

Since You Asked

by **George Lightbourn**

Madison's weekly newspaper *Isthmus* asked me and several other people to share a couple of ideas for Governor Doyle to address in his second term. This is what I sent them.

Save Milwaukee's Children

Most of the students sent into the Milwaukee school system emerge without workplace skills and lacking the grounding of good citizenship.

Tackling the problems of urban education is far from a political winner. It holds the prospect of being a governor's version of Iraq. So it's tempting to whistle past the graveyard of educational failure. And, without decisive action, that's what we should expect; continued failure. After decades of experience, we know that the Milwaukee School Board and Milwaukee teachers cannot turn it around on their own. This is one of those tough problems that require the power of the Governor. Tommy Thompson understood that when he decided to take on the failed welfare system.

Anyone who still needs convincing of the gravity of Milwaukee's problem should know that over 18,500 Milwaukee high school students are habitually truant. For those of us in Madison, that's the equivalent of ten of Madison's East High Schools.

Safe, comfortable reforms won't do the job. The situation is so dire that an all out assault is needed. Let's unleash the capabilities of state government, the business community and the UW System to attack the problem with the same vigor and urgency that boosted Neil Armstrong onto the nation's shoulders and propelled him to the moon. Restoring discipline and hope to Milwaukee children holds the prospect of yielding far greater returns than the space program ever could.

Fix the Mechanics of State Government

When Governor Doyle told the world he planned to eliminate thousands of state jobs he sent a shock wave through the halls of government. While taxpayer advocates celebrated, inside government things were downright gloomy. Several hard-working, bright employees said they no longer looked forward to going to work in the morning. They understood that the ship of state was getting smaller, but they also sensed it had little direction; that it was drifting.

Over on management's side, people appointed by Governor Doyle complained that they couldn't trust the civil servants they inherited from Thompson and McCallum.

You don't need an MBA to see that this disconnect between management and workers holds the prospect for disaster. Governments throughout the country

have learned the hard lesson; if downsizing isn't done right it can create a culture of inertia that lasts for years.

The quality of government, like any industry, is defined by the quality and capabilities of its people. Do we see bright, talented people coming in the front door of state government? I know of two who, in spite of my advice, opted for private sector jobs. They just didn't think now was a good time to work in government. Job one for Governor Doyle in his role as CEO is to ensure that some of the best and brightest Wisconsin talent is drawn into state service.

Job 1A is to make sure that a sufficient reinvestment is made in training the existing workforce. Is state government supporting continuous learning ala Berbee or Harley Davidson, or are state workers' skills allowed to stagnate?

Finally, Governor Doyle needs to articulate his plan for managing state government. Is he still committed to his downsizing goal? If he is, then he needs to tell his workforce how he intends to meet that goal. What is his plan for making government more efficient and productive? As with any productive business, it is essential that the CEO get the employees on the same page of his or her playbook. If there is no plan, he should fess up and we should all lower our expectations of state government for years to come.