Investigating Homeless Outcomes of Former Foster Care Youth in Wisconsin

By Sarah Foster, Ellen Hildebrand, and Caroline McCormack

Hundreds of Wisconsin’s foster care youth “age out” of the system each year. The expectation is that these youth are prepared for adulthood, yet many former foster care youth lack the skills necessary to transition into independent living. Without securing adequate housing, education, and employment, these young adults experience homelessness at greater rates than the general population.

To help policymakers and program developers address this problem, we match foster care and homelessness data from different Wisconsin state government agencies for 2005 to 2013. This matching yields an original and unique dataset that we use to examine demographic, familial, and structural factors related to homelessness among former foster youth. Our analysis places a specific focus on 18- and 19-year-olds—the ages when foster care children “age out” of the foster care system. Our hope is that this study will contribute to the body of knowledge that can aid in the development of programs that meet the needs of Wisconsin’s most vulnerable youth.

Foster Care Policy Framework

Federal and state governments assume responsibility for preparing foster care youth for the transition to adulthood. The federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 assists youth aging out of foster care in obtaining resources to maintain stable lives outside of the system. The law allocates $200 million annually to states for independent living services and post-secondary education support for these youths; this support includes education and employment promotion, housing support, and skills training. In 2012, approximately 66 percent of eligible youth in Wisconsin received Chafee funded services.

According to the state Department of Children and Families (DCF), approximately 450 state youth (8.5 percent of the total number of foster children) age out of foster care each year. DCF receives approximately $2 million in Chafee funds to support transition planning for youth. The funds are distributed among 71 counties, the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, three Native American tribes, and the Department of Corrections Division of Juvenile Corrections. Through statewide stakeholder outreach and an organizational effectiveness process, DCF determined in 2013 that Chafee service delivery at the county level does not sufficiently support the aged-out foster care population. DCF cited administrative overhead, competing priorities, and lack of expertise as reasons for inefficient use of funds. The
Research on Foster Care Youth Outcomes

Research has consistently shown poor outcomes among former foster youth related to their demographic and placement characteristics, and to family stability. However, little research has been conducted on the homeless outcomes of youth aging out of foster care. We can draw upon the broader literature to understand the transition into adulthood, stable housing, and permanent living situations, or permanency.

Studies consistently show that black youth have worse outcomes than their white peers. According to a 2006 study, black children are less likely to be reunited with their primary caretakers after being discharged from the foster care system and adopted than white children, leading to adverse outcomes.

Age is also shown to be a significant factor associated with poor permanency outcomes, which may lead to homelessness when these youth transition into adulthood. Specifically, many studies found that children who enter the system in their teens are less likely to exit the foster care system into any type of permanent living arrangements and familial relationships. According to a 2010 study of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, infants and younger children are less likely than older youth to be reunified with their biological parents. However, younger children are more likely than older youth to be adopted.

Multiple studies have looked at the number of out-of-home placements, placement type, and foster care outcomes. A 2003 study drawing from administrative data from Nevada’s Division of Child and Family Services found that the more foster care placements the youth encountered, the worse they fared when exiting the system. This study showed that those children with more foster care placements were more likely to have trouble with the law and spend time in jail, more likely to be homeless at some time after leaving care, and have smaller support networks.

Another 2003 study focused on the relationship of placement setting to exit rates and outcomes. It showed that youth in group home settings and some kinship care settings become reunited with their families at lower rates than other types of placements. The 2006 study found that youth in group homes and shelter placements are significantly less likely to be adopted. Additionally, this study showed that the total number of foster care placements was significantly related to lower rates of adoption and family reunification. A few studies have studied housing outcomes for former foster youth. In the study of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, youth were surveyed regarding their transition out of foster care. Data were collected on housing outcomes at four intervals between ages 17 and 24. When compared with the general population, these youth were found to have much poorer housing outcomes. The study found that 37 percent of the former foster youth had one episode of homelessness since their last foster care placement. Moreover, about 50 percent of former foster youth had four or more living situations since exiting foster care, and less than one third of the study sample of youth were living with biological parents or a relative.

