

representatives, and providing such information is “an essential function of a representative government.” Wis. Stat. § 19.31 (Declaration of Policy). As the Wisconsin Supreme Court has observed, “If Wisconsin were not known as the Dairy State it could be known, and rightfully so, as the Sunshine State. All branches of Wisconsin government have, over many years, kept a strong commitment to transparent government.” *Schill v. WI Rapids School Dist.*, 2010 WI 86, ¶ 1, 327 Wis. 2d 572, 580, ¶1 (Abrahamson, C.J., lead opinion). Defendants have failed Wisconsin’s clean government traditions by refusing to comply with their responsibilities under the public records law.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

3. CMD is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization engaged in investigative reporting and research, with headquarters located at 122 W. Washington Ave., Suite 555, Madison, WI 53703.

4. CMD is a “requester” as that term is defined in Wis. Stat. § 19.32(3) and as used in throughout Wisconsin’s public records law, Wis. Stat. §§ 19.31-19.39.

5. Defendant Office of the Governor is an “authority” as that term is defined in Wis. Stat. § 19.32(1) and as that term is used throughout the public records law, §§ 19.31-19.39, and Governor Walker is the legal custodian of the Office of the Governor’s records pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 19.33(4). Defendants have a legal duty to disclose records in response to a lawful request.

6. On February 5, 2015, Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) Staff Writer Jonas Persson submitted a request to Defendants for “All communications or contacts

between the Office of the Governor, and the following individuals regarding the 2015–17 Executive Budget Bill’s changes to ch. 36 of the Wisconsin statutes: Nathan Schwanz, Michael Heifetz, Mike Huebsch.”

7. The requested documents are “records” as the term is defined in Wis. Stat. § 19.32(2) and as used throughout the Public Records Law, Wis. Stat. §§ 19.31-19.39. The requested records pertain to Defendants’ role in writing Wisconsin’s 2015-2017 budget, specifically provisions in Chapter 36 pertaining to the removal of “the search for truth” and the “Wisconsin Idea” from the University of Wisconsin System’s mission statement.

8. On May 8, ninety-two days after CMD submitted its request, Defendants partially denied the request, declaring, in this order, that (1) records were being withheld under the attorney client communications and attorney work product exemptions, (2) records were being withheld under the “common law balancing test,” arguing specifically that the records are protected under a purported deliberative process privilege and alleging that the deliberative records are of little public value, and (3) that those same records were not “records” at all but fell under the “drafts” exemption in Wis. Stat. § 19.32(2). A true and correct copy of Defendants’ response is attached hereto as Exhibit A. As described below, these claims are unsupportable under Wisconsin law.

THE RECORDS CANNOT BE PROTECTED BY ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE

9. In their May 9 letter, Defendants claimed the following:

“We have withheld some records that consist of privileged attorney-client communications and protected attorney work product. The confidentiality of attorney-client communications and work product are highly valued public policies protected throughout Wisconsin law. See, e.g., *Wis. Newspress, Inc. v. Sch.*

Dist. of Sheboygan Falls, 199 Wis. 2d 768, 782-83 (1996) (recognizing the attorney-client privilege as an exception to the public records law); *Seifert v. Sch. Dist. of Sheboygan Falls*, 2007 Wis. App. 207, at ¶ 28 (protected work product)."

10. There is no indication that an attorney-client relationship existed between the office of the governor and the named individuals, none of whom are attorneys, according to the State Bar of Wisconsin. If any such relationship did exist, it would only apply to a very limited number of records that would be responsive to this request.

11. The "attorney work product" exemption only encompasses materials compiled by an attorney in anticipation of litigation. *Seifert v. Sch. Dist. of Sheboygan Falls*, 2007 WI App 207, ¶ 28, 305 Wis. 2d 582, ¶ 28. There was no litigation pertaining to the Executive Budget Bill or Chapter 36 planned or anticipated at the time of the request; indeed, months later, no lawsuits pertaining to the subjects of the request have been filed. The attorney work product exemption cannot justify the withholding of records responsive to this request.

THE RECORDS CANNOT BE WITHHELD UNDER A CLAIMED "DELIBERATIVE
PROCESS PRIVILEGE"

12. Defendants declare that, by applying the common-law balancing test, they "have withheld certain documents consisting of preliminary analysis and deliberations created and exchanged by and among employees of DOA and employees of the Governor's office in preparation of the Governor's budget, before the budget legislation was introduced in the legislature."

13. In applying the balancing test, it is only in an "exceptional case" where the Public Records Law's strong presumption in favor of disclosure can be overcome, and

only then if the authority can describe specific public policy concerns that would require secrecy. *Hempel v. City of Baraboo*, 2005 WI 120, ¶ 63, 284 Wis. 2d 162, ¶ 63.

14. Defendants claim that the strong public interest in disclosure of records and in monitoring the activities of government is overcome by the public's purported interest in protecting the deliberative process, asserting that:

"A candid, complete, and creative evaluation of the state's finances within DOA and within the Governor's office is inherent to the development of the Governor's executive budget. Making these internal discussions just as open to disclosure as the final version of the budget would inhibit the free exchange of ideas, opinions, proposals, and recommendations among those involved in deciding what to include in the final legislation. Disclosure of this narrow category of records—limited to discussions within DOA, within the Governor's office, and between the two--would discourage frank internal discussion and harm the quality of the final executive decision. Further, it would disincentivize the free exchange of emails and written documentation necessary to hone the precise language and calculations that are key to proper budget development. Without a doubt, this would significantly inhibit the efficiency and efficacy of the employees who develop the detailed language and financial calculations for the budget."

15. Despite claiming that protecting the deliberative process amounts to an "exceptional case" that can override the strong public interest in disclosure, the Wisconsin Supreme Court, in a 6-1 decision, has stated unequivocally that Wisconsin law does not recognize a deliberative process privilege. *Sands v. Whitnall Sch. Dist.*, 2008 WI 89, ¶48 n.12, ¶¶ 60-70, 312 Wis. 2d 1, ¶48 n.12, ¶¶ 60-70. The Wisconsin Attorney General has also emphasized that, for purposes of the Public Records Law, "Wisconsin law does not recognize a deliberative process privilege." *Wisconsin Public Records Law Wis. Stat. §§ 19.31-19.39 Compliance Outline*, Wisconsin Department of Justice, 28.

16. This appears to be the first instance since Wisconsin began drafting executive budgets in 1929 that the governor and the Department of Administration

have claimed that the budget drafting process is exempt from Wisconsin's Public Records Law.

17. Defendants' position is unsupportable under Wisconsin law, and they cannot cite to any statute or common law precedent that sustains their position. Instead, Defendants cite to non-binding federal statutory law:

"The public interests supporting nondisclosure here have long been nationally recognized, including in federal law. See Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 USC § 552(b)(5); *Bureau of National Affairs v. U.S. Department of Justice*, 742 F.2d 1484 (D.C. Cir. 1984)."

18. 5 USC § 552(b)(5) provides an exemption from disclosure under the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) for "inter-agency or intra-agency memorandums or letters which would not be available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the agency." Federal courts have found that § 552(b)(5) explicitly recognizes a deliberative process exception to FOIA.

19. The federal FOIA law does not apply to states. *State ex rel. Hill v. Zimmerman*, 196 Wis. 2d 419, 428 n.6, 538 N.W.2d 608, 612 n.6 (Ct. App. 1995). Although Wisconsin Courts have in certain instances found the public policies expressed in the FOIA exceptions relevant to the application of the common law balancing test, they have only done so when those exceptions overlap with Wisconsin statutory exemptions and with the public policies represented in Wisconsin common law. *Linzmeier v. Forcey*, 2002 WI 84, ¶¶ 32-33, 254 Wis. 2d 306, ¶¶ 32-33. At best, the FOIA exemptions can be persuasive authority when they reflect Wisconsin's statutory exemptions and Wisconsin common law. *Id.*

20. That is not the case here. No parallel “deliberative process” exception exists in Wisconsin law, and the Wisconsin Supreme Court has declared unequivocally that under Wisconsin law, “no such ‘deliberative process privilege’ has ever been recognized by the Wisconsin courts.” *Sands* 2008 WI 89, ¶50, 312 Wis. 2d 1, ¶50.

21. In fact, Wisconsin courts have repeatedly noted that the Wisconsin Public Records Law has been more effective than the federal FOIA, in large part because FOIA includes much broader exemptions, which have allowed more federal records to be withheld from the public. *Zimmerman* at 428 fn. 6, citing *Wisconsin Family Counseling Servs., Inc. v. State*, 95 Wis. 2d 670, 672-73, 291 N.W.2d 631, 633-34 (Ct. App. 1980). Wisconsin’s Public Records Law has long reflected a strong policy of transparency and access, and in contrast with federal courts interpreting FOIA, Wisconsin courts have declined to open “very large loopholes which can be used to prevent access to significant categories of data.” *Id.* Yet that is precisely the situation that Defendants are seeking to create.

22. If Defendants’ claims were to stand, it would undermine Wisconsin’s public records law by deploying the same overly-broad loopholes that have weakened access to information held by federal agencies.

23. At the time the Wisconsin public records law was updated in 1979, the role of the governor’s office and the DOA in drafting a budget was well-established, and the legislature declined to exempt those agencies or the budget drafting process from the law’s disclosure requirements, for more than 35 years.

24. Defendants are attempting to unilaterally graft a new deliberative process exception to Wisconsin's Public Records Law, one which runs directly contrary both to the clear directives of the Wisconsin Supreme Court and contrary to the legislature's declaration that it is "the public policy of this state that all persons are entitled to the greatest possible information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those officers and employees who represent them." Wis. Stat. § 19.31.

DISCLOSURE IS COMPELLED BECAUSE THE PUBLIC INTEREST IN THESE
RECORDS IS SIGNIFICANT

25. Defendants additionally claim that, under the balancing test, "the public interest in accessing these particular records is limited," since:

"All legislation is publicly available once it is introduced, and numerous documents are produced and released to the public explaining and justifying the specifics of the executive budget. Thus, pursuant to the required balancing test, we have concluded that the public interest in protecting the quality of the executive decision-making process and maintaining the efficiency and efficacy of the budget writing process outweighs the public interest in the release of these materials."

26. Effectively, Defendants are claiming that there is little public interest in the budget drafting process, and that the public should accept whatever the government voluntarily chooses to release. This is directly contrary to Wisconsin's strong traditions of open government and the role of the public records law in ensuring government oversight. "The right of the people to monitor the people's business is one of the core principles of democracy." *Schill*, 327 Wis. 2d 572, ¶2 (plurality opinion). The open records law "reaffirms that the people have not only the opportunity but also the right to know what the government is doing and to monitor the government."

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel v. City of Milwaukee, 2012 WI 65, ¶4, 341 Wis. 2d 607, 815

N.W.2d 367. “Transparency and oversight are essential to honest, ethical governance.”

John K. MacIver Institute for Public Policy, Inc. v. Erpenbach, 2014 WI App 49, ¶32, 354 Wis. 2d 61, ¶32.

27. The deliberations and discussions involved in the development of public policy are of the utmost public interest. The importance of transparency and public oversight is heightened when it comes to the two-year budget, which is usually the most important piece of legislation in a biennial legislative session. And, the public’s interest in these particular records, which pertain to changes to the University of Wisconsin System’s mission statement, is particularly compelling.

