

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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Governor Scott Walker's Biennial Budget:
Hypocrisy At Its Finest

Governor Walker refused to accept funding from the federal government to expand health care coverage for poor people in Wisconsin. His refusal will result in 90,000 people losing health care, cost state businesses up to \$36 million in extra fees and cost Wisconsin taxpayers an additional \$100 million (the funds he rejected will go to other states with Republican governors). Walker's Health & Social Services secretary was quoted as saying that these people could purchase health insurance on the health care exchange that will be created under the Affordable Care Act. That's a pretty amazing statement considering that Walker refused to comply with the mandates of what he calls "Obamacare" and when given the option of having a state-created health care exchange or letting the federal government create one for Wisconsin, he opted for the latter. For a "smaller government, state's rights" guy, that's pretty strange.

That's no stranger than cutting billions of dollars from education in his last budget and telling school districts to make up the loss by cutting teacher's wages and benefits so he could brag about balancing the budget. Now, after defunding the schools and leaving local governments on the hook for millions in obligations they can't pay for, he has proposed borrowing \$1 billion for road construction in his current budget.

When he was elected, Walker turned down over \$800 million from the federal government to build a high speed rail line between Madison and Milwaukee. The line was planned to run from Chicago to Minneapolis - a boon to numerous Wisconsin communities, a sure-fire way to create jobs and grow our economy. The rail line is still being built but is planned to go around Wisconsin, leaving us in a backwater.

The billion-dollar spending binge is payback to all the road construction companies who back Walker in the elections. Building roads is one thing, but doing it by borrowing to pay for it is unconscionable, especially in light of his plan to cut taxes to return a \$300 million "surplus" via tax cuts - mostly benefiting the wealthy. Sound familiar?

Does anyone remember another budget surplus and ensuing tax cut? When George Bush stole the election in 2000, one of the first things he did was pass a tax cut that primarily benefitted the wealthy, erasing projected budget surpluses for decades to come. Then, he fought two wars and funded them by borrowing the money. A decade later and we're still trying to rebuild our national economy.

Another interesting tidbit that's been in the news recently was the Department of Natural Resources' decision to use its staff and resources to shut down a nude beach on the Wisconsin River near Mazomanie that's been operating for decades.

Wait a minute, there have been countless news stories about the inability of the DNR to enforce environmental laws because it lacks the resources to do so. Repeat polluters are given sweetheart deals to spare the time and expense of prosecuting them. Yet the DNR can spend countless dollars and man-hours to shut down a nude beach? Heaven forbid that we use limited resources where they'll do the most good - protecting our environment. Better to prosecute consenting adults for having sex on a nude beach.

Walker has an ideology and an agenda which has nothing to do with fiscal responsibility and everything to do with implementing his right-wing, pro-business, pro-property rights, anti-civil rights agenda. When it comes to furthering his agenda money's no object. The only time fiscal responsibility comes into play is when he wants to deprive ordinary citizens of their right to a decent life.