Defining Homelessness

The data for our analysis was generated as a result of a joint effort to match data from DCF and the Wisconsin Department of Administration. These data include information about former foster youth who have and have not interacted with the homeless service system from 2005 through 2013. Our analysis is the first time that a data sharing agreement was established between these two state agencies. We define homelessness as having at least one entry into an emergency shelter in Wisconsin. Our definition excludes populations who have experienced homelessness in other states or have experienced homelessness but not utilized a shelter. This factor limits our analysis in that some youth may experience other types of unstable housing, such as “couch surfing” or “doubling up” with relatives. Consequently, our analysis likely underestimates the total number of former foster youth in our dataset who experienced homelessness from 2005 to 2013. Despite these limitations, our matched administrative dataset sheds new insight into homelessness among former foster youth in Wisconsin.

Analysis of Former Foster Youth in Wisconsin

We studied the impact of the foster care system on homelessness among “aged out” youth in Wisconsin using information from the matched dataset described above. First, we compared the characteristics of former foster youth who experienced homelessness to those who did not experience homelessness during the years 2005-2013. Second, we used statistical modeling to gain an understanding of which factors are related to being homeless, focusing on demographic characteristics, placement type, and discharge reason. Third, based on our statistical analysis, we computed predictive probabilities to indicate the size and significance of our estimated relationships. In addition to our data analysis, we conducted a review of state programs in
transition planning for youth aging out of foster care to help inform our data-driven policy recommendations.

Results

Of the 14,534 youth who left foster care from 2005 to 2013, 626 (4.3 percent) experienced homelessness during that time period. Of those youth, 3,155 aged out of the system, and 207 (6.5 percent) of those individuals became homeless.

The Role of Race and Gender

Our results, in many cases, serve to confirm the conventional wisdom about the factors that are related to homelessness. As shown in Figure 1, black youth are overrepresented in the former foster youth population and the population that became homeless. Our statistical models reinforce this result: Race is consistently a significant predictor of homelessness. This factor may be driven, in part, by income disparities between races that our data do not allow us to directly model.

Gender is also correlated with homelessness, but not with the same statistical consistency as race once other variables are included in our analysis. The descriptive data show that while females represent 43 percent of the foster youth in our sample, they represent 48 percent of the group that becomes homeless. In general, girls are far more likely than boys to have abusive parents, and an abusive parent makes a child more likely to become homeless.

The Role of Foster Care Settings

DCF treats a youth as being in foster care if that individual was ever placed in one of seven care settings. Six of the seven placements significantly correlate with being homeless: foster care, group home, residential care center, shelter, correctional, and relative. Only youth who were placed with relatives upon leaving foster care were less likely to become homeless. The remaining settings were negatively related to being homeless. This result is consistent with other research that suggests that more restrictive foster care settings are more likely to lead to adverse housing outcomes.

While these estimated relationships are revealing, it does not necessarily follow that foster care children who are not placed with a relative would have been better off had they not been placed in foster care.

The Role of Final Discharge Reason

The final discharge reason for leaving the foster care system is strongly related to becoming homeless. The types of discharge reasons that protected a youth from becoming homeless were adoption, guardianship, and reunification with the youth’s original caretakers. We also find that being transferred into an adult correctional facility, unsurprisingly, reduces the likelihood of homelessness.

To understand the relative size of these effects of these demographic characteristics, placement types, and final discharge reasons on homelessness, it is useful to remember that

![Figure 1. Comparing Race Among Former Foster Youth and Homeless Populations (2005-2013)](image-url)

Source: Authors’ calculations
the underlying risk of homelessness among the former foster youth population we studied was 4.3 percent. Figure 2 shows the predictive probabilities of becoming homeless for former foster youth. We find that black and female youth in the foster care system are more likely to experience homelessness than their respective white and male counterparts. Blacks are about 23 percent more likely to enter into homelessness than others. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found that black youth have poorer outcomes following foster care. Additionally, female youth are about 9 percent more likely to enter homelessness after their experience with the foster care system.

Having access to familial resources is a consistent predictor of homelessness in our findings. Both placement type and last discharge reason demonstrate the importance of access to familial resources in successfully transitioning out of the foster care system. Being placed with a relative is the best way for youth to avoid homelessness. Similarly, adoption and family reunification as final discharge reasons also reduce the chance of homelessness following foster care. We find that former foster youth who were adopted at their last discharge from the foster system are 140 percent less likely to become homeless than former foster youth who are not adopted. Additionally, we find that youth who were reunited with their family are 23 percent less likely to become homeless than are former foster youth who were not reunited with their families.