28. The question of how and why the governor used the budget to strike “the search for truth” and the “Wisconsin Idea” from the mission of the University of Wisconsin System has attracted significant media attention in Wisconsin and around the country. Outlets ranging from the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* to the *Wisconsin State Journal* to the *Washington Post* have written multiple articles on the issue, as have editorial boards at outlets like the *New York Times*.¹ See also Exhibit B.

¹ Karen Herzog, “Walker Proposes Changing Wisconsin Idea – Then Backs Away,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Feb. 4, 2015, available at <http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/scott-walkers-uw-mission-rewrite-could-end-the-wisconsin-idea-b99439020z1-290797681.html>; Dan Simmons, “Scott Walker Backtracks From Striking ‘Truth,’ ‘Human Condition’ from Wisconsin Idea,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, Feb. 5, 2015, available at http://host.madison.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/scott-walker-backtracks-from-striking-truth-human-condition-from-wisconsin/article_a4ca4220-7211-5fc8-b2b9-0ab5313c6937.html; Phillip Bump, “Scott Walker moved to drop ‘search for truth’ from the University of Wisconsin mission. His office claims it was an error,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 4, 2015, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2015/02/04/scott-walker-wants-to-drop-search-for-truth-from-the-university-of-wisconsin-mission-heres-why/>; Editorial Board, “Gov. Walker’s ‘Drafting Error’,” *New York Times*, Feb. 6, 2015, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/07/opinion/gov-scott-walkers-drafting-error.html>

29. The public's interest in this matter is not only in the policy change itself, but how that change came into existence. The governor initially stated that the changes to the mission statement were the result of a "drafting error" in the budget. This statement later earned a "Pants On Fire" rating from Politifact after the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reviewed the budget drafting file and discovered that the DOA had specifically requested the changes.²

30. The governor additionally claimed that the changes had been overlooked by University of Wisconsin officials, and issued a lengthy statement blaming "miscommunication" between his executive office and budget staff in the DOA. Yet emails obtained through other public records requests by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* further undermined those claims, and indicated that the change was intentional and that university officials had in fact disputed the changes but had been rebuffed. *Id.*

31. It is simply insufficient for Defendants to say that transparency is served because "legislation is publicly available once it is introduced." This undermines the oversight role that the Public Records Law is intended to promote: the law recognizes that "a representative government is dependent upon an informed electorate," and that "all persons are entitled to the greatest possible information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those officers and employees who represent them." Wis. Stat. § 19.31.

² Tom Kertscher, "Despite Deliberate Actions, Scott Walker Calls Change to University Mission a 'Drafting Error,'" Politifact Wisconsin, Feb. 6, 2015, available at <http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2015/feb/06/scott-walker/despite-deliberate-actions-scott-walker-calls-chan/>

32. The Public Records Law is in place so that the public is not put in a position of having to accept whatever the government voluntarily chooses to release and to accept the official explanation for its policies. The public has a vital interest not only in knowing *what* has been done in its name, but also *why* those policies have been advanced and *who* was involved in their development. See *MacIver Institute for Public Policy, Inc.*, 2014 WI App 49, ¶32, 354 Wis. 2d 61, ¶32. (“Public awareness of who is attempting to influence public policy is essential for effective oversight of our government.”)

33. Notably, it appears that Defendants have previously complied with past requests for records that reflected the office’s “preliminary analysis and deliberations” in developing the budget’s changes to the University of Wisconsin System’s mission statement. In fact, those records were vital to revealing the truth about how the changes came about.³ The claimed “deliberative process privilege” is only being invoked now, following what has been called the “political firestorm” that erupted after the “Pants On Fire” deception from Defendants about how these budget provisions were drafted.⁴ Courts have repeatedly rejected efforts by the government to “avoid disclosure on all issues that the public cares most about: the contentious ones.” *MacIver Institute*, 2014 WI App 49 at 14.

THE RECORDS CANNOT BE WITHHELD UNDER THE 19.32(2) “DRAFTS” EXEMPTION

³ See Jason Stein, Patrick Marley, Karen Herzog, “Walker Forced to Admit UW Objected to Wisconsin Idea Changes,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Feb. 5, 2015, available at <http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/documents-show-walker-administration-seeking-removal-of-uws-wisconsin-idea-b99439710z1-290927651.html>

⁴ Kertscher, “Despite Deliberate Actions, Scott Walker Calls Change to University Mission a ‘Drafting Error,’” *Politifact Wisconsin*.

34. Defendants additionally suggest the documents are not “records” since they fall under the statutory “drafts” exemption in the second half of Wis. Stat. § 19.32(2):

“Even putting the balancing test aside, these documents are not “records” within the meaning of the public records law. The law specifically exempts from public disclosure drafts, notes, preliminary computations, and like materials prepared for the originator's personal use or prepared by the originator in the name of a person for whom the originator is working. Wis. Stats. § 19.32(2). These preliminary analyses and deliberations are drafts, preliminary computations, and/or similar like materials that are prepared by individuals working for the Governor on creation of the Governor’s biennial budget. Release of these preliminary materials would be contrary to the conduct of government business, running counter to § 19.32(2)’s exclusions and to the declaration of policy in Wis. Stat. § 19.31.”

35. The requested documents are records and are not exempted under 19.32(2).

36. The responsive records cannot be excluded under the 19.32(2) “prepared for the originators personal use” exemption, since the requested records were distributed to others: indeed, the request is for records of communications between individuals and agencies about official business. The Wisconsin Attorney General has stated that “if one's notes are distributed to others for the purpose of communicating information or if notes are retained for the purpose of memorializing agency activity, the notes would go beyond mere personal use and would therefore not be excluded from the definition of a “record.” 77 *Op. Att’y Gen.* 100, 102 (1988). The Wisconsin Supreme Court has stated that, “A document prepared for something other than the originator's personal use, whether it is in preliminary form or stamped ‘draft,’ whether

recommendations of the document are implemented or not, is by definition a record.”

Fox v. Bock, 149 Wis. 2d 403, 414.

37. The records also cannot be excluded under 19.32(2)’s reference to materials “prepared by the originator in the name of a person for whom the originator is working.” The exclusion of materials under this provision is to be construed narrowly. *77 Op. Att’y Gen. 100, 102 (1988)*. Additionally, “the custodian of the document bears the burden of proof of facts demonstrating that it is a draft.” *Fox v. Bock*, 149 Wis. 2d 417.

38. According to the Wisconsin Attorney General, “the reason for the exclusion is to treat as a nullity language which is drafted for but which is not accepted by one’s superior.” *77 Op. Att’y Gen. 100, 102 (1988)*. There is no indication that any of the responsive records were drafted for and rejected by a superior; indeed, the request’s purpose is to determine how the final language that appeared in the Executive Budget came about.

39. Notably, Defendants appear to be claiming that the same records protected by the purported “deliberative process privilege” are also exempted from the definition of “record” under 19.32(2). If, as Defendants claim, the records in question amount to “frank internal discussion” and a “free exchange of emails and written documentation” that represent the honing of “precise language and calculations” in developing the budget, then those documents were not “drafted for but ... not accepted by one’s superior” and do not fall under the narrow “drafts” exemption in 19.32(2).

40. Additionally, a document is not a “draft” under Wis. Stat. § 19.32(2) if it is used for the purposes for which it was commissioned. *Fox v. Bock*, 149 Wis. 2d 414. By

Defendants' own admission, they are excluding records that provide "analysis and deliberations," "ideas, opinions, proposals, and recommendations," "internal discussion" and "calculations." These records were used for the purposes for which they were requested: they provided analysis, ideas, recommendations, and calculations on the budget issue in question.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff CMD requests that the Court grant the following relief pursuant to Wis. Stat. §§ 19.31-19.39 and Wis. Stat. § 806.04:

- a. Allow additional legal argument, as necessary, after Defendants have answered the Complaint;
- b. Order the Defendants to provide copies of the requested records to CMD;
- c. Award CMD its actual costs and damages under Wis. Stat. § 19.37(2)(a);
- d. Assess whether Defendants acted in a willful or intentional manner, and arbitrarily and capriciously denied or delayed response to the request from CMD, and assess appropriate damages under Wis. Stat. §§ 19.37(2)(b) and (3), and;
- e. Order any other such relief as the Court deems appropriate.

Dated this 19th day of May, 2015.



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EXHIBIT A



SCOTT WALKER
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF WISCONSIN

P.O. Box 7863
MADISON, WI 53707

May 8, 2015

Jonas Persson
Center for Media and Democracy
jonasp.cmd@gmail.com

Dear Mr. Persson,

This letter is in response to your public records request for the following:

All communications or contacts between the Office of the Governor, and the following individuals regarding the 2015–17 Executive Budget Bill's changes to ch. 36 of the Wisconsin statutes: Nathan Schwanz, Michael Heifetz, Mike Huebsch.

A search of the records of the Office of the Governor has been completed, and 480 pages of records have been found. These records are included with this letter in PDF format. Note that, although not expressly requested, we are including additional communications we found between the Office of the Governor and other individuals at the Department of Administration, not merely the three individuals listed.

We have withheld some records that consist of privileged attorney-client communications and protected attorney work product. The confidentiality of attorney-client communications and work product are highly valued public policies protected throughout Wisconsin law. *See, e.g., Wis. Newspress, Inc. v. Sch. Dist. of Sheboygan Falls*, 199 Wis. 2d 768, 782-83 (1996) (recognizing the attorney-client privilege as an exception to the public records law); *Seifert v. Sch. Dist. of Sheboygan Falls*, 2007 Wis. App. 207, at ¶ 28 (protected work product).

Additionally, the public records law incorporates the common-law balancing test, which requires us to weigh the public interest in disclosure against any harm that could result from disclosure. *See, e.g., Wisconsin Newspress, Inc. v. Sch. Dist. of Sheboygan Falls*, 199 Wis. 2d 768, 777-78 (1996). Applying this standard, we have withheld certain documents consisting of preliminary analysis and deliberations created and exchanged by and among employees of DOA and employees of the Governor's office in preparation of the Governor's budget, before the budget legislation was introduced in the legislature.

By law, the Governor is the one responsible for the state's biennial budget, and the Department of Administration is mandated to prepare the budget under the direction of the Governor. *See Wis. Stats. §§ 16.42–16.47*. A candid, complete, and creative evaluation of the state's finances within DOA and within the Governor's office is inherent to the development of the Governor's executive budget. Making these internal discussions just as open to disclosure as the final version of the budget would inhibit the free exchange of ideas, opinions, proposals, and

recommendations among those involved in deciding what to include in the final legislation. Disclosure of this narrow category of records—limited to discussions within DOA, within the Governor's office, and between the two--would discourage frank internal discussion and harm the quality of the final executive decision. Further, it would disincentivize the free exchange of emails and written documentation necessary to hone the precise language and calculations that are key to proper budget development. Without a doubt, this would significantly inhibit the efficiency and efficacy of the employees who develop the detailed language and financial calculations for the budget. In addition, disclosure would risk public confusion as a result of publishing non-final proposals, which may not ultimately have been adopted.

