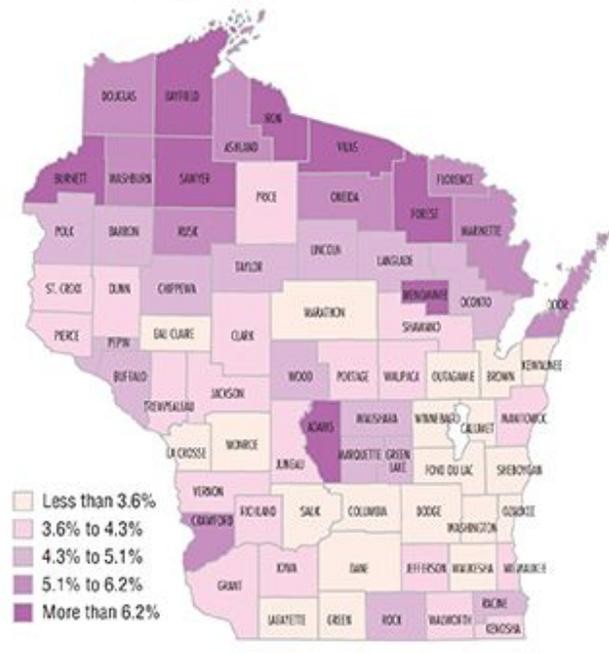
Once again, we’re look at a brutally asymmetrical economic story.

What we’re seeing is a trend towards growing wealth of certain cities, like Madison, Eau Claire, Appleton, and Oshkosh, and growing economic hardship elsewhere.

### Job creation, 2007-2015



### Unemployment, March 2017



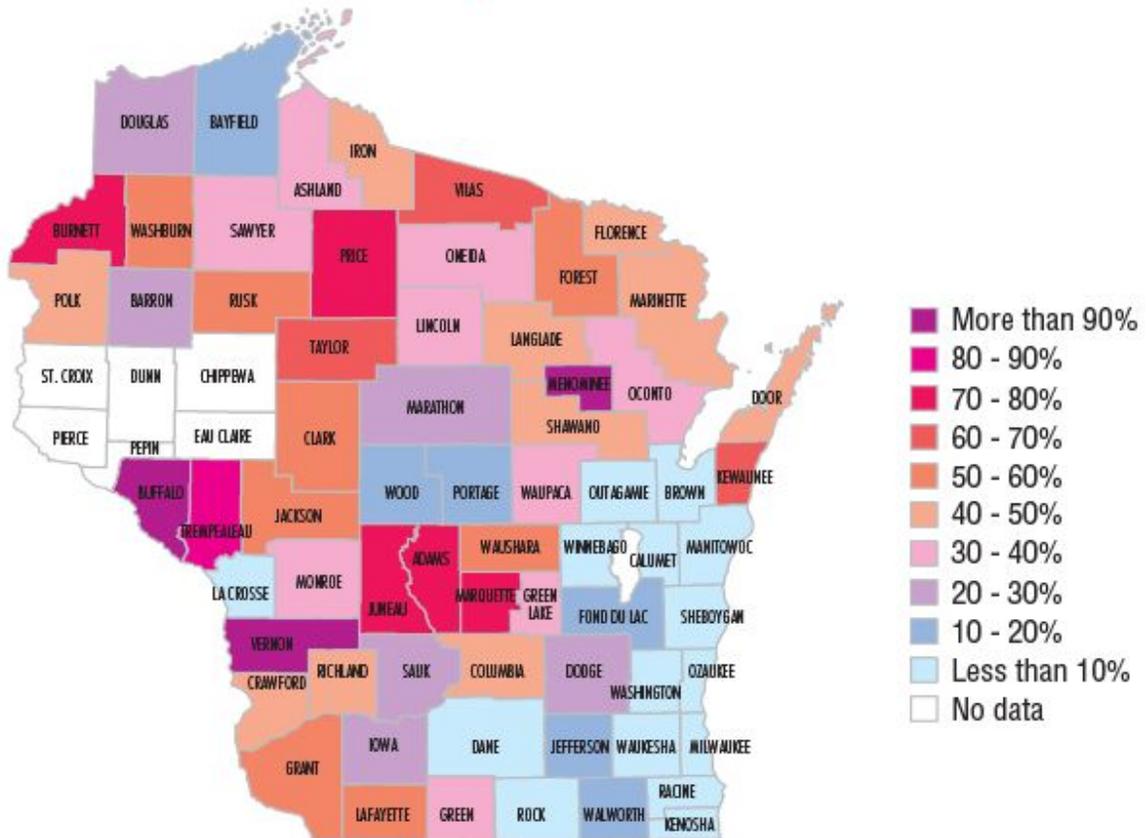
Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Of Wisconsin’s 72 counties, at least 62 are struggling. Between pre-recession 2007 and after-recession 2015, [nearly 75% of the new jobs added to the Wisconsin economy](#) were added in Dane county. The rest of Wisconsin has been starved for good-quality, decent-paying jobs.

Meanwhile, our elected officials are doing little to address the state's manufacturing and agricultural crisis.

One telling indicator of the gap between Wisconsin's have and have-not communities? Broadband access. Internet speed is measured by the speed with which you can download information to your computer. But Wisconsin has almost the slowest rate in the country -- we're at 49th place among the 50 states and the district of Columbia. 57% of Wisconsin's rural population lacks basic broadband.

## Without broadband, 2016



Source: [“Wisconsin Needs More than Foxconn to Fix Its Economy”](#)

Our Wisconsin Revolution calls for universal public broadband. Folks in Wisconsin need it, because without basic broadband, rural areas cannot offer the same quality of life that cities offer to their residents. According to a 2014 report prepared by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota, short-term benefits of rural broadband expansion include increases in business and job growth, along with business growth from increased e-commerce. Long-term benefits include growth in rural population, per capita income and GDP. In addition, rural citizens benefit from the ability to access online educational programs, rural medical providers can improve the quality of healthcare, and citizens can be more involved in their communities through high-speed internet connections.

But despite the patent need for more broadband access, in 2011, Governor Walker turned back \$23 million in federal broadband funding, claiming too much federal “red tape.” Through the sweep of a pen, Governor Walker helped make the disparities between Wisconsin’s urban and rural communities a permanent feature of the state.

Our Wisconsin Revolution sees this as a big problem -- and as really unfair for the state’s many rural and suburban residents. For this reason, our platform calls upon the state to make internet access a public utility, and establish cheap, reliable, high-speed internet and wireless access, aiming at 100 Mbps, throughout the state.

Disparities in broadband access translate into disparities in job availability and quality of life, and these, in turn, translate into huge disparities in who stays in poorer parts of Wisconsin, and who takes an exit route -- either through emigration, addiction, or suicide.