These results show that individuals who are able to remain connected with their parents or a relative while in and out of the foster care system tend to transition more successfully to life outside of the foster care system. Individuals who lack connections to family while in the foster care system and after being discharged have lower access to the resources and support a family provides. These findings show that permanent connections with a caring adult should be emphasized when creating policies aimed at reducing homelessness among former foster youth.

**Promising Best Practices in Transition Planning**

Despite evidence suggesting the importance of housing stability and familial connections, little evaluation exists on programs that support the foster care youth in achieving both of these outcomes. In lieu of evidence-based best practices, we describe innovative programs in other states that encourage housing stability and permanent familial connections to support systems for former foster care youth.

**Permanent Connections**

Most young adults who are raised by their original families are able to maintain long lasting relationships and build social networks. However, youth in the foster care system have fewer opportunities to build social networks with caring adults, and they may have initially entered the foster system because of problems with their original families. This problem is substantial because these social networks provide a number of important functions as youth transition into adulthood, including emotional support; guidance on employment, education, and relationships; and assistance during times of emergency. Many of the significant variables in our regression analysis (parental abuse, relative foster placement, and discharge into adoption, family reunification, or guardianship) reflect the importance of such connections.

To help foster youth transition into adulthood, state and

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**Figure 2. Predictive Probabilities of Homelessness for Former Foster Youth**

- Female: -6.5
- Black: -5.7
- Parent is Abuser: -5.4
- Each Additional Foster Placement: -3.2
- Placement with Relative: -1.3
- Discharged to Guardianship: -0.9
- Adopted: -0.25
- Reunited with Family: 0.1

Source: Authors' calculations
local governments are taking steps to help foster kids build and maintain stable, long-lasting, and meaningful relationships with caring adults. In 2003, the New York City Administration for Children Services began to require that all frontline staff be trained to help foster youth connect to family members or other caring adults before they leave the foster care system. Once a connection with a caring adult is made, social workers must involve the adult in team conferences aimed at planning the youth’s future and discharge from the foster system. If a social connection to a caring, responsible adult is not possible, the social worker is required to identify other avenues to encourage permanency. The purpose of connecting youth to their family members or other caring adults is to build lifelong relationships with an adult who can function in a parental capacity.

In a similar effort, California implemented a law in 2003 requiring state child welfare agencies to encourage frontline staff to develop approaches that ensure youth exit foster care with a connection to a caring, committed adult. The legislation requires the court to determine whether the child welfare agency has made reasonable efforts to maintain relationships with individuals who are important youth in foster care. Social workers and other frontline staff must make efforts to identify those individuals and to make efforts to maintain those relationships. Overall, this law aims to ensure that youth in foster care are connected to a social network upon exiting the system.

**Housing**

Providing youth with housing-related support is one of the most straightforward ways to reduce homelessness. However, the current level of housing-related support that Wisconsin provides to youth aging out of foster care is limited. In 2012, only 4 percent of Chafee funds went directly to room and board assistance. This small amount generally supports down payments on security deposits, household furnishings, or short-term rental assistance. Chafee program fund use in Wisconsin does not support the housing needs of former foster care youth.

Many programs nationwide are dedicated to helping former foster youth develop financial literacy and gain access to affordable housing. The two main ways are rental vouchers and direct placement of youth into safe and stable housing. Foster youth who have aged out of the system are eligible for rental vouchers through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This assistance is available to any family who has been separated or could be separated due to a lack of housing. In some states, former foster youth have been prioritized in receiving these vouchers. These states include Arkansas, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, and New York.

However, since federal rent subsidies are limited, states often step in and help connect state and local housing organizations and community centers. Illinois and Michigan have successfully adopted this model. In 2009, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority provided funds to smaller organizations addressing homeless youth projects for former foster youth. The Illinois Youth Housing Assistance Program uses Chafee money for transitional services, including direct assistance, financial training and counseling, and help in securing affordable housing.

**Conclusion**

Foster care youth in Wisconsin face a unique set of challenges. Our study examined data and transition planning programs around the nation to inform strategies for improving the outcomes of foster care youth. As state agencies and social service organizations seek innovative interventions, we suggest a deeper review of other state programs that promote permanent connections, housing stability, education, and vocational training.