The public interests supporting nondisclosure here have long been nationally recognized, including in federal law. *See* Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 USC § 552(b)(5); *Bureau of National Affairs v. U.S. Department of Justice*, 742 F.2d 1484 (D.C. Cir. 1984). Conversely, the public interest in accessing these particular records is limited. All legislation is publicly available once it is introduced, and numerous documents are produced and released to the public explaining and justifying the specifics of the executive budget. Thus, pursuant to the required balancing test, we have concluded that the public interest in protecting the quality of the executive decision-making process and maintaining the efficiency and efficacy of the budget writing process outweighs the public interest in the release of these materials.

Even putting the balancing test aside, these documents are not “records” within the meaning of the public records law. The law specifically exempts from public disclosure drafts, notes, preliminary computations, and like materials prepared for the originator's personal use or prepared by the originator in the name of a person for whom the originator is working. Wis. Stat. § 19.32(2). These preliminary analyses and deliberations are drafts, preliminary computations, and/or similar like materials that are prepared by individuals working for the Governor on creation of the Governor's biennial budget. Release of these preliminary materials would be contrary to the conduct of government business, running counter to § 19.32(2)'s exclusions and to the declaration of policy in Wis. Stat. § 19.31.

Note that we have not analyzed communications with representatives of UW System or the Legislative Reference Bureau under this reasoning. We are providing these communications because it is our understanding that they are already publicly available.

Pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 19.35(4)(b), these determinations are subject to review by mandamus under Wis. Stat. § 19.37(1) or upon application to a district attorney or the Attorney General.

This letter completes our response to your request. Thank you for contacting the office of Governor Scott Walker.

Sincerely,



David J. Rabe
Assistant Legal Counsel

EXHIBIT B

Walker Strikes Truth and Wisconsin Idea from UW Mission in Budget

By Jonas Persson and Mary Bottari, posted February 4, 2015

UPDATE Feb. 5th -- After first defending the language in DePere, Walker backed down after being asked by Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reporter Dan Bice about the issue. Late in the day Walker spokesperson Laurel Patrick told media outlets that the changes to the UW mission were a "drafting error," and a Tweet from Walker made the same claim. The next day the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that far from being a drafting error, the language was specifically requested by the Walker administration.

In addition to unprecedented budget cuts to the University of Wisconsin (UW) system, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker struck "the search for truth" and the Wisconsin Idea from the university's mission in his executive budget bill unveiled last night.

First summed up by UW President Charles Van Hise in 1904, the Wisconsin Idea means that "the borders of the University are the borders of the state." Van Hise declared that he would "never be content until the beneficent influence of the university reaches every family in the state" and this has long been the core philosophy of the UW System, which has worked hard over the decades to generate programs that serve people and communities all over the state.

Walker's executive budget (see below) amends Sec. 1111 of the statutes to remove language specifying that the UW system has a public service mission to "extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campus" and to "serve and stimulate society." He strikes language ensuring that the mission of the UW is to extend "training and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition," as well as the language specifying that "the search for truth" is "basic to every purpose of the system."

During the Progressive Era, legislator Robert M. La Follette suggested that the Wisconsin Idea would help make Wisconsin a "laboratory for democracy," and it has been linked to a series of progressive reforms, such as workers' compensation, the direct election of United States Senators, and the non-partisan Legislative Reference Bureau. The mission of "reaching every family in the state" is also closely linked to Wisconsin public radio and TV. The Walker budget slashes \$5 million in state funding from this important public service media.

In 1952, presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson gave a speech in Madison in which he reflected on the Wisconsin Idea of the university serving the public interest. To him, there was more to it than "a simple belief in the people." It also meant that: "the role of government was not to stumble along like a drunkard in the dark, but to light its way by the best torches of knowledge it could find."

The budget bill removes the text specifying that the UW System is created "in the public interest" from the statute. In the new wording, it is established out of "constitutional obligation."

\$300 Million Slashed From the UW System While Neighboring States Invest in Higher Education

Walker also cut state funding for the UW System by \$300 million. The unprecedented cut, which amounts to 13 percent of the state funding for the university system and 2.5 percent of the total budget, accompanied by a tuition freeze will result in the defunding of scores of departments and jeopardize the livelihood of faculty and graduate students. Walker attempts to sweeten the cuts by spinning off the system as a self-governing "public authority" similar to a port authority. The Board of Regents appointed by the governor would be the governing body and the legislature and the public would have less of a role in protecting academic freedom and other statutory rights.

The proposals come against the backdrop of four years of failed economic policies. The harsh prescription of tax breaks for the rich and cuts in services for the poor that Governor Walker promised would revitalize Wisconsin's economy and balance the budget have failed to do either. Wisconsin remains 32nd in the nation in new job growth and the state faces a \$2.2 billion dollar deficit.

In a grim irony, the cut also comes amid reports that other states in the Midwest, such as Minnesota (which recently reported a \$1.04 billion budget surplus), Indiana, Iowa and Ohio, are ramping up funding for its state universities, the Wisconsin State Journal reports.

Walker, who did not attend the UW system and failed to graduate from Marquette, seems to have little grasp of the role the state university system plays in the economy. In fact, a 2011 impact study found that the UW System, including alumni startups, generate \$12.4 billion annually to the Wisconsin economy, "while supporting 128,146 Wisconsin jobs and generating \$614 million in state tax revenue."

Bipartisan Discontent as Walker Tries to Put an End to Public Higher Education

The cuts in Wisconsin higher education, and the apparent disregard for the fact that the UW System is a motor for innovation in the state, has drawn the ire of lawmakers from both sides of the aisle.

Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse) deplored "Walker's cut-and-run policies that benefit the wealthy" while glancing at neighboring states "creating jobs, investing in their communities and seeing strong budget surpluses."

Her Republican colleague Jerry Petrowski (R-Marathon) agreed, arguing that "The UW System is vital to our state and plays an important part in the development of technology and the establishment of new businesses, thereby increasing the amount of jobs available in Wisconsin."

SECTION 1111. 36.01 (2) of the statutes is amended to read:

36.01 (2) The mission of the system is to develop human resources to meet the state's workforce needs, to discover and disseminate knowledge, ~~to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses and to serve and stimulate society by developing~~ develop in students heightened intellectual, cultural, and humane sensitivities, scientific, professional and technological expertise, and a sense of purpose. ~~Inherent in this broad mission are methods of instruction, research, extended training and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition. Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth.~~

The Washington Post

How Gov. Walker tried to quietly change the mission of the University of Wisconsin

By Valerie Strauss, on February 5, 2015

You might think that changing the mission of a flagship public university would be an issue put up for public discussion. Not in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker submitted a budget proposal that included language that would have changed the century-old mission of the University of Wisconsin system — known as the Wisconsin Idea and embedded in the state code — by removing words that commanded the university to “search for truth” and “improve the human condition” and replacing them with “meet the state’s workforce needs.”

Walker, in a budget speech given earlier this week, didn’t bother to mention the change, which is more than a simple issue of semantics. There is a national debate about what the role of colleges and universities should be. One group, including Walker, see higher education in big part as a training ground for workers in the American workplace; another sees college education as a way to broaden the minds of young people and teach them how to be active, productive citizens of the country.

After fierce public criticism, Walker, who recently said that faculty and staff throughout the university system needed to work harder and who is seeking to cut funding for the university system by \$300 million over the next two years, said the change in language was a mistake. A Walker aide called it “drafting error,” according to the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel.

Walker, in a statement (which you can read below), said the whole thing was a result of miscommunication between his own staff and that of the university system. All he wanted, he said, was to add the language about meeting workplace needs and not remove anything else. The Journal-Sentinel, however, reported that Walker’s office had “requested in painstaking detail the removal of phrases central to the Wisconsin Idea — the guiding principle of the state’s public university system for more than a century.” And it said it found references in the budget proposal in which the administration requested that the changes be made.

The paper said it discovered a Dec. 30 e-mail from state Department of Administration budget analyst Nathan Schwanz that was sent to nonpartisan attorneys at the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau who were drafting the bill “to make a number of changes to the mission statement of the UW-System as it is enshrined in state statutes.” Then, on Jan. 12, the newspaper reported, he sent another e-mail explicitly saying that the Walker administration wanted changes made; it said: “To extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses should be removed.”

Academics were, of course, furious. The paper quoted University of Wisconsin System President Ray Cross as saying:

“The Wisconsin Idea is embedded in our DNA. It is so much more than words on a page. It is the reason the UW System exists. It defines us and forever will distinguish us as a great public university.”

Here’s Walker’s statement:

“We encourage a vigorous debate over the idea of an authority to govern the University of Wisconsin system or the status quo, as well as a debate about what is the real amount of savings that can be generated by an authority, which we believe is worth \$150 million a year. However, there is no debate over the principles contained within the Wisconsin Idea. We are, and have been, in agreement.

“So how did a change to the Wisconsin Idea get into the budget?

“While we had extensive discussions about the merits of an authority and about variations of how higher education is organized in other states, my staff, the state budget team, and I did not have much discussion about the mission statement. The only real mention was about adding something to existing language related to workforce development.

“Staff from the UW, the state budget office, and my office met several times to discuss the authority idea. In anticipation of these meetings, draft language was prepared by the state budget shop to serve as a starting point. At this initial meeting, my Chief of Staff directed the state budget office and the UW to continue working on statutory language changes and to elevate concerns or disagreements to his attention when agreement could not be reached. The guiding principle was to keep this process simple because the main focus was on providing the maximum amount of flexibility under the new authority.

“Staff from the UW System reviewed drafts of the budget language on various occasions, so I was surprised we had not heard concerns about the final version. Late on Wednesday, my Chief of Staff spoke again with UW System staff and found that they had raised a concern with the state budget office about the specific language. Unfortunately, when my office told the budget staff to keep it simple, they took that to mean that we only wanted workforce readiness language in the mission when we really wanted the language added to the existing mission statement. They also responded to UW staff that this change was not open for discussion because they were told to keep it simple and only add in workforce readiness language.

“Clearly, changing the Wisconsin Idea serves no purpose. That is why I made it clear on Wednesday that we would not change it in the budget. It is not a change of heart. It was a simple miscommunication during the natural back and forth of this process.

“The real debate should be about two things: 1) governance of the UW System and 2) how much an authority is worth in savings.

“In the 2003/05 state budget, former Governor Jim Doyle cut the UW by \$250 million. He did not give them reforms to make up for the lost state aid. They made up most of it with higher tuition.

“Our proposal gives new cost-saving reforms to the UW through an authority—while freezing tuition. We believe it is a good plan. Let the debate begin.”

The New York Times

Gov. Walker's 'Drafting Error'

By the Editorial Board, on February 6, 2015

It was not enough for Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin suddenly to propose a destructive 13 percent cut in state support for the University of Wisconsin's widely respected system. His biennial budget plan, released Tuesday, reached gratuitously into the university's hallowed 111-year-old mission statement to delete a bedrock principle: "Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth."

The budget — patently tailored for the governor's conservative campaign for the Republican presidential nomination — inserted language that the university should be more narrowly concerned with meeting "the state's work force needs."

Brazenly deleted as well from the mission statement, which is nationally appreciated in education circles as the Wisconsin Idea, were the far from controversial goals "to educate people and improve the human condition" and "serve and stimulate society." It was as if a trade school agenda were substituted for the idea of a university.