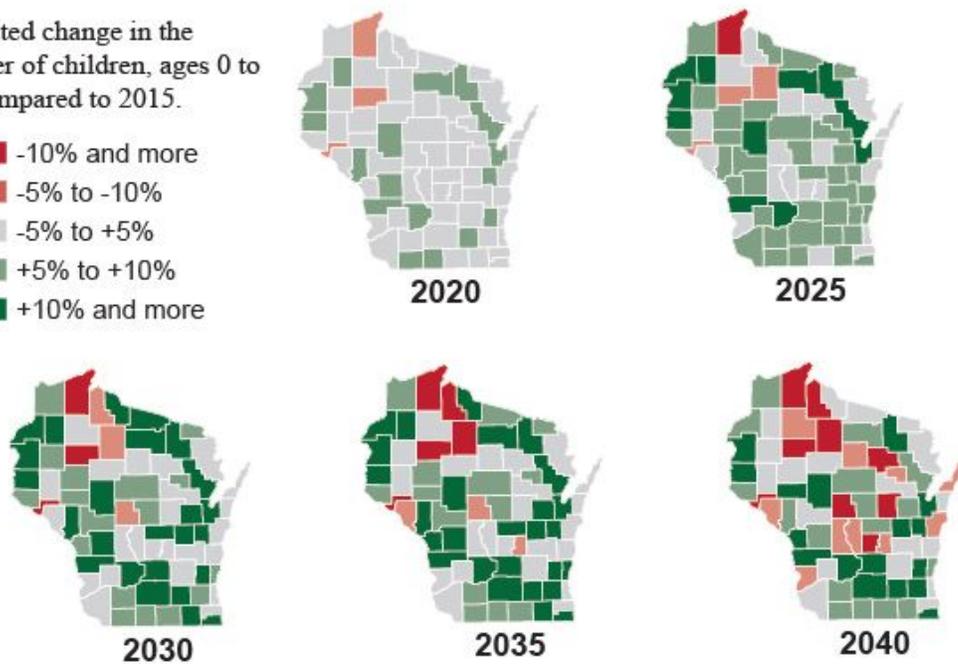
Rural Northern Wisconsin, which has been hardest-hit by unemployment in the past several years, and which is struggling to maintain its public schools functional, is projected to lose between 20 and 28% of its children [in the next 20 years](#).

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## Number of Children in Northern Wisconsin Projected to Dwindle

Projected change in the number of children, ages 0 to 19, compared to 2015.

- -10% and more
- -5% to -10%
- -5% to +5%
- +5% to +10%
- +10% and more



Source: Analysis of figures from the Wisconsin Department of Administration

WISCONSIN BUDGET PROJECT

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Older rural communities are showing other signs of distress as well. As a new study has shown, nearly three of four gun deaths in Wisconsin are suicides, and many of those [are in northern Wisconsin](#), among rural, white men ages 45 and older. Suicides in these communities likely stem from a shortage of mental health services in small towns, and they reflect social isolation and economic trouble. “There’s a disintegration of community,” an observer said. “In many ways, suicide is an act of anger.” The opioid epidemic in Wisconsin -- which is among the worst in the nation -- has also [disproportionately impacted](#) poorer and more underserved parts of the state. Tragically, the epidemic shows no signs of abating.

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**The problems Wisconsin faces are huge. Common-sense solutions would take us a long way in fixing them.**

To create a fair economy in Wisconsin, the first step to address declining or stagnant wages would be to implement a mandatory living wage for all workers. If all minimum-wage workers in Wisconsin were paid \$15 per hour, as well as an annual cost of living adjustment, this would go a long way towards improving their life conditions and their chances at advancing themselves and their children. Increasing low wages would also pump more money and spending into the economy, stimulating growth, while enabling more people to afford proper nutrition and health care.

To address Wisconsin’s dwindling labor options, local and state government must provide assistance and tax support to locally-owned, independent businesses -- the kinds of businesses that will employ Wisconsin residents and address the state’s under-employment crisis.

Wisconsin must also start making fuller use of our public education to assist local and regional economic development efforts, and it must invest in jobs for the future. We would like to see Wisconsin become a national leader in cutting-edge public sector and private sector jobs, rather than lagging far behind, as it currently does. We want to build a Wisconsin that invests in jobs that help modernize our decaying physical infrastructure -- whether it comes to roads, bridges, railways, or public buildings.

The tax system in Wisconsin is currently unfair: it benefits the wealthy and penalizes those less well-off. We call for state tax reform, which would raise rates on top incomes, treat capital gains like other income, and remove regressive loopholes (like the manufacturing tax credit). We also call on the state to establish “circuit breakers” on property tax refunds from state income taxes, which would ensure that only those who are paying a significant percentage of their income towards property taxes can receive this benefit.

### **Talking with our fellow Wisconsinites.**

Say you'd like to strike up a conversation with a neighbor or fellow colleague about how economic inequality impacts them. Because "economic inequality" is a fancy word, you probably don't want to lead with that idea. Instead, find out what economic issues your neighbors or colleagues are peeved about when it comes to their lives or that of their family. Are they working multiple jobs to scrape by? Working Saturdays and overtime? In debt and worried they won't be able to pay it back? Once you get a sense of what economic difficulties they are having, and show some empathy and understanding, you can then zoom out. Instead of talking about "economic inequality," you can encourage them to think about "fairness" and about how "everyone should have a fair shot at the American Dream" if they work hard. Instead, that doesn't seem to be happening. Honest and hard-working Americans just like them are struggling too -- not just or primarily because of personal decisions those individuals made but because trickle-down economics doesn't work and because big-money interests have been pushing politicians to make decisions that actually harm everyday people.

## **Chapter 2: Getting Big Money Out of Politics**

In 2010 the Citizens United ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court said to the wealthiest people in this country: you already own much of the American economy. Now, we are going to give you the opportunity to purchase the U.S. Government, the White House, the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House, Governors' seats, legislatures, and State judicial branches as well. The Citizens United decision hinges on the absurd notion that money is speech, corporations are people, and giving huge piles of undisclosed cash to politicians in exchange for access and influence does not constitute corruption.

During this campaign cycle, billions of dollars from the wealthiest people in this country are already flooding the political process. Super PACs – a direct outgrowth of the Citizens United decision – are enabling the wealthiest people and the largest corporations in this country to contribute unlimited amounts of money to campaigns. The situation has become so absurd that super PACs, which theoretically operate independently of the actual candidates, have more money and more influence over campaigns than the candidates themselves do.

We are talking about a rapid movement in this country toward a political system in which a handful of very wealthy people and special interests will determine who is elected or who is not elected. That was not Abraham Lincoln's vision of a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. As former President Jimmy Carter recently said, unlimited money in politics, "violates the essence of what made America a great country in its political system. Now, it's just an oligarchy, with unlimited political bribery being the essence of being elected at the Federal, State and Local levels."