DCF should strive for the creation of a unified dataset with foster youth and homeless data that provides additional research opportunities for deeper analysis. For example, we suggest an expansion of the dataset by incorporating data from other state sources, including educational attainment data and incarceration records. These data could shed light on other factors correlated with adverse outcomes, including the factors behind the placement of foster youth into correctional placements, patterns of transfer into adult facilities, and the longer-run relationship between the experience of a correctional placement and homelessness. Additionally, surveys of former foster youth could complement the analysis of administrative data studied here. Finally, policymakers and DCF program staff should conduct regular evaluations of the programs created to support youth aging out of foster care.
Can Local Motivations Help Address the Global Climate Problem?

By Gregory F. Nemet

Several characteristics of climate change make it a daunting challenge for policymakers. These include the combination of substantial near term costs and long-delayed and uncertain globally diffuse benefits. In designing and implementing energy policies to address climate change, governments negotiate a thicket of often conflicting social demands for an energy system that provides a reliable supply of low-cost energy, while protecting health and the environment. Climate change adds an additional set of difficulties for governments because mitigating the negative effects of global climate change requires a fundamental transition in the energy system. Moreover, the time scales inherent in the climate and energy systems imply a need for persistence in policymaking; policies need to be applied and adjusted over several decades. However, the non-climate benefits that accompany public policies to address climate change make this policy challenge a bit less daunting.

Changing the energy system to stabilize the climate is likely to have a variety of effects that are not directly related to greenhouse gas emissions, including human health, macro-economic, geo-political, eco-system, agricultural yields, and employment patterns. Those effects that favor human welfare are often termed “co-benefits.” Note that these co-benefits are distinct from “direct climate benefits,” which also affect the economy, health, agriculture, and other aspects of human welfare. Direct climate benefits result from reductions in the amount of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere; in contrast, co-benefits result from the actions that are taken to reduce greenhouse gases, rather than those gases themselves. The term “benefits” is used to reflect the fact that decisions related to policies designed to address climate change are typically made with consideration of their costs and benefits. These decisions, however, do not usually consider the full range of effects of actions to address climate change. Among the most important of known co-benefit effects are those associated with air quality and the resulting improvements in human health.

The Scale of the Transformation Required

A serious effort to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and to stabilize the climate requires basic changes in energy production and consumption. In the face of a doubling of global demand for energy services, greenhouse gas emissions need to be less than one-fourth of current levels within a few decades. Since incremental improvements in the efficiency of existing energy technologies and cost reduction experienced by low-carbon energy sources are insufficient, an important challenge for energy policy is the scale of the transformation required. Reducing emissions by this substantial amount in the face of a growing global economy implies decreasing the carbon intensity of production by 5 percent annually for the next several decades. To put this in perspective, only six countries have sustained that rate of decarbonization for a decade or more: China during its modernization in the 1980s; post-Soviet Union transitions in Russia, Poland, and Slovakia; and adoption of nuclear power by Sweden and France in the 1980s (see Figure 1). Energy policy needs to be at least equivalent with these historically significant transformations—and sustained globally for decades.

Such a transition will require substantial innovation. Innovation depends heavily on the willingness of many actors to manage technical and market risk so that the enormous investments—tens of trillions of dollars—required to improve technologies are profitable. While the private sector is likely to continue to account for a dominant share of investments in innovation and deployment of new technologies, government decisions affect the incentives that firms in the private sector face, due to multiple market failures.

At present, there is a negative externality problem associated with carbon emissions: Carbon-emitters pay nothing to emit while others bear the costs of the resulting damages. An economy-wide price signal that reflected the full social cost of each additional unit of carbon emitted would address this negative externality problem. However, an efficient carbon price is a necessary but insufficient policy to stabilize the climate.
A second market failure is the spillover benefits of knowledge. Given a high and rising carbon price and the need for the global economy to decarbonize at 5 percent annually, one would expect the business community to devise methods to decarbonize energy production, with new processes, materials, and devices. However, a single firm’s costly efforts to initiate low-carbon pilot projects, demonstrations, and prototypes would result in a knowledge spillover to other firms. Competitors would learn from these investments—by reverse-engineering products, imitating designs, and observing success or failure. This ability to learn without costs creates the knowledge spillover market failure. The learning firms are “free riders” and fail to invest themselves. As a result, the total level of investment in new processes, materials, and devices would be too small.