But Mr. Walker badly miscalculated — in the state at least, and perhaps even with the national constituency he is furiously courting in campaign trips and in his fund-raising. The citizens of Wisconsin, clearly more appreciative of the state university than is their governor, erupted through social media and news outlets, sending Mr. Walker into retreat a day later. His office attempted the ridiculous excuse that the pernicious editing of the university's mission was simply "a drafting error" in the budget text and that the Wisconsin Idea would be left intact after all. But a December email showed clear instructions from the administration to make the deletions.

Mr. Walker came to national prominence four years ago with his attacks on collective bargaining rights and attempts to curtail the benefits of state workers. His new budget doubles down on his recent complaints that university faculty and staff do not work hard enough, insisting that the 26-campus, 180,000-student system could absorb the \$300 million state cut he proposed.

Even fellow Republican legislative leaders quickly shied away from the governor's ideologically driven thrust at the university ethos. Even without the ridiculous changes to the mission statement, the Legislature must firmly resist Mr. Walker's regressive budget, because it includes the university cut and a vaguely detailed plan to transfer university control to a "quasi-governmental" authority.

The budget also offers virtually no significant increase in public school funding while increasing voucher support for private and religious schools at taxpayers' expense. It includes another shibboleth of the hard-right agenda — a requirement for drug testing of those seeking a variety of public benefits.

All of that may be red meat for conservative zealots in the caucus and on the presidential primary circuit. Yet it is hard to see such a clumsy attack on education going far with a general electorate concerned about their children's chances in life. If nothing else, Mr. Walker is sharpening the debate within the Republican Party about whether it can win despite its own extremists.

The New York Times

Scott Walker Needs an Eraser

By Gail Collins, on February 13, 2015

Lately, the big star in the race for the Republican presidential nomination has been Scott Walker, the governor of Wisconsin. He gave a rip-roaring speech at a conservative confab in Iowa last month, and it's been his moment ever since.

Unless the moment ended this week when Walker went to London on an alleged trade mission and refused to say whether he believes in evolution. Or pretty much anything.

"For me, commenting on foreign policy or, in this case, economic policy in a country where you're a visitor is not the politest of things," he told a BBC journalist.

Who knows how that will fly with the Republican base? Maybe they're dying for a president who'll go on an international trip and confine his remarks to the virtues of Wisconsin cheese.

But about that Iowa speech: It was really a rouser. Basically, Walker talked about the "comprehensive conservative common-sense conservative agenda" he's imposed on Wisconsin. His common-sense examples included making it easier for people to carry lethal weapons around the state and defunding the main organization that helps low-income Wisconsin women with family planning.

Mainly, though, The Speech was about waging war on public employee unions, particularly the ones for teachers. "In 2010, there was a young woman named Megan Sampson who was honored as the outstanding teacher of the year in my state. And not long after she got that distinction, she was laid off by her school district," said Walker, lacing into teacher contracts that require layoffs be done by seniority. All of that came as a distinct surprise to Claudia Felske, a member of the faculty at East Troy High School who actually was named a Wisconsin Teacher of the Year in 2010. In a phone interview, Felske said she still remembers when she got the news at a "surprise pep assembly at my school."

Actually, Wisconsin names four teachers of the year, none of which has ever been Megan Sampson, who won an award for first-year English teachers given by a nonprofit group. But do not blame any of this on Sampson, poor woman, who was happily working at a new school in 2011 when Walker made her the star victim in an anti-union opinion piece in *The Wall Street Journal*. At the time, she expressed a strong desire not to be used as a "poster child for this political agenda," and you would think that after that the governor would leave her alone. Or at least stop saying she was teacher of the year.

When it comes to education, Walker seems prone toward this sort of intellectual hiccup. Just recently, he released a proposed budget that would have changed the University of Wisconsin's mission statement by eliminating the bits about "the search for truth," educating people and serving society, in favor of the educational goal of meeting "the state's work force needs." When all hell broke loose, Walker blamed that one on a drafting error.

"Is this a pattern?" teacher-of-the-year Felske wondered.

That budget also contains another interesting education idea that Walker has yet to blame on inept typists. He wants to change the way teachers are licensed. Basically, the plan would be to let people with “real-life experience” just take a test to demonstrate that they knew their subject matter. It appears to require no training whatsoever in the actual art of teaching.

“Teaching is more than just knowing stuff,” protested Tony Evers, the state superintendent of public instruction. “It is an extraordinarily complex skill.” You may not be surprised to hear that in Wisconsin, the superintendent of education is not appointed by the governor. Evers was elected on his own, and his office is extremely unhappy about Walker’s new plan.

“We don’t know the origins of this idea. It wasn’t discussed,” said John Johnson, a spokesman for the superintendent. “We’re requiring more rigor of our students, but this certainly seems like a decrease in the rigor we require of our teachers.”

The idea could very well become law, whether the educators like it or not, since the Wisconsin Legislature often makes policy changes as part of the budget. We will have to let Wisconsinites worry about that.

But it gives us a fresh look at the wave of attacks on teachers’ unions around the country. We definitely do not want to protect incompetent or lazy teachers. On the other hand, if you believe that teaching is a skill that it takes years of practice to master, you also do not want to encourage politicians to save money by canning the most expensive and most experienced teachers.

Not a problem for Scott Walker. His view of teaching is apparently that anybody can do it. Just the way anybody can be president. As long as they don’t make you talk about evolution.

Correction: February 19, 2015

Gail Collins’s column on Saturday incorrectly stated that teacher layoffs in Milwaukee in 2010 happened because Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin “cut state aid to education.” The layoffs were made by the city’s school system because of a budget shortfall, before Mr. Walker took office in 2011.

The New York Times

Save the Wisconsin Idea

By Christine Evans, assistant professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, on February 16, 2015

MILWAUKEE — EARLIER this month, Scott Walker, the governor of Wisconsin and potential Republican presidential candidate, unveiled a proposed budget that would cut \$300 million of funds to the University of Wisconsin system and shift power over tuition from the Legislature to a new public authority controlled by appointed regents. The initial draft of Mr. Walker's budget bill also proposed to rewrite the university's 110-year-old mission statement, known as the Wisconsin Idea, deleting "the search for truth" and replacing it with language about meeting "the state's work-force needs."

This attack, surely meant to impress possible donors to the governor's potential presidential campaign, squanders the inheritance of all Wisconsinites: an affordable, top-ranked university system that attracts students and scholars from around the world and is a major contributor to the state's economy. Criticism prompted the governor to restore the Wisconsin Idea's wording, but the budget cuts remained.

Mr. Walker's action implies that Wisconsinites no longer share their parents' and grandparents' values. He suggests that a university system with a mission to "educate people and improve the human condition" is no longer a priority here. He is wrong.

I teach history, a discipline that is always in the cross hairs of cuts designed to make a public university education more "practical." But my students have shown me that they find the study of the past very relevant to their lives.

Many have already had careers when they come through my classroom door. Quite a few are military veterans, others have worked in factories and trades. We have a master's degree student who runs a successful local business; other graduate students are former teachers who intend to return to their schools.

These students do not come to our university to get basic vocational skills or a modest-paying job. They already have those things, and they want more.

One recently returned veteran in my 20th-century Russia class was struggling emotionally. The tone of his questions could be hostile or abrupt. He missed classes because of medical appointments at Veterans Affairs. Then, a few days before a paper on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" and Varlam Shalamov's "Kolyma Tales" was due, he wrote to me. The descriptions of the Soviet gulag brought back his experiences of fear and privation as an infantryman. He wondered if other vets had been similarly unsettled.

I urged him to write about his experiences, because his story mattered. We met to get him back on track academically. I was so proud when he passed.

Signs that my students know what a humanities education is worth abound in more everyday moments as well. When, in an introductory lecture, I offhandedly mentioned Andrei Bely's

“Petersburg,” a novel about terrorism and revolution in Russia, undergraduates lined up to ask me to repeat the details, so that they could read it on their own time.

I ran into a former student recently and he mentioned that his mother was looking forward to reading the books from our class last year. One history major, an avid gun collector, commuted five hours each way from rural Wisconsin to take my historical methods class.

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where I work, is an urban research university that has been nationally recognized for service to the community. Twenty million dollars — our campus’s likely share of the cuts — represents the entire annual budget of our business school, or our college of engineering, or our schools of public health, information studies and social welfare combined. Which should we eliminate to help students prepare for “real world” jobs?

We should reject Mr. Walker’s claim that he knows best what the limits of Wisconsin students’ education should be. As my students understand, the humanities train critical thinkers and citizens. That may be inconvenient for politicians who see their constituents as merely a “work force,” but it is definitely good for our democracy, as well as our economy.

Students like mine are the ones who will be hurt most directly by Mr. Walker’s proposed changes. The experiences of the Wisconsin system and that of other state universities show that when state funding is cut, regents raise tuition sharply to compensate. Students pay more and get less. This has already happened in Louisiana, where Gov. Bobby Jindal has implemented similarly drastic cuts to the public university system. During his time in office, tuition at public universities in the state has nearly doubled.

The Wisconsin Idea has been a national model for over a century. Mr. Walker’s assault on it is meant as a model, too — a guide for dismantling the public universities we’ve all inherited.

The Washington Post

Gov. Walker, eyeing a 2016 bid, picks new fight in Wisconsin: Universities

By Robert Samuels, on February 16, 2015

MADISON, Wis. — Gov. Scott Walker has cited his experience battling unions here four years ago as proof that voters appreciate a political leader willing to “go big and go bold.”

So as he woos supporters around the country for a possible presidential bid, Walker (R) is once again picking a fight against a powerful institution at home — public universities.

Walker’s new budget proposal would slash \$300 million from the University of Wisconsin system over the next two years. That’s a 13 percent reduction in state funding.

The cut, Walker said, is a fair exchange for a two-year tuition freeze and new flexibility long sought by administrators to set pay scales and campus construction priorities. But the plan is drawing angry responses from school officials and students as the state’s Republican-led legislature takes it up.

Walker drew a direct line between his 2011 battle against his state’s public-sector unions, which sparked mass protests and made him a national GOP star, and his new quest to transform higher education.

“It’s very much like what we did four years ago,” he said last week during a trip to London, which was billed as a trade mission but was widely seen as a move by Walker to gain some foreign policy expertise.

It is unusual for a governor pondering a presidential run to take on what could be an all-consuming political brawl at home — and a distraction from the coast-to-coast travel and fundraising required to build a national campaign.

But the university budget debate has a clear upside for Walker, who is shaping his political brand around the idea that he does not shy away from a fight. Whether or not he succeeds in transforming the universities, the battle itself, coming in the midst of Walker’s effort to rise above a crowded field of prospective Republican presidential candidates, is likely to play well with conservative voters who see universities as elite institutions and hotbeds of left-leaning activism.

In Wisconsin, university advocates say their schools could be a far more difficult target for Walker, with a broader and deeper base of support than the unions had.

Hundreds of students and faculty members protested on campuses last weekend, and organizers said that was only the beginning. Officials from the state’s flagship campus in Madison have begun to tap into the school’s large network of alumni and other supporters to encourage opposition to Walker’s plan.

A harbinger of what Walker might face came in an immediate uproar on social media this month after his staff proposed changing the university's ethereal focus on the pursuit of truth, known as the "Wisconsin Idea," to a grittier focus on "workforce needs."

Critics charged that Walker, who did not graduate from college, was disrespecting the traditions of the University of Wisconsin. Walker immediately backed off and described the change as a mistake.