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### **What Should We Do About It?**

The need for real campaign finance reform is not a progressive issue. It is not a conservative issue. It is an American issue. It is an issue that should concern all Americans, regardless of their political point of view, who wish to preserve the essence of the longest standing democracy in the world. We must have a government that represents all of the people not just a handful of powerful and wealthy special interests. Real campaign finance reform must happen as soon as possible.

America should be a nation in which all people, regardless of their income, can participate in the political process and run for office. Our vision for democracy should be one in which candidates are speaking to the vast majority of our people – working people, the middle class, low-income people, the elderly, the children, the sick, the poor, and people of all races and genders.

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## **The Solution**

To get big money out of politics, we must:

- Appoint Supreme Court justices who will overturn Citizens United
- Pass a constitutional amendment giving Congress and the states the power to regulate money in elections.
- Create a publicly financed, totally transparent system of campaign financing.
- Aggressively enforce campaign finance rules.

Returning to a government of, by, and for the people will not be easy. We will need measures highlighted here. It will require agreement of Congress or, in the case of a constitutional amendment, two-thirds of the Congress and three-quarters of the states.

We will get there by building and continuing a movement with enough power to elect representatives will return power to the people.

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## **Background**

Americans are well aware of the problem of big money in politics. Even if they do not know the specific details, they understand that elected officials are beholden to large corporate and individual donors, and that their so-called representatives are responsive to the entreaties of massively funded lobbyists. They understand that the decisions made, and laws and policies adopted, by elected officials advance the interests of large corporations and wealthy individuals, and that contrary views and policy preferences of “regular people like themselves” are not heeded.

When asked in surveys, people express strong support for “getting big money out of politics.” Here in Wisconsin, since 2011, over 100 hundred towns, villages, cities, and counties have gone on record - either through voter referenda or resolutions by governance bodies - in favor of “The People’s Amendment,” which calls for overturning the doctrines that “money is speech,” and that corporations, like natural human beings, enjoy Constitutional rights. Such an Amendment would again permit limitations on political contributions and expenditures. The referenda in Wisconsin increasingly win by exceptionally large majorities. Support for reform of campaign finance is strong across the political spectrum.

Nevertheless, getting big money out of politics does not have the emotional charge that some other issues, notably health care and abortion rights, do. Few voters condition their votes on the position candidates may have on this issue. Indeed, they are unlikely to know those

positions. They are also unlikely to believe that there are politically feasible effective solutions to the problem of big money in politics, which disposes them to fatalism and passivity in relation to the issue...

For OWR to advance the cause of “getting big money out of politics” it should strive to:

- Intensify citizen concern with this issue, and elevate it to one on which voters will condition their votes.
- Propose and campaign for modest steps that are feasible even under current Supreme Court constraints. People need something they can be for, not just issues that arise their anger and opposition. They also need some proposals which they can believe are achievable, or they will not engage.

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### **Intensifying Citizen Concern**

While voters may know that “big money” controls our political system, they may not realize the enormity of the problem, and they are unlikely to know the dimensions of the problem in their state or their own communities. Without overwhelming people with data they cannot digest, we need to find ways to communicate and publicize the dimensions of the problem in the state. That is, we need to bring into focus how much money is being contributed and spent, who is contributing the money, and who is spending it, and on whom and for what, and we need to bring into focus the consequences of this flow of money. Ideally, we would do this in ways that can appeal to citizens regardless of their political ideology or party identification.

Other groups in the state, like Wisconsin United to Amend (WIUTA) and the Wisconsin Democracy campaign, each described below, are already engaged in doing work of this kind. While we can as individuals, and, perhaps, as an organization, contribute to and enhance their efforts, it would be good if we can identify activities and efforts that are distinct from, and additional to, the work of other organizations. This is especially true if we want to build OWR organizationally.

We should make “getting money out of politics” positions central to the selection and campaigns of OWR-endorsed candidates for office. OWR-endorsed candidates should run on platforms favoring measures to rid politics of big money, e.g., favoring a constitutional amendment and protections against special interests who are contributing to opponents’ campaigns.

Local OWR chapters might undertake sustained campaigns to expose and publicize the reliance of local representatives on the contributions of corporations and wealthy donors, and could link their representatives’ voting record to those contributions. Such campaigns could include letters to the editors of local newspapers. They could include (polite) confrontations with local representatives at their office hours, town halls, and candidate forums. Finally, they could include demonstrations outside their representatives’ offices, preceded with efforts to secure

local media coverage.

Another strategy would be collaborating with grassroots groups who are contesting issues against parties who are being funded by “big money.” OWR would support the cause of the grassroots’ groups, and, in return, grassroots issue groups would ally with OWR in exposing and opposing the “big money” supporting special interests. Issues around which such alliances and cooperation might be organized include private school vouchers, high-capacity well regulation, CAFO permits, sand fracking, sale of public lands, and proposals to privatize water utilities.

In addition, OWR might participate in a statewide rally against big money in politics. Such a rally or assembly could be held at a central location, e.g., Stevens Point, or there could be a series of regional rallies in places like Green Bay, Eau Claire, Ashland, Racine, etc.

Organizations active in the campaign against big money in politics could present their ideas for future efforts and for collaboration, and elected officials and political candidates could be invited to speak on the issue.

### **Talking to skeptics about Citizens United.**

Campaign finance reform – including efforts to limit political spending by corporations, unions and the super-wealthy – has historically been part of the conservative legacy. The Court’s decision rolled back nearly a century of laws – federal and state – passed by lawmakers from both sides of the aisle who, regardless of political affiliation, agreed that reasonable restrictions can and should be placed on campaign spending by powerful special interests in order to preserve our democracy.

A recent survey in of small business owners indicated that 66% of the small business owners polled felt that the Supreme Court’s ruling has been bad for small business. Additionally, 88% of those polled view money in politics negatively, including 68% who view it “very negatively.” Why do small businesses feel this way? It’s not hard to see why – most political contributions given to Super PACs and independent groups come from a very, very small pool of wealthy donors and giant corporations. · Though small businesses owners are now ‘free’ to make these unlimited political contributions, when it comes to political spending small business owners on Main St. can’t compete with Big Banks on Wall Street.

## Chapter 3: Fair Elections and a Real Democracy

As a result of the influence of big money in politics and because of many other factors, Wisconsin today lacks of a real democracy -- a democracy that truly represents all of the state's residents, not just urban elites and the wealthy.

One key step in making democracy work again in Wisconsin is fixing our electoral system. Voting is a right, not a privilege, and Wisconsin must start treating it as one.

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**Gerrymandering is an age-old problem in the American political system.** But it has reached new levels of sophistication and political distortion in the past decade. We see the harm done to democracy at both the federal and state levels.

