

June 13, 2011

The board of Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies has released the following position statement regarding the Budget Repair Bill and the proposed Biennial Budget:

**The board of the Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies (WCSS) opposes the current version of the Budget Repair Bill (Act 10) and many of the provisions in the proposed Biennial Budget.** We ask members of the Wisconsin Legislature to amend the Budget Repair Bill and to significantly alter the biennial budget.

In light of the fact that there is a state mandate to teach about labor history and collective bargaining rights, we find it important to take a public stand on the most significant changes in forty years to collective bargaining rights for state workers. **The Budget Repair Bill contains a number of significant changes, most notably the provisions that essentially eliminate collective bargaining rights for state employees.** Major policy changes, such as eliminating public union collective bargaining, should have been a centerpiece of a political campaign. Instead, as the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* has reported, not once during campaign was the idea ending collective bargaining rights for both pensions and health care for public employees expressed. There is no public mandate for such a policy.

**The Board of WCSS believes that public workers should not be singled out to bear the budget reduction burden.** They are our neighbors, our police, our firefighters and teachers; they are the people that plow our roads and clean our public buildings. WCSS strongly recommends that, in keeping with the venerable progressive traditions of our state, public workers be allowed to retain the bargaining rights that have sustained their professions for decades.

**The current economic troubles and deficits in Wisconsin, while serious, do not warrant these measures.** In fact, according to a 2011 report issued by *Moody Investor Services*, which examined combined state debt and pension liabilities, Wisconsin rated in the top quartile of states. We are concerned that an atmosphere of fear of an economic crisis is being used to coerce people into acting quickly and perhaps rashly in search of a resolution to this issue. As social studies educators, the WCSS Board believes in thoughtful, rational, and reasoned debate that allows intelligent people to change their mind in light of new information and thoughtful deliberation. Moreover, we worry that partisanship and political pressure may impede this type of careful and thoughtful analysis and reasoned judgment. As social studies educators, we are deeply troubled by the seeming lack of concern for democratic procedures such as the ending of a public meeting before all have had a chance to testify, the questionable closing of the capitol to legal protest, the premature closure of discussion and debate, the rushed votes, and the seeming lack of a willingness to negotiate with legislators in the minority.

**K-12 education will suffer disproportionately in the budgetary proposals** that recommend reducing state payments to schools by unprecedented levels. We are skeptical of the claims that the required additional payments by teachers into their pensions and health insurance will compensate for these cuts. According to State Superintendent Tony Evers, an analysis by Andrew Revchosky of UW-Madison's LaFollette School of Public Affairs reveals that "public school children will suffer the greatest state cut to education since the Great Depression under Governor Walker's proposed budget." The significant cuts to school funding will hurt children and will limit their futures.

**We are concerned that under the budgetary proposals, professional development opportunities for social studies teachers may be significantly curtailed.** This past year, we have witnessed a significant drop in our conference attendance at the WCSS annual conference, which we attribute at least in part to the budgetary proposals and the previous cuts to education. The WCSS board believes that high quality professional development is essential to helping teachers be prepared to best educate children.

**The quality of education in Wisconsin will suffer if the budgetary proposals pass.** Under the budgetary proposals, teachers' compensation packages would be slashed and their union rights—a right guaranteed in the United Nations *Declaration of Human Rights*—would be severely curtailed. Teachers will have a greatly reduced voice in developing important policies such as class size, teaching load, professional development, planning time, extracurricular duties, and more; this will likely reduce the effectiveness of instruction. These proposals also risk driving the most talented, dedicated, and experienced teachers from the profession or from the state. Many K-12 teachers are retiring this year because of budgetary issues and uncertainties. Moreover, the **integrity of teacher licensing is being compromised** by exemptions for charter school teachers. Of all educational factors, the quality of the teacher has the greatest impact on the education and future success of kids. An educated populace is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy and a basic human right.

**The board of WCSS disagrees with the priorities, both stated and implicit, in the Budget Repair Bill and the proposed Biennial Budget.** The amount of new state resources to be devoted to road construction far outstrips the **cuts to the University of Wisconsin System and campuses.** Understandably, many Wisconsin college and university faculty will no doubt consider leaving if the economic assault on higher education in the state continues. These deep budget cuts to higher education and the ensuing **“brain drain”** will negatively impact Wisconsin's higher education as well as the preparations of a well-educated workforce and citizenry for years to come. Should not Wisconsin citizens be asked whether they would consider road construction a far higher priority than educating their children and grandchildren?

**These budgetary decisions will have consequences for decades to come. The lack of open and reasoned debate on the proposed changes, and the lack of ability to compromise and to discard ideas are not in the best interest of Wisconsin.** Therefore, we, the board of WCSS, urge the Wisconsin State Government to reconsider the Budget Repair Bill and the Biennial Budget in their current forms. Legislators and their constituents have an obligation to examine alternative budget proposals on how to wisely address the state's budget deficit and at the same time to find ways to move Wisconsin forward.