Still, Rebecca Blank, chancellor of the Madison campus, emphasized protecting university traditions as part of a letter she sent to 160,000 alumni. It urged alumni to lobby their local lawmakers "so that we can continue to provide Wisconsin students with an outstanding education, and serve the state in the best tradition of the Wisconsin Idea."

Michael Fahey, managing director of the UW-Madison alumni association, said he is reaching out to the university's 400,000 alums around the world.

"We know that Wisconsin alumni represent the full spectrum of political opinions, but we have been pleased that alumni are eager to lend their voice to the campaign," Fahey said.

In his remarks in London, Walker predicted that his proposed changes to universities would lead to the same kind of improvements that his 2011 law brought about in K-12 schools and local governments. Curbing collective bargaining for most public-sector unions, a core piece of that law, gave officials more freedom to operate efficiently and effectively, he said.

And he noted that, just as his children attended public schools back then, he has a personal stake in the university system today, with a son attending UW-Madison.

"People said [the 2011 law] would be the death of public education in my state," Walker said. "Back then I had two kids in public high schools, and I said I have a vested interest then, just like I do now in the UW system. . . . With our authority, the same thing will happen with the University of Wisconsin system."

Walker aides said the proposed budget cuts are part of his philosophy of reforming government rather than raising taxes or merely cutting spending.

Laurel Patrick, a Walker spokeswoman, said the governor's proposal would give university officials much of what they have wanted. "For years, administrators at the University of Wisconsin have said that getting out from under the bureaucracy of state government would allow them to achieve considerable savings in areas like purchasing, construction and hiring," she said.

Democrats say Walker is putting his national ambitions ahead of state needs. Besides the university cuts, they note that his budget plan includes other items popular with conservatives, such as drug testing for public benefits, expanded K-12 vouchers and less money for public broadcasting.

State Sen. Jennifer Shilling (D), the Senate minority leader, said the state budget proposal "looks like a presidential document."

Although Shilling said she does not expect protests as large as those in 2011, she said that "more people will find themselves in the crosshairs with his budget. Don't underestimate the intelligence of Wisconsinites: They know this is fodder for a presidential campaign."

University administrators have been blunt in their criticism of the governor, while other advocates have sought to build grass-roots opposition to the plan.

In a public meeting last week with hundreds of faculty members, students and staffers, Blank, the UW-Madison chancellor, said the cuts would undoubtedly lead to higher tuition for out-of-state students.

“There will surely be layoffs,” she said as some audience members groaned. “These cuts are too big to handle. They’re too big for the university and too big for the state.”

In rural communities, an e-mail chain initiated by the state’s teachers union encourages residents to put green lights outside their homes to show their support for the university. On Saturday, more than 300 students protested in single-digit temperatures. One person held a sign referring to the school’s mascot that read: “The Wisconsin Badger is an Endangered Species.”

Eleni Schirmer, a fourth-year graduate student who helps lead the teaching-assistant associations, said the budget cuts represent another epochal time for the university. She was in her first year when Capitol Square in Madison filled with protesters, and she said she became so fascinated that studying unions became part of her graduate work. She said activists are reinvigorated.

“Walker’s pretty bold,” she said. “If he has presidential aspirations, we’re going to show what he is willing to put at stake to get there, and that is the life of the university.”

Ray Cross, the president of the university system, which includes 13 four-year schools and 13 two-year schools, said the possible cuts came as a disappointment. He had proposed a \$95 million increase in funding. Cross said he and his staff have been poring over budget documents and spreadsheets to find cuts. He said he wants to assess multiple scenarios before determining how bad downsizing could be, for fear of “crying wolf.”

Walker’s team has played down the impact, saying the cuts would amount to a 2.5 percent reduction in the university system’s \$6 billion budget. Walker has suggested increasing professors’ workloads to help make up the difference.

“We didn’t know the details until a few days before the budget was released,” Cross said. “We are going to be a dramatically different organization at the end of this. It is a statement from the state that ‘we want you to be smaller, a more streamlined organization.’ ”

Still, Cross could not hide his frustration. Looking out his 17th-floor window from the university administration building, up the street from the state Capitol, he joked: “Sometimes I want to throw water on it.”

The New York Times

2016 Ambitions Seen in Walker's Push for University Cuts in Wisconsin

By Julie Bosman, on February 16, 2015

MADISON, Wis. — Atop a steep hill on the University of Wisconsin campus is a granite boulder affixed with a bronze plaque honoring the university system's lofty mission: to benefit the entire state by promoting public service and a search for truth.

Summed up in one phrase — “the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state” — the mission statement, known as the Wisconsin Idea, has been cherished by educators and graduates for a century. So when Gov. Scott Walker, a second-term Republican, presented a budget this month proposing to delete some of its most soaring passages, as well as to sharply cut state aid to the system, he ignited a furious backlash that crossed party and regional lines.

“We were really upset about it,” said Tony Sumnicht, the student body president at the University of Wisconsin, River Falls, a small college in the western part of the state, echoing a sentiment voiced by some Republican lawmakers. “The Wisconsin Idea is the philosophy that during our years in college we live and learn by.”

Rebecca M. Blank, the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, spoke on Friday during a question-and-answer forum on the proposed cuts. Credit Ben Brewer for The New York Times

Mr. Walker hastily backtracked, attributing the proposed changes — which included inserting a call “to meet the state's work-force needs” — to a “drafting error” by aides.

But to many Wisconsinites, it appeared that this was no mistake, and that the governor, who was re-elected in November, was intentionally sending a pugnacious message to an audience beyond the boundaries of his state: the conservative caucus voters of neighboring Iowa, the first stop in the presidential sweepstakes.

Mr. Walker, who gained the national adoration of Republicans during his first term by taking on labor unions and limiting collective bargaining for public workers, has recently made it clear that he is seriously considering a bid for the presidency in 2016, and in recent days he confirmed that his political organization had leased office space in suburban Des Moines. He spent much of last week on a four-day “trade mission” in London, on the heels of Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey, another potential contender for the White House.

Mr. Walker's budget, which must be approved by the Republican-controlled Legislature, calls for a 13 percent cut in state aid across the university system, with its 13 four-year universities and 180,000 students, for a total decrease of \$300 million over the next two years.

The governor, who has a son at the university's Madison campus, has said that the cuts should go hand in hand with a promise to give greater autonomy to the system, a move that he said would free it to trim costs. Laurel Patrick, a spokeswoman for Mr. Walker, said in an email that the \$300 million cut was “only 2.5 percent of the total U.W. System operating budget.”

“Governor Walker is proposing to provide the University of Wisconsin System with the authority and flexibility that it has been seeking for years, while freezing tuition for two years to maintain college affordability for our state’s hard-working families,” she said. “These reforms will give the U.W. System the power to transform higher education in this state for the future by empowering leaders, protecting taxpayers and promoting long-term stability.”

But to his critics, Mr. Walker, in both his proposed cuts and in the discussion that arose over the Wisconsin Idea, is trying to capitalize on a view that is popular among many conservatives: that state universities have become elite bastions of liberal academics that do not prepare students for work and are a burden on taxpayers.

“This is a budget that serves Scott Walker for president, and it doesn’t serve Wisconsin,” said Jon Erpenbach, a Democratic state senator. “He’s trying to appeal to the most conservative of conservatives, the Republican voters in early-polling states. And there’s 5.5 million people back home saying, ‘Wait a minute.’ ”

Even some of Mr. Walker’s supporters, who cheered his initial run for the governorship and helped him survive a recall election in 2012, said they were questioning the governor’s budget proposal and its potential consequences for higher education.

“We are now facing a cut that will absolutely savage the infrastructure and quality of teaching and research to this university,” said John Sharpless, a Republican who is a history professor at the Madison campus. “What would be a shame for us in Wisconsin is if Scott leaves a wake of damage here on his way to the presidency.”

In an interview in her office here, Rebecca M. Blank, the chancellor of the Madison campus, said that if the governor’s budget was approved, she would have to raise out-of-state tuition and institute layoffs. She added that the proposed cuts were so large that if she eliminated five schools — nursing, law, business, pharmacy and veterinary medicine — she would still have to find other ways to trim costs.

“This is really big, in terms of its size on my education program,” Ms. Blank said.

Many residents in the liberal enclave of Madison, where Mr. Walker is deeply unpopular, see his willingness to slash funding for higher education as a reminder of his background: Mr. Walker abruptly dropped out of Marquette University, a Jesuit institution in Milwaukee, during the spring semester of his senior year.

“Walker doesn’t value the university,” said Jessi Mulhall, a government worker, pausing during a chilly walk down State Street, near the campus. “He has disdain for anything intellectual. He doesn’t care if the populace is educated.”

Others shrugged off criticism of the governor, suggesting that many people in Madison were still furious at Mr. Walker for curtailing the power of labor unions.

“My guess is that this is just about the economy,” Eric Johnson, who teaches a gardening course on campus, said as he walked down State Street on a recent afternoon.

Mr. Walker also suggested, in a comment that infuriated university faculty and staff members, that professors could help “make savings” by teaching an additional class per semester.

In the interview, Ms. Blank bristled at the notion that professors are not working hard enough. “Our teaching loads look a lot like the teaching loads at other top universities,” she said.

One scientist at the university, Andras Fodor, said he had been lured to Madison from his native Hungary by its reputation as a top research institution. “In my field, it is one of the best universities,” he said. “That reputation is a terrible thing to destroy.”

But Republicans in the Legislature said that educators were exaggerating the impact of the cuts. Scott L. Fitzgerald, a Republican who is the Senate majority leader, said in an interview that while the budget called for a “significant reduction” in higher education funding, he had had very little response from his constituents so far.

Some campuses have cash reserves that they can draw from to reduce the pain from budget cuts, he said, though “I would suspect that the impact would probably be more severe on a smaller campus that doesn’t have a lot of cash in reserve.”

Some Republican lawmakers have expressed concerns about the depth of the proposed cuts, raising the possibility that the Legislature will try to soften them.

“People take a lot of pride in U.W.-Madison — it’s one of the crown jewels of the state,” said Kerry Lechner, the editor of The Portage Daily Register, a newspaper in central Wisconsin. “I don’t think the Legislature will rubber-stamp this budget. It will have a lot of scrutiny and a lot of debate.”



Scott Walker Objects to ‘the Search for Truth’

By John Nichols on February 4, 2015

UPDATE (2-3-15) 5:30 pm: Facing sharp criticism for proposing to abandon the University of Wisconsin’s public-service mission statement, as outlined in state statutes, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker on Wednesday afternoon abruptly dropped the plan. Criticized for attacking the Wisconsin Idea and the state’s historic commitment to academic inquiry, the all-but-announced 2016 presidential candidate shifted course less than twenty-four hours after making his proposal, which came as part of a broader assault on higher education funding. Walker claimed the line-by-line proposal for changing the statutes was a “drafting error.” The following article provides background and context regarding the prospective presidential candidate’s stumble.

Americans have returned to the question of whether the Republican Party has launched a “war on science”—as 2016 presidential prospects Chris Christie and Rand Paul have abandoned public-health imperatives in order to feed skepticism about whether children should be vaccinated against infectious diseases.

But Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker has trumped his fellow 2016 contenders.

Walker is launching a war on the truth.