Despite the public's overwhelmingly negative view of Congress, in the 2016 elections for the House of Representatives, only eight incumbents out of 435 representatives lost their re-election. The average electoral margin of victory was [37.1 percent](#). Why? The system is rigged by the politicians by dividing voting districts up so that incumbents are virtually guaranteed to win. When elections are not competitive, citizens lose the power of their vote. And that is exactly what the politicians aim for, in order to maintain and expand their power.

At the state level, Wisconsin is notorious for its gerrymandering of the state legislature. In 2012, Republicans won only 48.6 percent of the statewide vote, yet they won 60 of 99 seats in the state Assembly. In 2014, they collected 52 percent of the vote but won 63 Assembly seats. We supposedly live in a representative democracy, but the politicians are choosing their voters, not the other way around. No political party should be able to redistrict the state for partisan interests.

**Our Wisconsin Revolution proposes to solve these problems by taking redistricting away from the politicians and placing it in the hands of non-partisan commission.**

The most well-known model for this is Iowa, where both Republican and Democratic lawmakers support such a nonpartisan process. In fact, bills have been presented in the Wisconsin state legislature to do that. Senate Bill 13 and Assembly Bill 44 call for the creation of a non-partisan commission. If we want a true democracy, we need this kind of redistricting.

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**Wisconsin has one of the country's most [restrictive voter ID laws](#).**

In 2014 the legislature passed a law requiring photo ID to vote. At that time, an estimated 300,000 registered voters did not have a required type of photo ID. A [2017 study](#) concluded that the photo ID law deterred over 11 percent of survey respondents from voting. That is equivalent to nearly 17,000 registered voters in Dane and Milwaukee counties, and an

estimated 40,000 statewide. In addition, many respondents actually had proper voting ID, but did not vote because they believed they did not.

The official rationale for these restrictions is that they are needed to prevent voter fraud. Has there been significant voter fraud? Several studies have demonstrated that voter fraud is extremely rare, and there is no evidence of significant voter fraud in Wisconsin.

So why did the Republicans institute this restriction on voter rights? Wisconsin's Attorney General Brad Schimel, in a moment of candor and hubris during April of 2018, [bragged](#) that Donald Trump and Sen. Ron Johnson would not have won in Wisconsin if the state did not have such a restrictive voter ID law. In addition, Wisconsin Rep. Glenn Grothman has twice [admitted](#) that the voter ID law specifically hurts Democratic candidates.

### **Our Wisconsin Revolution proposes a simple solution to the problems generated by restrictive voter ID laws.**

Wisconsin should abolish photo ID laws, whose intent and effect is simply to reduce voter participation from specific demographic groups who tend to vote for the Democratic Party.

### **Additionally, we need to work to increase voter registration.**

A large percentage of Americans, including Wisconsinites, who are eligible to vote remain unregistered. The question is, why do people need to register? If we want a full-bodied democracy, we should aim to register all valid voters.

Nine states and the District of Columbia have instituted [automatic voter registration](#). Citizens are free to "opt-out" instead of being required to go through a process to "opt-in." Wisconsin should adopt automatic voter registration to enfranchise more of its citizens and increase democratic participation.

### **It's time to stop purging voter lists.**

In 2018, the state of Wisconsin [purged](#) over 650,000 voters from its voter lists, first simply because they hadn't voted in four years, and second because the state believed they may have moved. No doubt many of the people had moved or died, but we simply do not know how many voters were improperly dropped from the roles. In addition, citizens were dropped from the roles and afterwards received a simple postcard stating that they needed to contact the state in order to get reinstated. The state made very little effort to notify the public about this effort. How many people ignored the postcard in their pile of mail or were out of town at the time? We don't know.

While it is proper for the state to aim to maintain accurate voter roles, no one should be dropped from the roles unless there is strong evidence they are no longer eligible, and the state needs to do more to notify voters *before* they are purged and make substantial efforts to inform the public.

**Another way to suppress the vote is to [cut back on polling places](#).** This particularly impacts low-income and minority citizens who rely on public transportation. Instead, we call our our representatives to ensure that there are sufficient number and accessibility of locations for registration and for voting, taking into account finding solutions for those with limited means of transportation.

**Our elected representatives have also been imposing more and more limitations on early voting.**

In 2014, the state legislature passed a law to substantially reduce the availability of early voting, which is particularly popular among minority voters. The [courts ruled](#) that to be unconstitutional.

We call on our elected officials to ensure that there is sufficient opportunities for early voting in order to maximize democratic participation.

Another means to discourage voting is to have [long voting lines](#) at certain locations, in part as a result of restrictive and confusing voter ID laws. Scott Tranter, a Republican political consultant, has described voter ID laws — and generating long lines at polling places — [part of his party's tool kit](#). We believe it is imperative there be enough voting location and poll workers that citizens are not dissuaded from voting by long lines.

Simply put, one of the principal responsibilities of the government in a democracy is to fully enfranchise its citizens: to maximize the ability of voters to cast ballots and ensure that voting maps are created in a fair way. Since 2010, the Wisconsin government has been acting systematically against this principle and the fundamental rights of its citizens. We need to restore an authentic democracy to our state.

### **On native nations' sovereignty in our democracy**

Native Americans are citizens of their own nations, as well as citizens of their state and the United States. In Wisconsin there are 11 native nations, which reach out to the State on policy, legislation, and agreements.

Executive Order 39, signed in 2004, provides a forum for the executive cabinet agencies to consult with Native nations. For the most part, the consultations have been helpful in working out issues for the benefit of both the state and the tribes. But more is needed. Whenever laws and rules impact native nations, state and local agencies must follow the principle of [Free, Prior, and Informed Consent](#) as defined by the [United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#)

Say you'd like to talk to someone who might not be sympathetic with you right off the bat
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about creating a real democracy in Wisconsin. “Democracy” may be the most commonly held and non-partisan ideal in American politics. In your conversation with them, try to (1) show how our current political system fails to uphold the basic principles of democracy and (2) frame OWR as a proponent of an authentic democracy. Similarly, most everyone has a positive view of the ideal of “fairness,” and we want to identify OWR with this idea. One way to bring up these values is to start with a question: “do you think our political system should be a real democracy?” or “do you think we should have fair elections?” Virtually everyone will respond with “yes.” Then you can point to instances of how our political systems fails to live up to those ideals, and show that OWR has policies that would enact democracy and fairness.

## **Chapter 4: Good Jobs and a Living Wage**

Most of us spend a lot of our lives at work. For this reason, fighting for a more democratic and just workplace is essential to building a better society. Yet workers’ right to a good job and a voice in the workplace has been under attack for several decades in Wisconsin and the United States more broadly. Why? How did we get here, and how do we move forward?

Let’s be clear: workers’ rights are human rights. According to United Nations affiliate the International Labour Organization, workers have the right to associate freely, engage in mutual aid, and pursue better working conditions. Attacks on labor rights are nothing less than an attack on people’s entitlement to a healthy and fulfilling life. Unfortunately, the corporate class in the United States disagrees and has vigorously attacked workers’ hard-fought gains such as collective bargaining and a living wage. But that still doesn’t explain how it is America became one of the most unequal countries in the industrialized world with little respect for workers’ rights.