While the spread of knowledge is generally beneficial, knowledge spillovers harm innovation in that they weaken incentives for innovators. As a result, incentives for investment are blunted and innovation proceeds more slowly than is optimal.

Knowledge spillovers are generally larger early in the innovation process. This new knowledge may consist of foundational designs and scientific information that spreads easily, e.g., through publications and conference presentations. Knowledge spillovers in early stages are why governments sponsor science and basic research, which firms are unlikely to fund on their own. But knowledge spillovers are also problematic at later stages in the innovation process. After a new technology moves out of the research it may still not be ready for commercial use. It may need to be scaled up, production processes may need to be put into place, and reliability may not yet be proven. At this stage, what innovation researchers call the “Valley of Death,” the scale of the investments required is large, but technical uncertainty is still high. Consider, for example, the decision about building a first-of-its-kind nuclear power plant or carbon-capture power plant. Billions of dollars are at stake, but no one knows how well the plant will work—and the whole world can watch, for free, to see whether it works. Providing efficient incentives for this type of investment requires additional policies, since even a perfectly priced carbon tax will not avoid the problem of knowledge spillovers. To confront this knowledge spillover market failure, governments may need to fund a portion of the first few plants needed to “demonstrate” this new technology. The scale of the technological change required makes incentives for technological change a central concern of energy policy. There is a role for governments to play at multiple stages of the innovation process.

Another challenge to transforming the energy system to address climate change is that these systems are slow to change. Much of the capital stock in the energy system lasts a very long time—often 50 to 100 years. The aged fuel pipelines, power plants, and electricity transmission lines that are key parts of the U.S. energy system are examples of long-lived investments in infrastructure. For most system components, operating costs are low relative to capital costs of new installations. It is often less expensive to use and maintain old equipment for decades, despite the availability of new technologies with attractive characteristics.

One consequence of long-lived capital stock is that transitions from one dominant energy source to another—such as from wood to coal or from coal to oil—have historically taken almost a century. This inertia is exacerbated when addressing climate change due to the long atmospheric lifetimes of greenhouse gases—remaining in the atmosphere and continuing to reradiate heat for nearly a century. Even if energy system transition times shorten through technology changes, these inertial forces cannot be ignored. Any successful strategy to transform the energy system to address climate change will require strong popular and political will sustained over decades. And it will require patience: Investors, policymakers, and others looking for returns will likely need to wait many years.

This need for persistence and patience contrasts with the
historical patterns of energy policymaking, especially in the United States where we see cycles of booms and busts—eras of active policymaking followed by years of indifference. Policy priorities come and go as crises fade and as competing social concerns take precedence. Recent work that I have undertaken with students at the La Follette School has found that in the past 40 years, 63 energy-related policies have involved targets five or more years beyond the year in which they were first implemented. These targets were achieved about two-thirds of the time. For many actors in the energy economy, this historical experience undermines the credibility of stated energy policy targets.

This lack of credibility is important because investors in low-carbon innovation are crucial for a transition to a decarbonized energy system. But these investors are appropriately skeptical that policy targets will not be met on time—such as targets for emissions levels or carbon prices. If investors need carbon prices for their investments to pay off, they are likely to adjust the risk of the payoffs they expect from these investments to account for the possibility that targets will be changed—such as if abatement costs increase above what the public will support. This effect weakens the incentives that policies are intended to provide.

At present, the American public does not seem to put much value on the benefits of avoiding climate change. It will be difficult to sustain policies involving high and rising carbon prices when surveys show that each American is willing to pay hundreds—but not thousands—of dollars per household per year. If one assumes that carbon prices will have to eventually become high enough to create incentives for low-carbon energy to replace high-carbon energy, the current reluctance of the American public to pay these prices seems incompatible with stringent climate policy. Perhaps technological breakthroughs will serendipitously arrive and make the needed energy transition smooth, easy, and inexpensive. But that is a risky premise on which to design policy. A more proactive approach would be to establish the conditions that make breakthroughs more likely to occur: carbon pricing, innovation-oriented policy, and political leadership. For that, public sentiment needs to change, which might come about as people see that addressing climate change has local and near term benefits, not just long-term and global ones.