Literally.

As part of a broader attempt to diminish the state’s support for, and ties to, the University of Wisconsin System, Walker wants to strike “Wisconsin Idea” language from state statutes—including references to public service and a commitment to “search for truth.”

The Wisconsin Idea, which is much discussed but not always so much understood in the present day, has always been about seeking the truth, and about applying the results of that search not just to curriculum choices but to the policies and programs of the state.

The statutes of the state of Wisconsin detail a vision of the role of the University of Wisconsin rooted in this Wisconsin Idea, which holds that the mission of the UW is both to educate students and to provide information and ideas to solve the challenges facing the state and its citizens. Outlined more than a century ago in the language of longtime University of Wisconsin President Charles Van Hise, Governor Robert M. La Follette and their progressive allies, the Wisconsin Idea has always held that “the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state.”

What this meant, practically, was that when farmers faced a challenge, UW professors did research to help them address it. When city officials were looking to improve sanitation, UW professors provided assistance. When state and local officials were looking to assure that elections were fair and functional, UW professors analyzed and responded to proposals. And when new technologies developed, such as radio and television, the UW utilized them to spread

knowledge and ideas to Wisconsinites who might never set foot on a campus. (Notably, Walker's budget also proposes cuts to Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television.)

The Wisconsin Idea has always held that democracy requires an informed and engaged citizenry, and that academics and researchers should pursue the truth in order to serve that citizenry.

For decades, this vision has been detailed in the Wisconsin Statutes that reference the UW System. "The mission of the system is to develop human resources, to discover and disseminate knowledge, to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses and to serve and stimulate society by developing in students heightened intellectual, cultural and humane sensitivities, scientific, professional and technological expertise and a sense of purpose," the statutes explain. "Inherent in this broad mission are methods of instruction, research, extended training and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition. Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth."

With his presentation Tuesday night of a new state budget plan that will also serve as a touchstone for his presidential campaign, Governor Walker proposed to cut \$300 million in higher-education funding as part of plan to remake the UW System as a "public authority" with "increased flexibilities." In legislative documents outlining how the plan would be implemented, Walker and his team suggested a rewrite of the statutes that strikes the call "to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses and to serve and stimulate society." He also wants to remove the closing lines that read: "Inherent in this broad mission are methods of instruction, research, extended training and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition. Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth."

Walker has never made a secret of his disdain for Wisconsin's progressive heritage, and his policies have evidenced his disregard for the Wisconsin Idea. But disdain and disregard are one thing. Eliminating references to "the search for truth"—and to using that truth to "improve the human condition"—is something else altogether.

There were many incidents that helped to forge Wisconsin's commitment to freedom of inquiry and to the use of the inquiry to serve students and the state. The most famous of these came in the 1890s, when state officials pressured the UW to remove Professor Richard T. Ely from his position as director of the School of Economics, Political Science and History at the University. The charge was that Ely was too engaged with efforts in the community to improve social conditions and to expand the rights of workers. The controversy was as bitter as it was intense. But ultimately the UW Board of Regents rejected the pressure to limit the school's search for truth and its engagement with the issues and challenges facing Wisconsin.

Their defense of Ely is quoted on a plaque on the UW campus that reads: "Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere we believe the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found."

The Wisconsin Idea has always been about the search for truth, at the UW and beyond.

When Scott Walker attacks that search, he attacks not just the UW but Wisconsin; not just public service, but the pursuit of truth in service to the public.



Walker proposes changing Wisconsin Idea — then backs away

By Karen Herzog, on February 4, 2015

Stunned educators accused Gov. Scott Walker on Wednesday of trying to kill the Wisconsin Idea, which has guided the mission of the state's public higher education system for more than a century.

And although the governor backed away from his early position, both university officials and his own words seemed to contradict how the issue unfolded.

"The Wisconsin Idea is embedded in our DNA," University of Wisconsin System President Ray Cross. "It is so much more than words on a page. It is the reason the UW System exists. It defines us and forever will distinguish us as a great public university."

Update: Documents show Walker administration sought removal of UW's Wisconsin Idea in December

First articulated in 1904, the Wisconsin Idea states that the mission of the UW System is to solve problems and improve people's lives beyond the classroom. The core principle is that "the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state."

Walker hadn't alluded to changing the UW System's mission during his budget speech Tuesday night; it does not appear he had ever mentioned it publicly.

But in the proposed budget he released Tuesday, the governor made the UW System's mission to "meet the state's workforce needs." He also proposed striking language about public service and improving the human condition, and deleting the phrase: "Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth."

Late Wednesday afternoon — long after stories about the governor's effort lighted up social media and news websites — Walker backed away when confronted by Milwaukee Journal Sentinel columnist Daniel Bice. He said the new language was a drafting error and "kind of a nonissue because that's not a problem with us."

Walker implied at an event in Oconomowoc that UW System officials saw the language and "somehow overlooked" the changes. "We have no problem" reinserting the Wisconsin Idea, he said. "Our focus is on creating an authority that gives them full flexibility, and not on changing the mission." Cross immediately issued a one-sentence statement thanking the governor for his commitment to the Wisconsin Idea.

However, UW officials did raise objections before the budget proposal was released, according to Alex Hummel, associate vice president for communications.

Further, at a stop in De Pere earlier in the day, Walker made no mention of any drafting error.

"The focus would be honed in, in particular to look at making sure that we prepare individuals in this state, be they fresh out of high school or coming back later in life, for the jobs and opportunities available in the state," Walker said.

"Learning's important, but ultimately it's most important for people to get the chance to get the education that they need to succeed in the workforce and in life," he added, according to the Wisconsin Radio Network.

'I'm nearly speechless'

The controversy erupted as the governor is proposing \$300 million in cuts to the UW System in the next two years, while giving the schools new flexibility in how they operate. It also came just a week after Walker suggested faculty and staff on UW campuses should be teaching more classes and working harder.

Word of the governor's move, first reported by the Center for Media and Democracy, spread quickly across the UW System's 13 four-year and 13 two-year campuses.

"I'm nearly speechless," said Mark Schwartz, a UW-Milwaukee distinguished professor geography and chairman of the faculty University Committee. "The budget cuts are one thing. This aims at the heart of the Wisconsin Idea and smashes it."

Others saw the language on workforce training as reflecting a narrow understanding of why a university exists — similar to how his comments on faculty workload were seen as not fully appreciating what university educators do. Walker himself does not have a degree.

"It's a very materialistic definition of knowledge that's very off-putting to me," said James Baughman, a historian and Fetzer-Bascom professor at UW-Madison's School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

"We aren't just training people to be workers," Baughman said. "We're training them to be citizens, to be leaders. It's not that we don't have a responsibility to serve people to get training, but it's a lot more than that."

Some critics immediately compared Walker's action to the surprise introduction in 2011 of Act 10, which all but ended collective bargaining for most public employee unions.

A source of state pride

To this day some educators begin their courses by impressing the Wisconsin Idea on students, telling them that what they are learning does not exist in a vacuum, but is intended to help people.

UW-Madison has an entire web page devoted to the Wisconsin Idea, listing more than 1,000 recent examples of the flagship's service to the state. It spans teaching, research, outreach and public service.

Cross was chancellor of the UW Colleges and UW Extension before becoming UW System president a year ago. The Wisconsin Idea is central to the mission of UW Extension, which reaches all 72 counties of Wisconsin. In speeches to community groups across the state, Cross talks expansively about the merits of the Wisconsin Idea and how it drives quality.

"Wisconsin must not abandon this core principle and value," Cross said.

In his budget, Walker struck statutory language that says the UW System's mission is "to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campus" and to "serve and stimulate society..." He also struck language that the mission is "to extend training and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition."

Walker's proposed mission statement instead says: "The mission of the system is to develop human resources to meet the state's workforce needs, to discover and disseminate knowledge, and to develop in students heightened intellectual, cultural, and humane sensitivities, scientific, professional and technological expertise, and a sense of purpose."

UW-Madison Chancellor Rebecca Blank is expected to voice strong concern about the governor's proposals when she speaks Thursday before the UW Board of Regents.

In the meantime, @BeckyBlank reassured her campus on Twitter: "The Wisconsin Idea is — and always will be — central to the mission of this university."

Leave it alone

In the hours after the news of Walker's changes broke, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) said he would prefer to leave it to the UW System as to whether changes should be made to its mission statement.

"I think every once in a while taking a look at our mission statement is important, but it probably shouldn't be done in the context of the million decisions we make in the budget," he said. "It should probably be the authority, the regents, the chancellor, the president of the system all taking an opportunity to work on it together."

Sen. Jon Erpenbach (D-Middleton), who sits on the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee, said the proposed change was absurd, calling the Wisconsin Idea a model for the country.

"I really believe the governor has lost his bearings as to who he is and what he does," he said. "His job is not to rewrite the Wisconsin Idea. It's to promote the Wisconsin Idea."

Walker said in a tweet late Wednesday that the final budget will include the Wisconsin Idea in the UW System's mission.

Daniel Bice and Patrick Marley of the Journal Sentinel contributed to this report.



Walker forced to admit UW objected to Wisconsin Idea changes

By Jason Stein, Patrick Marley and Karen Herzog, on February 5, 2015

Madison — Gov. Scott Walker and aides scrambled Thursday to respond to revelations that his administration had insisted to University of Wisconsin officials on scrapping the Wisconsin Idea, the guiding principle for the state's universities for more than a century.

In a rapid revision to his own comments on Wednesday, the Republican governor acknowledged that UW System officials had raised objections about the proposal.

They had been told the changes were not open to debate.

While backtracking on earlier comments to reporters, Walker continued to insist in a statement that he hadn't known what his own administration was doing until after the proposal became public and caused a firestorm of criticism.

He said no one would be disciplined.

First articulated in 1904, the Wisconsin Idea states that the mission of the UW System is to solve problems and improve people's lives beyond the classroom. That mission encompasses teaching, research, outreach and public service.

The governor's budget, released Tuesday evening, proposed spinning off the UW System as a separate entity, cutting its state funding by \$300 million over two years and making its mission to "meet the state's workforce needs." It proposed striking UW principles in state law about proving public service, improving the human condition, and searching for truth. It also eliminated the venerated concept that the boundaries of the university extend to the boundaries of the state.

On Jan. 29 — five days before Walker introduced his budget — the UW System's John Yingling sent an email to the state budget office flagging concerns about the proposed changes and then followed up by phone. Yingling is a special assistant to Ray Cross, the system's president.

"We strongly urge that stricken language is unique to depicting the character, mission, and vision of the UW System," Yingling wrote, according to an email released Thursday under the state's open records law.

On Wednesday, Walker initially expressed no concerns when questioned by a reporter about the proposed changes to the system's mission statements.

"Learning's important, but ultimately it's most important for people to get the chance to get the education they need to succeed in the workforce and in life," Walker said during a stop in De Pere, according to Wisconsin Radio Network.

But later that day, he backed away from the changes by saying they had been included because of a drafting error or oversight in his budget. He further implied that UW System officials saw the changes and "somehow overlooked" them.

On Thursday he acknowledged that, in fact, UW System officials had thrown up red flags and been rebuffed.