It’s a long and complicated story, but since the 1970s especially, big business has waged a successful class war against workers. The business class has invested billions of dollars in buying politicians, pushing legislation that favors the rich, funding pro-business think tanks, and corporatizing the news. The corporate class managed to convince the American public that it’s interests are our interests. The more money we give them, the more we subject everything—our jobs and our lives—to the market, the better off we’ll be.

There is perhaps no better example of these converging trends than right-to-work legislation. State by state, the business class has pushed these laws to weaken workers’ classic form of resistance, the union. Right-to-work laws forbid unions from requiring all employees at a worksite to join the union and pay dues. The result is known as the “free-rider problem”: people benefit from the unions’ activities without paying into them, resulting in a weakened union that can’t fight for workers’ rights. The 2018 Supreme Court case *Janus versus AFSCME* is just the transposition of big business’ attack on public sector workers to the national level.

Wisconsin is no different from this national trend. Act 10 was another major setback in the American labor movement's long history of decline. What was significant about Governor Walker's victory was what it symbolized. The business class won in a state with a long history of labor activism. Other states like Michigan and West Virginia have also recently become right-to-work. Big business and its allies convinced enough voters that unions are just another interest group who protect and enrich bad workers and slow down the economy. But perhaps the most damaging view they have peddled is that unions only represent their members. To an extent, this last part has been true.

The labor movement—and we mean unions, specifically—failed to counter corporate America's offensive. Whereas (some) unions had once been combative, grassroots organizations with progressive leaders, by the late twentieth century they had adopted what labor activists call “service-model unionism”. This is also true of Wisconsin. Unions became another form of insurance. They handled grievances in a bureaucratic manner rather than being dynamic, member-controlled, and civic organizations that organized entire communities around progressive and popular ideas. They spent union members' money on donations to Democrats, who too often went ahead with the business class' agenda of free (rather than fair) trade, low wages, and so-called “welfare reform.” The good news is that stultified unions, as a result of the new political landscape, are rediscovering the organizing ethos. The recent teachers' strikes sweeping the nation show what a militant grassroots movement with roots in the community can do.

Nevertheless, income inequality in the US is pervasive. Americans can't afford a decent quality of life, let alone find the time to make it fulfilling. The classic vehicle of working-class resistance, the unions, have been badly beaten. The corporate class controls both mainstream parties, leaving most Americans without genuine representation.

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### **What does OWR propose we do?**

First things first, let's be crystal clear about what the American people want. Let's start with some basics. We believe that all people have the right to a good job. The desire for a “good job” is universal. A good job can be defined as one that's safe (occupationally and environmentally) and sustainable. It's a job that provides equal access to advancement opportunities and the ability to negotiate for improvements. It includes employees with various forms of disability, temporary/contract employees, and incarcerated employees of the state or private industry. At the very least, a good job is one that provides a living, rather than a starvation, wage.

Here's some more info on what we think constitutes a good job:

1. The Right to Unionize – The right to form a union encapsulates every other workers' right. Workers must have the right to associate freely, practice mutual aid, voice grievances, and organize themselves to fight for theirs and the public's collective betterment. In our day-to-day lives, we wouldn't tolerate arbitrary and authoritarian decisions from the

government. Why should the boss be allowed to act any different? The union can be workers' best protection at work.

2. Employee & Environmental Safety – No occupation, despite any potential promised rewards, should endanger the life or health of a worker. In 2015, at least 4,836 workers died on the job. It's estimated [another 50,000 to 60,000 die each year](#) from occupational diseases in the United States.

3. Sustainability – Defined as a position that offers long term employment, and that was created with the intent of being a sustained permanent position. Temporary employment [accounts for 40% of new job listings in some areas](#), with younger women and people of color being the most likely to fill these unstable and low income rolls, with affordable benefits rarely available.

4. Living Wage - The \$15 per hour wage that is commonly suggested as a living wage is more accurately a survival wage. [A living wage is one that provides for advancement in society.](#)

5. Equal Access/Advancement – While no institutions aside from organized labor institutions have offered (for some) a realistic opportunity for workplace equality (primarily in manufacturing), elected officials [have a responsibility to strengthen and appoint](#) competent and adequate staff to those government agencies responsible for enforcing the workplace equality laws that exist.

6. Access to good jobs and all that comes with it begins with [equal access to educational opportunities](#). An affordable and equally accessible quality public education, including vocational education and secondary education are the gateway to good jobs.

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## **How does Our Wisconsin Revolution plan to make these ideas a reality?**

### **#1: Educate.**

We have to remind the overwhelming majority of the American public that they are workers who have nothing in common with billionaires and millionaires. Like the bosses, Trump and the Republicans will try to divide us and pit us against one another. But the truth is that regardless of your heritage, where you were born, the language you speak, the color of your skin, your religious beliefs (or lack thereof), sex, gender identity or orientation, we all work for someone else. For a significant portion of our lives, our time is not our own. The fruits of our labor benefit some private interest. This is what unites us as workers. OWR aims to educate people to recognize themselves as workers with a shared interest—that is truly the public interest—and to fight for it.

### **#2: Vote.**

OWR is a political organization. We campaign for politicians who will defend the above-mentioned rights and protections. We campaign for politicians who believe in taxing the rich, making Medicare for all, investing in public schools, expanding vocational education and job re-training programs, enacting environmental protections and health standards, guaranteeing paid vacation for all and paid parental leave, promoting fair trade, and giving subsidies to cooperatives rather than multinational corporations like Walmart, Amazon, or Foxconn.

Every revolution should have an idea of where it wants to go, and how it would improve every aspect of daily life. OWR aims to rekindle Americans' commitment to democracy and extend its principles to the workplace to improve our material conditions and to make life more fulfilling.

Today, many people don't think of the job as a place for politics. Work is boring, unfulfilling, and/or exploitative and that's just the way things are. Workers who defend their rights are portrayed as ungrateful troublemakers.

When talking to folks about workers' rights, it's best to start by listening. Ask them if they're happy with their job? Are they paid enough? Do they get enough time to rest and recover? What health hazards do they face? Do they worry about being fired? Are their benefits secure? Do they have a union? Regardless of whether they answer positively or negatively, the next step is to get them to identify with other workers who are struggling. If they themselves are in a tight spot, it's important to show them they're not alone. If they're doing well, then our task is to convince them to identify with and support other working people. Ask them: is it right that so many people working a 40-hour week live in poverty or paycheck to paycheck? Should bosses have so much power over people's wellbeing and happiness? Shouldn't politicians invest in working people and in good jobs rather than multinational corporations? Can an authentic democracy function if people are too tired to participate or intimidated at work, where they spend much of their lives?