Local and Near Term Co-Benefits

Since 2009, the local and near term benefits of climate policy have become more prominent in policy debates and better documented in the literature. This research indicates that the consideration of air quality co-benefits reduces the societal cost of climate policy. Valuing co-benefits generally justifies more stringent climate policy by decreasing the perceived social damages that come from reducing emissions. These co-benefits also improve the robustness of stringent climate policy, in part because the uncertainty in the timing and extent of damages from air pollution is substantially lower than those of climate change. Moreover, the benefits of reducing air pollution occur more locally and sooner.

Here is how the idea of “co-benefits” works. Begin with the knowledge that the costs of complying with regulations, such as the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, are on the order of billions of dollars per year, just for nitrogen oxides. More stringent recent regulations and inclusion of all regulated pollutants would result in substantially higher compliance costs. Changes in the technologies used to produce and consume energy, as well as the level of energy consumption, have two beneficial effects related to air quality. First, many of the changes that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions would also reduce other emissions as well, such as nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, and mercury. These pollutants lead to asthma, hypertension, neurological problems, smog, as well as ecological damage. Second, many of these technological changes would reduce the need for expensive pollution-control equipment—such as flue-gas desulfurization, selective catalytic reduction, and electrostatic precipitators—to comply with air quality regulations. Both of these effects work to reduce the perceived cost of complying with the regulations.

Earlier work has looked at the costs and benefits of air pollution regulations and found large net benefits. A widely cited 1997 study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found that the Clean Air Act of 1970 had net benefits of about $30 billion in today’s dollars, with benefits about 40 times the costs. Uncertainty is large, primarily due to how much value one ascribes to avoiding premature deaths, but net benefits are in the trillions, even in the most conservative valuation of benefits. While this sort of study is insightful, the valuing of the co-benefits of energy and environmental regulations designed to effect climate change requires a different approach.

To evaluate potential co-benefits of climate change policy, the social cost of complying with some form of climate change regulations (say, air pollution regulations) must be compared to the benefits of compliance in the form of a) improved health and b) avoided air pollution regulation compliance costs. These benefits are considered “co-benefits.”

In equation form, this evaluation is:

\[ \text{Social Net Benefits of Climate Change Policy} = \text{Direct Climate Benefits} + \text{Co-Benefits} - \text{Social Cost of Compliance with Climate Policy} \]

The expression \( \text{Co-Benefits} \) is defined as:

\[ \text{Co-Benefits} = \text{Improved Health Outcomes} + \text{Other Co-Benefits} + \text{Avoided Non-Climate Policy Compliance Costs} \]

This is a different type of exercise than calculating the net benefits of air pollution regulations. First, we are comparing benefits, many of which were not objectives of the policy, so
the institutional mechanisms for ongoing evaluation are mostly absent. Second, whereas the estimates mentioned above are ex post, these are prospective. Consider that even the EPA’s analysis of historical net benefits of the Clean Air Act had uncertainty bounds that span an order of magnitude. Uncertainty is an even more troublesome issue with prospective co-benefits. As a result, studies of co-benefits have been careful about providing ranges, rather than central estimates. They have also tried to be global over long periods rather than location specific.

In 2010, a University of Wisconsin–Madison study analyzed 37 peer-reviewed studies of air quality co-benefits published from 1991 to 2010. These studies provided 48 estimates of the economic value of air quality co-benefits of climate change mitigation policy. They span diverse geographies, time horizons, valuation techniques, and involve different mixes of economic sectors contributing to mitigation. They found that air quality co-benefits well exceed the costs of reducing climate change. They found a range of benefits of $2-$196 per ton of carbon dioxide with a mean of $49 (see Figure 2). They did not estimate costs to achieve these costs, but report that $20 is a likely range from the models they surveyed. They found much higher levels of benefits, and even lower costs, in developing countries where air quality is low and the marginal benefit of reducing pollution immediately leads to reduced hospitalizations and improved well-being. An important caveat here is that in 2010, there was the dearth of studies in developing countries so that those results had large error bars attached.