"To me, in the end it was a confusion out there," Walker said of the proposed changes. "It was a mistake that someone made. Someone assumed one thing when the idea was we weren't going to add anything more (to the budget), they assumed that that meant we were going to keep a blank, simple mission statement. That's why I immediately said yesterday in a tweet, 'It's no big deal.' "

Walker made his comments soon after the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported Thursday that the drafting file for the budget bill showed two instances — one in December and another in January — in which the Walker administration's budget shop requested the specific changes to the mission statement.

Later, he released the long statement attempting a further explanation.

In a separate statement, Walker's budget director, Michael Heifetz, said he was to blame for the proposed changes and the language would be removed in a routine budget follow-up that is always sent by administration officials to the Legislature to clean up the bill's language. Heifetz declined an interview request through an agency spokesman.

"In this specific case, there was clearly a misunderstanding and I take responsibility for this drafting error," Heifetz's statement said.

UW officials rebuffed

Yingling, the special assistant to the UW System president, sent his Jan. 29 email objecting to the changes to Nathan Schwanz, an analyst in the state budget office within the Department of Administration. Yingling said he gave Schwanz time to read it and to consult with others in his office before the two talked by phone.

Over two phone conversations, Yingling said Schwanz made it clear that he understood the email but would be sticking with the proposed changes to the Wisconsin Idea in state law.

"The response was, 'No, we're not going to make any changes (to Walker's budget proposal). If you want to re-create this in (Board of Regents) policy, you're free to do that,' " Yingling said Thursday.

Walker's legal counsel, Brian Hagedorn, said Thursday that Yingling's email had never been shared with anyone in the governor's office.

UW System spokesman Alex Hummel said in a terse statement that university officials are "glad the changes are not being sought."

"Our primary focus is on the impact of the (\$300 million) budget cut and the public authority proposals the governor has made for the UW System and its institutions," Hummel said.

Detailed instructions

For every piece of legislation — especially the massive state budget — drafting is a painstaking process in which a number of parties share successive versions of the specific language. The

drafting file is essentially a history of those rewrites — all of them full of minute changes and revisions — made to the budget proposal as it wound its way toward the final version.

In the file, a Dec. 30 email from Schwanz to the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau's Mark Kunkel, a nonpartisan bill drafter, directed a number of changes to the UW mission statement in state statutes.

The changes were part of a larger section in the budget that would transform the university from a state agency into a quasi-public authority with greater flexibility from the state and its rules.

An attachment to that Dec. 30 email proposed the changes such as deleting the phrase, "Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth." That electronic file, released through an open records request, showed that it was created by Schwanz about four hours before he emailed it to Kunkel.

On Jan. 12, Schwanz sent another email to Kunkel with more detailed instructions.

"To extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses should be removed," Schwanz wrote.

Previously, Schwanz worked as a congressional staffer and campaign worker for U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy, a Republican from Weston. Schwanz didn't return a phone message Thursday seeking comment.

'There's no integrity'

The high-profile controversy comes as the governor rides a wave of positive press nationally for his all-but-certain presidential run.

Democrats called on Walker to take responsibility for what was in his budget.

"He blamed somebody else. To me, there's no integrity there. I'll leave it to somebody else to decide if there's a lie in there," Sen. Janet Bewley (D-Ashland) said of Walker.

Sen. Jon Erpenbach (D-Middleton) said he couldn't believe that the governor would not have known of changes to the Wisconsin Idea, which Erpenbach described as being "written in stone" on the university's foundation.

"This isn't something that would be an oversight. This is the governor directly aiming his arrow at the heart of the UW and what it's all about," Erpenbach said.

In Watertown Thursday, the governor said he thought the public debate should be focused on whether to give the university more flexibility and cut its state aid, not the flap over the proposed changes to the Wisconsin Idea.

Asked if there were other things in his budget he didn't know about, Walker said: "No, we knew about things overall. But I'm saying this was not a question of something we put in. This was the way that unfortunately somebody interpreted the direction of keeping it simple. We wanted to keep it simple and not making changes other than add the item we talked about in terms of workforce development."

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Despite deliberate actions, Scott Walker calls change to university mission a "drafting error"

By Tom Kertscher, on February 6th, 2015

SECTION 1111. 36.01 (2) of the statutes is amended to read:

36.01 (2) The mission of the system is to develop human resources to meet the state's workforce needs, to discover and disseminate knowledge, to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses and to serve and stimulate society by developing develop in students heightened intellectual, cultural, and humane sensitivities, scientific, professional and technological expertise, and a sense of purpose. ~~Inherent in this broad mission are methods of instruction, research, extended training and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition. Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth.~~

This excerpt from Gov. Scott Walker's 2015-'17 budget reframes the mission of the University of System, essentially removing the Wisconsin Idea, a guiding principle of the system that emphasizes service to state government and citizens.

Emails reviewed by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel show Walker's budget office requested sweeping changes to the Wisconsin Idea that later became part of his budget.

Echoing other national media, U.S. News & World Report declared Feb. 3, 2015 that Gov. Scott Walker was having a better two-week run than any 2016 presidential hopeful.

The very next day, Walker got caught in a political firestorm back home.

News broke that language included in Walker's state budget proposal would fundamentally change something known as the "Wisconsin Idea" -- a mission statement for the University of Wisconsin System that had been in place, and held in some esteem, for more than a century.

The Wisconsin Idea doesn't have a precise meaning, but an early definition was: "The borders of the university are the borders of the state." In short, the Wisconsin Idea is a notion of public service, including the system's contributions to state government as well as "research directed at solving problems that are important" to citizens.

Today, the university system includes the flagship University of Wisconsin-Madison and 25 other campuses that comprise the \$6 billion-per-year UW System.

The backlash to Walker's proposal, even from some conservatives, was swift. So was Walker's response.

Using his official Twitter account, the governor stated on Feb. 4, 2015:

"The Wisconsin Idea will continue to thrive. The final version of budget will fix drafting error -- Mission statement will include WI Idea."

"Drafting error"?

Really?

Walker's budget changes

The day before his tweet, Walker had given his 2015-'17 state budget address. It made no mention of the Wisconsin Idea.

The next day, the left-leaning Center for Media and Democracy, a Madison-based group, reported that the 1,800-page budget bill itself included language that, in effect, struck the Wisconsin Idea from the mission of the University of Wisconsin System. That mission is contained in a state statute.

As shown in a photo accompanying this story, Walker's budget deletes a number of phrases contained in the statute. Among the statements that are removed: "Extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses"; and "Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth."

With some added language, the edits to the language emphasized the mission should be to "meet the state's workforce needs."

How changes occurred

Walker's "drafting-error" explanation suggests the rewriting of the UW System's mission was some kind of mistake -- changes made inadvertently.

Walker's spokeswoman told us the governor had learned shortly before sending his tweet that "there was a miscommunication during the back and forth of the budget process."

But the evidence indicates the changes to the Wisconsin Idea language were intentional.

As revealed by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, based on emails and other information gathered by the newspaper:

As the budget was being prepared, Walker's administration insisted to UW System officials that the changes to the Wisconsin Idea language be made.

In December 2014, a budget analyst in Walker's Department of Administration directed the nonpartisan budget-writing office to remove the phrase "Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth" from the state statute covering the UW System's mission.

In January 2015, the same analyst told the budget-writing office to remove another phrase: "To extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses."

Five days before Walker introduced his budget, a UW System official sent an email to Walker's budget staff raising concerns about the changes, saying: "We strongly urge that stricken language is unique to depicting the character, mission and vision of the UW System."

That UW official, John Yingling, later told the Journal Sentinel that Walker's budget staff responded by saying the changes would remain in the budget.

Backtracking from earlier statements, Walker eventually admitted that UW System officials had thrown up red flags and been rebuffed -- although he also said there "was a confusion out there" and "it was a mistake that someone made."

Walker's office also issued a statement claiming that when his office told the budget staff to "keep it simple, they took that to mean that we only wanted workforce readiness language in the mission when we really wanted the language added to the existing mission statement.....It was a simple miscommunication during the natural back and forth of this process."

Our rating

Walker said fundamental changes to the language describing the Wisconsin Idea in the University of Wisconsin System's mission statement were the result of a "drafting error" in his state budget proposal.

But Walker's administration had insisted to UW System officials on making the changes, giving detailed instructions on passages to be removed from state law. And eventually Walker himself acknowledged that the UW System had objected to the changes before his budget was put into final form.

His original claim was not only inaccurate, but ridiculous. Pants on Fire.



Can Scott Walker Handle the Truth?

MSNBC, "All in with Chris Hayes," on February 5, 2015.

Guest: Mary Bottari, Executive Director of the Center for Media and Democracy

The likely 2016 candidate is under fire in his home state for proposing to delete "the search for truth" from the University of Wisconsin System's mission statement.



The Latest On The UW System's Wisconsin Idea Controversy

Wisconsin Public Radio, "The Joy Cardin Show," on February 5, 2015

Guest: Mary Bottari, Deputy Director of the Center for Media and Democracy.

Gov. Scott Walker is blaming the drastic changes to the UW System's mission on a "simple miscommunication" with his budget staff, and that the Wisconsin Idea will remain intact. Joy Cardin's guest, who broke the original story, discusses ongoing developments, including revelations that the Walker administration sought removal of the Wisconsin Idea.



For Walker, success on the national front, a stumble at home

By Daniel Bice, on February 6, 2015

It's been this kind of week for Gov. Scott Walker: He has emerged as a media darling on the national front even as he took a beating politically at home.

"He is clearly distracted by his presidential ambitions," said Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling, a La Crosse Democrat.

Walker could not have done any better with his national press.

He's leading in polls in Iowa and New Hampshire, and the Washington Post labeled the Wisconsin Republican the first "it" candidate of the 2016 presidential horse race.

The number-crunchers at Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight are giving Walker better odds than anyone but former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush of winning the GOP nomination.

"No 2016 presidential hopeful has had a better two-week run than Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker," declared U.S. News & World Report.

But you wouldn't know it in Wisconsin.

Walker spent much of the past week trying to douse the firestorm created by his proposal to delete the venerated Wisconsin Idea and the "search for truth" from the University of Wisconsin mission statement.

He initially defended the change before blaming it on a "drafting error" and then later citing "miscommunication" by his staff. He also accused UW officials of overlooking the change, a claim he had to retract.

Earlier in the week, Walker gave a budget address that clocked in several minutes shorter than his telephone town hall meeting with Iowa voters just a day earlier.

Is it possible, Wisconsin, that the governor is just not that into you anymore?

"Tommy Thompson would never have made this mistake," said Mary Bottari, a former legislative staffer who is now with the liberal Center for Media and Democracy, which broke the news about the change in the UW mission statement. "Not only is Walker not sufficiently schooled in Wisconsin values and traditions, he has been listening to too many of his out-of-state big money friends."

No Republican lawmaker has said the same.

"That's not legitimate criticism," countered former Republican state Sen. Mike Ellis.

Some have even said Walker has been locked in since offering up his proposed 2015-'17 budget plan.

Walker has maintained that he won't launch his bid for the GOP presidential nomination until after the state budget is signed into law. Even so, he has already been hiring staff and making trips around the county to promote his all-but-certain candidacy.

One GOP legislator warned that Walker might find it difficult to run for national office while keeping things running smoothly in Wisconsin.

"Will he be distracted as this continues down the road?" said the Republican lawmaker, who asked not to be identified, well, for obvious reasons. "I can't say he won't be. I don't see how he wouldn't be."