In the end, you can simplify workers' rights to two basic principles, one material and the other philosophic, that resonate with many Americans: a fair day's wage for a fair day's work and freedom from tyranny. The hard part is framing these two principles in terms of solidarity—an injury to one is an injury to all—rather than individual advancement or protection. Not because we don't care about the individual, but because by ourselves we can't possibly take on the corporate class. We have to remind working people that we are many while the bosses are few.

## **Chapter 5: Quality Education as a Fundamental Right**

In order to become workers with a fair shot at the American dream, all children must be entitled to free and high-quality public education. Education has historically been the way that Americans can move up in life, and for this reason, education should be free -- *all* children should be able to improve their lot.

Wisconsin, which used to be a leader nationwide when it came to public education, has been falling behind. Wisconsin is facing a real crisis when it comes to K-12 education funding. For the first time in memory, Wisconsin has fallen below the national average for funding per student. Since 2001, the number of students in need of free and reduced lunch rates in Wisconsin has grown -- from 21% to 43%. Rural districts are also facing a huge problem with fewer kids and rising poverty (today, 75% of our students are located in just 30% of our districts).

Since 2011, many districts in Wisconsin have passed referenda to increase public school funding. The pass rate for these referenda has been immense: around 80%. Tellingly, about 80% of the referenda are in rural school districts. This shows voter dedication to education, despite their having to rely upon disproportionately lower property tax valuations.

Our Wisconsin Revolution believes that we can do better.

Specifically, Wisconsin must:

- Provide salaries, benefits, working conditions and a career structures that attract and retain the most capable teachers
- Halt public financing of vouchers
- Increase state funding for public schools, and amend the funding formula to give more priority to the success of disadvantaged students.

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**How can Wisconsin attract and retain excellent teachers?**

Teachers must be paid more, especially in the early stages of their careers when education is competing with other professions to attract talent and skill. Schools are competing with other employers for talent, and if we want to recruit high quality teachers into the profession we have to pay them properly.

Teachers also need working conditions that enable them to do their best work. Schools need to be safe and inviting for teachers, as well as for students. In order to individualize instruction teachers need to be able to know their students individually: middle and high school teachers who teach more than 100 students -- some more than 200 students -- in a school year can't do that because it simply can't be done.

Teachers must also be treated as professionals. They need an infrastructure for professional learning, in which they can observe and be observed, equip themselves with the skills associated with best practices. As in other professions, excellent practitioners need to *acknowledged and rewarded* for excellence in their profession.

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**To fix our education system, we also need to urgently halt funding for voucher schools.**

The evidence suggests that the so-called “school choice” or voucher experiment in Wisconsin has failed.

Students in voucher schools do not outperform students in the schools they would otherwise attend, and we do not have any evidence that the introduction of markets has improved the public schools with which they compete. Milwaukee has the longest running, one of the most extensive, and one of the best-designed voucher systems in America: after 25 years, if vouchers were a success, there ought to be some evidence, at least coming from Milwaukee.

If choice were the panacea that its advocates say it is, Milwaukee should be performing off the charts in terms of educational outcomes. Instead Milwaukee's performance continues to lag other large cities: In a recent comparison of 8<sup>th</sup> grade math tests scores in 13 cities in 2009, 2011, and 2013, with the comparison group including Houston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Miami and Chicago, the scores for Milwaukee were lower than for any other city but Detroit. Vouchers are not the answer.

“School choice” is not the way to go. Our education system must focus on improving educational outcomes from regular public schools, through increasing supports for learning outside the schools, increasing funding and making it more equitable, and improving the recruitment, retention, and practice, of skilled teachers and school leaders.

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**It's time to increase state funding for high-need schools and students.**

Wisconsin has large achievement gaps between affluent and low-income children. This gap results in diminished prospects for low-income children in future earnings, employment opportunities, as well as health and mental health outcomes; and wastes talent that our society could put to productive use. Schools with a high concentration of low-income students also find it more difficult to recruit and retain high quality teachers and administrators, which are the key to improving the quality of schooling.

To help schools with the added costs of high-need students, we propose an adjustment to the State funding formula, with an added increment of 0.5 of the per-pupil amount for each student eligible for

Reduced Lunch and 0.8 of the per-pupil amount for each student eligible for Free Lunch.

The adjustment to the funding formula would enable Districts with disadvantaged populations to attract high quality teaching and administrative staff and hire additional support.

[Several states already include an increment to supplement the education of disadvantaged students.](#) Delaware includes an aid of .78 of regular funding for districts with 30% poverty or greater. California provides an additional .2 for each disadvantaged student, and a further .5 per disadvantaged student for districts with high concentrations of disadvantaged students. Minnesota, Utah, Ohio, New Jersey, South Dakota, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Indiana, and North Carolina all have increments of .1 or more. Countries, such as the Netherlands [and the United Kingdom](#) have much more progressive national funding formulas that recognize the additional challenge that educating children who are socio-economically disadvantaged create for schools

The State of Wisconsin should adjust the education funding formula to address the costs borne by low income communities in the state. As an incremental step in this direction, the legislature should immediately create this additional aid as a supplement before the more onerous project of rewriting the formula can be realized. The measure should apply initially only to new State appropriations in order to avoid harming the current budgets of the State's school districts. Adjusting the formula to establish additional funds for districts serving disadvantaged opportunities will ensure all Wisconsin students have a fair chance at a bright future.

Some of your friends, neighbors, relatives, and colleagues are skeptical that anything is wrong with public schooling in Wisconsin. Others believe a lot is wrong. How can you be persuasive?

- Wisconsin, like all States, has large gaps in achievement especially between lower and higher income students, but also between African-American and White students. Some will agree that this constitutes a deep unfairness in access to economic, social, and personal success. Others will disagree: but even they will often agree that it is a terrible waste of human potential that we should address if we can.

- We have plenty of evidence that students in schools with better teachers and better principals learn more; reducing those achievement gaps, without harming the achievement of more advantaged students, can only be done with an influx of talent and skill into the schools. For that, we need increased funding: teachers' salaries need to be more competitive with those of other professions. But we also need to improve the working conditions for teachers and principals; especially making it a profession in which high quality performance leads to advancement.

## **Chapter 6: Health Care for All**

We are all affected by the health care system, but both cost and access to care are unequal. The care we receive depends on our race, gender, where we live, the job we have, our age, our income and many other factors. For decades, we have depended on a fragmented system that treats some very well and millions very poorly.

The consequences of our policies are myriad. Tens of millions of people are uninsured. As a proportion of GNP, we pay twice as much as other industrialized nations do for healthcare. Along with the uninsured there are many who are underinsured or who can't pay the deductibles and thus can't use the insurance they have. Bankruptcy, preventable diseases, homelessness and even death are consequences of our present policies. Even for those who are insured there is stress dealing with our insurance companies when they deny care or have other policies that interfere with our rights to choose a doctor or make decisions regarding our own care.