What's been most surprising in the past week is how Walker allowed the kerfuffle over the Wisconsin Idea to dominate several news cycles.

News of the proposed changes prompted one new explanation after another before Walker's office issued a 500-word summary of what happened.

By week's end, it was clear that the normally sure-footed Walker had stumbled by citing a nonexistent drafting mistake and chiding UW officials for overlooking the details of his proposal.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, a Rochester Republican, said he believes the error occurred at the staff level.

Vos said it would be unrealistic to expect Walker to review the actual statutory language of his budget plan. The UW mission statement, he said, likely wouldn't even rise to the level of a bullet point in a budget summary.

The Wisconsin Idea is a notion of public service, including the system's contributions to state government as well as "research directed at solving problems that are important" to citizens.

As for Walker, Vos said, "He's been totally engaged."

Shilling, the Democratic leader, said the governor has no one to blame but himself for the self-inflicted wounds. She added that she doesn't believe Walker fully understood how important the Wisconsin Idea is to many state residents.

"This is not some trite tag line," she said. "This goes back generations."

More important, Shilling said, this past week raises concerns about Walker's ability to juggle his White House pursuits with his Statehouse obligations.

In the week before his Tuesday budget address, he attended at least five private fundraising events across the country, addressed a Washington, D.C., conservative forum and talked about foreign policy on ABC's This Week, according to The Associated Press.

Walker brushed aside such criticism, telling reporters: "I've had to run three times in four years, so I'm used to running and still doing a good job governing the state of Wisconsin."

He's also learned a thing or two while pursuing the state's highest office.

Every president knows it's a good idea to go abroad when hit with a string of criticism at home.



On Trip to UK, Scott Walker Gets Away From University Flap

By the Associated Press, on February 10, 2015

MADISON, Wis. — Gov. Scott Walker may have picked the perfect time to get out of Wisconsin for a few days.

The prospective Republican candidate for president is traveling in the United Kingdom this week on what's officially billed as a trade mission. It's a trip that also turns the Wisconsin governor's focus toward foreign policy and away from a kerfuffle at home with the University of Wisconsin.

Few things in the state are as revered as the "UW," a fact Walker collided with last week when he proposed cutting \$300 million from the university system's budget and removing the century-old philosophical underpinning of the school's mission statement.

The reaction, including from his normally loyal Republican allies, took some shine off the largely positive reviews Walker received nationally after his speech last month at a conservative political conference in Iowa.

"It's one of the most spiteful, mean-spirited and counter-productive things I could imagine, going after the university in this situation," said former state Sen. Dale Schultz, a Republican and a UW graduate who retired this year after 32 years in the Legislature.

The reaction from others was more muted. "I worry that the magnitude of the cut might be too much to absorb this quickly," said Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos. Yet the criticism and concern highlighted the balance Walker must strike as a likely candidate for president still on the job as governor.

Unlike former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, out of office for eight years, or the several U.S. senators considering a bid, Walker is a chief executive who can't avoid responsibilities with the potential for political risk, such as writing a budget or negotiating with state lawmakers whose agendas doesn't always match his own.

Walker has already said he's willing to scale back the cut. The backlash over changes to the mission statement — a beloved ideal known as the "Wisconsin Idea" — was so strong and swift that he backtracked within hours, calling the proposal a mistake he hadn't known about.

"It is undeniably a challenge when you're a governor of a state and you're running for office," said Nick Ayers, a national Republican strategist who managed Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty's presidential campaign in 2011. "But if your run for president matches the agenda, vision and principles of what you've done at home, then it's a manageable process."

Indeed, Walker has already begun folding his UW plans into his broader narrative to conservatives in Iowa and across the country that he's offering "bold ideas" at the state level that show true leadership — unlike what he calls the stagnation in Washington.

He has compared UW cuts to his moves in 2011 to help solve a budget shortfall. Walker proposed making teachers and other public workers pay more for their pension and retirement benefits, while also effectively ending their collective bargaining rights. The initiative sparked an effort to remove him from office, which ended in 2012 with Walker's victory in a recall election.

"We weren't afraid to go big and go bold," Walker told conservatives at the Iowa event in January that drew other potential presidential candidates. "Maybe that's why I won the race for governor three times in the last four years. ... If you get the job done, the voters will actually stand up with you."

Andrew Hartman, a history professor at Illinois State University who has written a book on the cultural politics in America, points out that conservative attacks on higher education have a long history in the GOP going all the way back to Ronald Reagan's run for California governor in the 1960s.

"That can only help him in the Republican primaries," Hartman said of Walker's targeting UW. "It certainly can't hurt him."

Walker also wouldn't be the first Republican governor to stumble when it comes to a state's popular university. In 2014, then-Texas Gov. Rick Perry tried to force the University of Texas into a series of reforms to de-emphasize research, cut tuition and increase enrollment. In that fight, a powerful coalition of Texas's top political and university donors, along with business leaders, rallied against Perry's plans.

In his state budget for next year, Walker proposed giving the 26-campus system more autonomy from state laws and oversight. He breezily suggested the school could make up \$300 million in cuts — or 13 percent of the university's state aid and 2.5 percent of its total budget — if professors taught one more class each semester.

Professors shot back that Walker has no understanding of the hours spent on research and other work outside of teaching classes, highlighting a potential vulnerability in Walker's presidential resume — his lack of a college degree.

The issue was compounded a few days later, when it was discovered deep in Walker's nearly 2,000-page budget he had proposed changing the university's mission statement to focus on fostering career development, eliminating the Wisconsin Idea — a charge to seek a broader truth and understanding of the human condition.

The Wisconsin Idea dates back to 1907 and the progressive politics of the time, but it's grown to be the heart of the university's relationship with the state. It focuses on the principle that research conducted at the university should be applied to help improve the lives of people in the entire state beyond the classroom.

"The university isn't some far-off place," said Schultz, the retired Republican senator who called Walker's proposed cuts reckless. "It's relative to people on a daily basis."

The Atlantic

The Governor Who (Maybe) Tried to Kill Liberal-Arts Education: Why Scott Walker's allegedly mistaken attempt to change the University of Wisconsin's mission statement is an omen for big changes to higher education in America

By Alia Wong, on February 11, 2015

Last Wednesday, Wisconsin's Republican Gov. Scott Walker released a biennium budget plan that had a strange twist nestled inside. This line item didn't have much, if anything, to do with how he intended to spend the state's money; it had no numbers, dollar signs, nor provisos. It did, however, deal ever-so-vaguely with Wisconsin's economy—at least, what Walker envisioned it would look like down the line and how higher education would make that happen.

Walker proposed to rewrite the University of Wisconsin's mission statement. He apparently wanted to strip out its frills (stuff like "extended training," "public service," improving "the human condition," and "the search for truth") and inject it with a more practical goal: meeting "the state's workforce needs."

The "Wisconsin Idea" is the belief that the mission of the university is to improve people's lives beyond the classroom walls.

The proposal took aim at a cherished institution. Many university mission statements are read only by the committees that draft them. For a century, though, the University of Wisconsin has defined its purpose around the "Wisconsin Idea," the belief that the mission of the university is to improve people's lives beyond the classroom walls. The proposed changes deleted this public purpose, substituting the narrower goal of workforce education.

Within hours, amid a storm of criticism and outrage, Walker backtracked on the edits. In a statement on Thursday, Walker blamed the changes on a last-minute "drafting error." The intention, he said, was simply to reform the university's budget priorities and governance structure, a directive Walker's staffers misinterpreted:

We encourage a vigorous debate over the idea of an authority to govern the University of Wisconsin system or the status quo, as well as a debate about what is the real amount of savings that can be generated by an authority, which we believe is worth \$150 million a year. However, there is no debate over the principles contained within the Wisconsin Idea ...

Unfortunately, when my office told the budget staff to keep it simple, they took that to mean that we only wanted workforce readiness language in the mission when we really wanted the language added to the existing mission statement. They also responded to UW staff that this change was not open for discussion because they were told to keep it simple and only add in workforce readiness language.

Clearly, changing the Wisconsin Idea serves no purpose. That is why I made it clear on Wednesday that we would not change it in the budget. It is not a change of heart. It was a simple miscommunication between the natural back and forth of this process.

Whether Walker's justification holds water isn't clear. Skeptics in the news media and the higher-education world appear unconvinced that the change was merely a typo rather than an about-face in response to the immediate backlash. After all, internal memos leaked on Thursday to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and Wisconsin State Journal show that Walker's administration explicitly instructed the budget plan's drafters to delete clauses such as this one: "Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth."

Whatever Walker's intent, the situation has caused a good deal of hullabaloo, making national headlines and raising, or at least renewing, questions about the state of higher education in the country and the role of public universities in promoting state economies and American society's general well-being.

"Basically it's clear that, regardless of how it got into the language, there was an intent to reexamine or to look at redefining the core values of what our university is about," said Mark D. Schwartz, a geography professor at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee who serves on the school's Faculty Senate.

This workforce-centric approach "is designed for short-term learning and long-term disaster."

Carol Schneider is president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, an organization that represents about 1,450 institutions and advocates for a "liberal education"—one that is broad and "public-spirited," matched to the spirit of a free, democratic society. Liberal education, she said, builds the kinds of capacities that are useful in any kind of job: critical thinking, problem-based reasoning, understanding the science of how society operates. This notion of a "liberal education" is what made America's university system "the envy of the world." But in recent years, she said, policymakers have attempted to rebrand that system.

Liberal-arts and humanities programs at public universities are increasingly under siege as state legislatures cut the institutions' funding, forcing school administrators to make tough decisions about what to eliminate. The obvious targets are the programs that yield a lower return on investment—at least in a concrete, monetary sense—and are more nebulous in their impact on the economy. What sounds like it has more dollar signs and productivity attached to it: philosophy or America's favorite new acronym, STEM?

Schneider pointed to the National Governors Association, which in 2011 published a report titled "Degrees for What Jobs? Raising Expectations for Universities and Colleges in a Global Economy." The report encouraged governors across the country, including Walker, to prioritize university programs geared around filling in-demand jobs. But it also served as a wake-up call to people like Schneider. "In reality, it was designed for downgrading expectations," Schneider said. "It's part of a national trend toward redefining higher education as trade education ... [The Walker scenario] simply offers an unusually explicit glimpse at what it all actually means, but it was not unique."

This workforce-centric approach "is designed for short-term learning and long-term disaster," she said. "It's focused on the wrong measures of what actually matters."

The "Wisconsin Idea" embodies the very essence of a liberal education, which is why Walker's apparent attempt at scrapping it incited the reaction it did nationally. This idea treats the

education and research produced within a university setting as a public good, a tool inherent to a democracy—not strictly a means to some end.

"I think it strikes to the heart of how important education is to the state, and how it's supposed to be a right that all Wisconsinites have and want to have access to and be a part of," said Jo Ellen Fair, a journalism professor at the University of Wisconsin—Madison who also serves on the campus' Faculty Senate. "Whatever knowledge is produced in the university should be accessible to Wisconsinites. We have a responsibility to ensure that whatever it is we're doing at the university should be something Wisconsinites can use and will enrich their lives."

"To see the university as a technical school is to miss the point of what we do," Fair continued. "Our research is all about trying to prepare our students to live in the world."