Our current system deprives so many largely because of the way it is funded. A large part of the funds go to insurance company shareholders and their executive salaries. The same problem holds true for for-profit hospitals and clinics. Even so-called non-profit facilities contribute to the problem.

Our Wisconsin Revolution believes that health care is a human right. What we mean by that is that all human lives have equal value and thus equal right to the necessities to maintain that life. The American ideal of freedom involves health, and those who are sick or injured and unable to get adequate health care are not free. For this reason, health care is a human right. We want a system that treats all equally, covers physical and mental health and allows us to have more control over our own decisions.

## **Our health care system does not have to be this way.**

There are several models that we can look at as examples of health policies that cover the mental and physical needs of our citizens and contribute to a healthier economy. The two major systems are either a government run system such as in Great Britain (an example in the US would be the VA system) or a system that provides public health insurance but leaves the care provided up to public or private hospitals, clinics and practitioners.

In the US Medicare is an example of the public insurance model. So, compared to our current situation, what advantages come with Medicare for All, if it were truly expanded to cover all?

First, we can stop large scale waste. Now we pay for administration of multiple insurance plans, marketing of those plans, lobbying and high executive pay. If a single payer such as the government were to handle the financing along with the same benefits for all, the money saved would go a long way toward paying for such a system.

Also, our costs have been rising at more than the rate of inflation. With a single payer system those costs could be stabilized. With the purchasing power of the entire population and the ability to negotiate for prices of all pharmaceuticals and services, care will become more affordable. Also, with preventative care available to all, use of emergency rooms and nursing homes will decrease and treatment of chronic conditions will be less expensive. Given the United States' aging population, it is critical that long-term care in the community is included in Medicare for All.

With Medicare for All, decisions about our health care will be left in the hands of patients and their health care providers. No longer will patients be restricted to a limited network but be free to use any accredited services. There will be more focus on preventative care along with both mental and physical health care needs. Included would be substance abuse treatment, dental, vision and reproductive care, including abortion.

Our health care delivery network will become more equal also under this system. No longer will there be a big problem with rural hospitals closing or a decline in the numbers of doctors and other health care professionals. Underfunded government facilities will be on an equal footing. The ability to negotiate fees and budgets will provide more equality.

Bernie Sanders has introduced a Medicare for All bill in the Senate (S. 1804) with 15 co-sponsors as of April 15, 2018. The more ambitious "Expanded and Improved Medicare for All" bill in the House (H.R. 676) has 122 co-sponsors as of April 15, 2018. We have begun a nationwide conversation about a better way to solve our health care dilemma. The Affordable Care Act did provide a path forward to covering millions of uninsured, but as we all know that is being dismantled. We will continue to advocate for a Medicare for All policy as a solution to our national dilemma.

## **Here in Wisconsin, there's a lot we can do.**

While we move toward a nationwide health policy we can't forget that many decisions regarding health care are made on a local level – both statewide and in our counties. Decisions about everything from vaccination requirements for school children, to medical licenses, to budget appropriations for public hospitals and much more are left to our local governments. We also have to remember that the insurance the state provides for its employees is second only to Medicaid as a proportion of our health dollars. The state is also responsible for prison health care which is most often inadequate especially for mental health and addiction services. We provide emergency ambulance and first responder care as part of our local taxes. There are many decisions that our county boards, village boards and city governments make that impact our health care.

The decision that was made not to take the federal funding in the ACA for Medicaid expansion was a decision made by our governor. The state has also tightened the eligibility requirements for BadgerCare and BadgerCarePlus in an effort to limit the availability of services to people in need. From 2000 to 2012 the percentage of Wisconsin citizens covered by employer sponsored insurance fell by over 14%, which is an example of some of the dysfunction of our current system and how it has an effect on all of us. The ACA requirement that everyone have insurance, along with other policy decisions, has lowered the number of uninsured in Wisconsin by over 200,000 in recent years. But that has come to an end.

Also, Governor Walker has been overhauling the long-term care system in Wisconsin. He said he was committed to expand innovative programs to allow persons with disabilities “to live more independently.” Unfortunately, the counties around the state that had the best practices for home care, are in complete confusion. The decision to use out-of-state insurance companies to handle the new “Family Care” has left patients and providers in a bureaucratic black hole.

When talking to skeptics, remind them that Medicare is an example of the type of system we are advocating. Just ask anyone with coverage if they would give it up. Ask people if their parents or grandparents have been denied care. Fears that government would dictate treatment or limit access to care has not been borne out with our current system.

Remind people that we pay twice (as a percentage of GNP) what other similar countries pay with often worse outcomes. Much of the fear around supporting Medicare for All has come from the mistaken notion that the costs would be extreme and unmanageable. On the contrary, the dollars that go to insurance premiums to cover administrative costs, executive salaries and stockholder profits would be saved. Also, the ability to negotiate drug and treatment costs would lower the overall health budget.

## Chapter 7: Defending Our Environment

Wisconsin used to be a national leader in environmental protection and natural resource and it has a long and continuing tradition of native peoples acting as stewards of the Earth, and it has a long and continuing tradition of native peoples acting as stewards of the Earth. But since 2010, the attack on the environment and science has been relentless. Hundreds of environmental regulations have been weakened or eliminated. Staffing for the lead environmental agency has been reduced by [22 percent and its ability to provide scientific knowledge has been limited.](#)

Here at Our Wisconsin Revolution, we say it's time to return to common sense environmental protections and scientifically-based natural resource management. In the process we will strengthen democratic principles, social justice, and our economy.

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### **End the politicization of the DNR.**

Prior to 1995, the head of the DNR had either been a scientist or a career DNR staff member and was appointed by a citizen Natural Resource Board. In 1995 the DNR Secretary began to be appointed by the Governor. In 2012 Governor Walker selected a real estate developer to head the agency with the mandate to create a “chamber of commerce” culture at the DNR. Meanwhile, the influence of the Natural Resources Board has been diminished significantly.

We believe it's time to minimize political influence on the DNR. We can do this by strengthening the influence of the citizen Natural Resource Board and reinstating the policy of that the head of the DNR be scientist appointed by the board.

### **End the attack on science.**

Natural resource policy must be based on scientific knowledge, and in a democracy, people need access to scientific knowledge. But the current administration has eliminated the DNR Bureau

of Research, terminating work related to climate change. Also, information about climate change has been scrubbed from the agency's website. Scientists no longer routinely appear at legislative hearings regarding environmental laws to offer a science-based evaluation of proposed legislation. The agency has also severely restricted press access to its staff, curtailed weekly newspaper articles by staff and ended the environmental education program.

Our Wisconsin Revolution calls on the state to rebuild the science programs and staff of the DNR. It's time to educate the public about scientific findings, encourage DNR scientists to advise state government and give media free access to scientists, and base environmental and natural resource policy on science.

### **Restore local control.**

In the past, county and town governments were able to adopt environmental protections based on local conditions and citizen input. Since 2010, the legislature has prohibited many environmental protections enacted by local governments. For example, shoreland zoning is governed by a state law, but counties used to have wide latitude to seek citizen input and adopt stricter regulations to protect sensitive shorelines. However, in 2016 the legislature changed state regulations from minimum to maximum standards.

We believe it's time to return local control for environmental protections and return state standards to minimum rather than maximum requirements.

### **Pursue clean energy.**

Market forces favor the transition to clean energy, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics has stated that job growth in clean energy will be the fastest of any sector. The federal Clean Power Plan, developed during the Obama administration, aimed to speed the transition to a clean energy economy. Wisconsin, however, was one of 24 states to challenge the plan. It also incentivized fossil fuels and discouraged wind and solar power. As a result, Wisconsin lags behind other Midwestern states in clean energy and the jobs they create.

Instead, Wisconsin should create policies that encourage a rapid shift to clean energy and energy efficiency, helping to protect our environment while creating thousands of locally-based jobs.

### **Protect Clean Air and Clean Water Acts.**

Clean air and water are the fuel for a \$20 billion tourism industry as well as supporting our agriculture and forest industries and preserving safe drinking water for all. Wisconsin was often a leader in making improvements to the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, going beyond federal mandates to improve the environment. Since 2010, state government has reduced regulations to the federal minimum standards.

This is a problem. We call on our elected representatives to develop strong state and local protections to ensure clean air and water.

### **Protect our wetlands.**

Wetlands are essential habitats for birds, fish, and other aquatic life, and are critical to fishing and hunting. They help keep our water purified and moderate droughts and floods. Since 2010, the state government has weakened wetland regulations, allowing more wetland destruction from filling and mining. Recently the legislature passed a bill that exempts over a million acres of non-federal wetlands from permitting requirements and allows destruction of these aquatic habitats without a permit or oversight by the DNR. We call for an end to the elimination of our wetlands and call for protection mechanisms to be put back in place.

### **Guarantee clean and safe groundwater.**

The quality and quantity of our groundwater is essential to the health of our environment, agriculture, and rural wells. In the Central Sands area of the state, high capacity wells are adversely impacting surface waters. In 2015, contrary to Wisconsin Supreme Court rulings, Attorney General Van Hollen issued an opinion that DNR could no longer evaluate impacts to surface waters by high capacity wells. This was followed by legislation that made high capacity well approvals permanent, eliminating periodic review of permits. Meanwhile, the state is ignoring groundwater contamination caused by manure from large Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO's) and by nitrate contamination from intensive row crop agriculture, making water undrinkable for people in some areas.

Our Wisconsin Revolution believes it's time to reinstate limits and periodic reviews of high capacity wells, and adopt legislation that ensures our groundwater is safe to drink for all Wisconsinites.

### **Common-sense mining regulations and safety precautions.**

Before 2010, Wisconsin had common-sense regulations on mining to protect our water, soil, and air from contamination. Since 2010, the state government has weakened mining regulations. It passed legislation to allow iron mining. It limited the ability of local governments to protect itself against frac-sand mining. It overturned the 1997 "prove it first" law that required sulfide mining companies to show, rather than just say, that it is able to extract metals and minerals without contaminating the water. In addition, it reduced the financial responsibility of mining companies for future contamination. Weakened mining regulations also limit the ability of native tribes to preserve environmental quality on their reservations. And the "Mining for America Act" eliminates the right of citizens to challenge the accuracy of mining company information in a contested case hearing prior to the issuance of any mining permit.

We believe it's time to reinstate regulations that protect our water, soil, and air from contamination, and ensure that mining companies pay for any degradation of the environment

that they cause. We call on our electeds to restore the contested case hearing prior to any decision to approve or deny a mining permit. And we believe that the State of Wisconsin must be required to consult with Native Nations prior to any mining permitting process that could affect native treaty rights.

### **Protect fish and wildlife.**

Aldo Leopold helped develop a wildlife management system that relied on science and citizen input. Since 2010, state government has allowed politics to weaken and distort wildlife management. In the face of the spread of chronic wasting disease among deer, the government has loosened standards for baiting and feeding deer despite clear evidence that this facilitates the spread of the disease. The legislature also has proposed eliminating DNR research, monitoring and management of gray wolves not directly related to wolf depredation unless wolves are removed from the endangered species list. The result would be the termination of vital monitoring of wolf populations and disease. This legislation complicates the work of law enforcement officers, raises the risk of future litigation with Wisconsin's Chippewa Tribes over co-management status, and could jeopardize Wisconsin's continued eligibility to receive federal Pittman-Robertson funding.

We call on the state to allow and enable the DNR to study deer and wolf populations, and enact common-sense laws that limit the spread of chronic wasting disease.

There are several tactics for raising concern about the environment to those who are not strongly inclined that way. One simple tactic is to always use the positive term “environmental *protections*” instead of the more negative “environmental *regulations*.” (Conservatives are aware of this, and always use the term “regulations.”) Here in Wisconsin, it is worth highlighting how our state has such a strong tradition of environmental conservation (Aldo Leopold, Gaylord Nelson), thus associating conservation with the identity of Wisconsin. In addition, with some audiences it helps to associate environmental protections with habitat and wildlife conservation, highlighting the benefits to hunting and fishing, thus reaching out to those who participate in those sports. With other audiences, it is good to associate environmental protections with human health, especially of our children. Conservatives have long framed environmental discussions in terms of “jobs versus the environment.” We should link environmental conservation to a strong economy, including our tourism industry, farming (loss of water quantity), and forestry (climate change is damaging timber production). And finally, we can raise the non-partisan issue of local control. In several ways, the state government has taken away the freedom of local governments to protect their natural resources.

## Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read through this booklet outlining our vision, and our proposed solution for how to fix what's wrong in this state and nationally.

Now let's do something about it together.

If you'd like to find a local Our Wisconsin Revolution chapter near you, or learn more about the concrete work we do to identify and train candidates, develop policy, raise popular consciousness, and grow the movement, check out our website, at [ourwisconsinrev.com](http://ourwisconsinrev.com). There, you'll also find a toolkit for activists with tips on how to successfully lobby your electeds, write an op-ed or blog post, and much more.

We currently have 26 Our Wisconsin Revolution chapters statewide. For more info, email our statewide organizer, Max Love, at [max@ourwisconsinrev.com](mailto:max@ourwisconsinrev.com).

And if you have any questions or suggestions or comments on how to improve this booklet (it's a living document!), please email [info@ourwisconsinrev.com](mailto:info@ourwisconsinrev.com) or call 724-557-6269. You can also reach us with letters at:

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