Indeed, those error bars were found to be important in a study three years later from the University of North Carolina and others that modeled air quality co-benefits around the world over the course of the century. The authors found estimates much higher than those surveyed by the Wisconsin study. The bottom end of their range, $50, is close to the mean of the Wisconsin study, although their upper bound, $380, is almost double that of the Wisconsin study. Climate policy costs are well below benefits in most of the century, and only at the end of the century, when climate policy becomes very stringent, do costs approach benefits. Like the Wisconsin study, these estimates only valued air quality benefits, not climate ones. They used a longer time line, they modeled the interaction between warmer temperatures and air pollution, and they included demographic changes. They found a large portion of the co-benefits of global climate change mitigation actions is attributable to reduction of particulate matter, and consequent health effects, in China. Benefits exceed costs in the near term in China by a factor of 10 to 70. Like the Wisconsin study, co-benefits are especially large in developing countries.

In April 2014, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a new climate assessment—the last was in 2007. The IPCC convenes thousands of scientists who, every five to seven years, summarize the state of science and social science on aspects of climate change. The reports are peer reviewed and address thousands of public comments. They include a “Summary for Policy Makers” that distills hundreds of pages of somewhat technical text into 30 or so pages. Representatives of the national governments that sponsor the IPCC

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**Figure 2. Estimates of the Value of Air Quality Co-Benefits**

- Developed Countries
- Developing Countries

**Broadening the scope from climate benefits to include air quality and other co-benefits raises the importance of the location of avoided emissions. ... Not all of the benefits of avoided emissions are distributed across the world, some, a substantial amount, are retained locally.**
also approve this summary. This assessment can be said to represent a consensus, or at least a basic shared understanding, of what we know about climate change. Released in April, the fifth assessment report highlighted co-benefits:

“Climate policy intersects with other societal goals creating the possibility of co-benefits or adverse side-effects. These intersections, if well managed, can strengthen the basis for undertaking climate action. Mitigation and adaptation can positively or negatively influence the achievement of other societal goals, such as those related to human health, food security, biodiversity, local environmental quality, energy access, livelihoods, and equitable sustainable development; and vice versa, policies toward other societal goals can influence the achievement of mitigation and adaptation objectives. These influences can be substantial, although sometimes difficult to quantify, especially in welfare terms. This multi-objective perspective is important in part because it helps to identify areas where support for policies that advance multiple goals will be robust.”

Awareness of co-benefits as a central part of policy design is now much more pervasive.

Implications of Valuing Co-Benefits

The most fundamental implication of valuing co-benefits is that large values of such benefits justify more stringent policy than if only direct climate benefits are valued. As the studies above suggest, inclusion of co-benefits provides more than a trivial effect. Moreover, even though co-benefits are uncertain, they are likely more certain than direct climate benefits. The higher certainty associated with co-benefits effectively provides a hedge against the longer term and more uncertain benefits of climate policy. As the IPCC says, greater certainty makes policies “robust” and has led others to refer to them as “no regrets” policies, that is, even if climate change turns out to be relatively benign in a region, one still receives co-benefits.

The local aspect of co-benefits is especially important. With co-benefits, the geographic dispersion of the benefits of mitigation becomes more closely tied to location of emissions. A basic justification behind greenhouse gas emissions trading is that the atmosphere is indifferent to the location of emissions since the main greenhouse gases are long-lived and are well mixed throughout each hemisphere (for methane) and across the globe (for others, including carbon dioxide). Broadening the scope from climate benefits to include air quality and other co-benefits raises the importance of the location of emissions. One implication is that, from a nation-state perspective, co-benefits make emissions reductions more targeted than effects that are a pure public good. Not all of the benefits of avoided emissions are distributed across the world, some, a substantial amount, are retained locally.

This local aspect of co-benefits itself has implications. First, it provides stronger incentives for cooperation from developing countries than do climate change benefits alone. Due to lower incomes, an earlier stage of development, and negligible historical contribution to the stock of atmospheric greenhouse gases, rapidly growing developing countries are particularly sensitive to abatement costs and have shown only modest enthusiasm for reducing emissions. Their recent and predicted growth makes them essential to addressing the global problem. The studies mentioned above show higher levels of co-benefits in developing countries. The nearer-term and more localized co-benefits of climate change mitigation might be sufficient to prompt developing countries to participate in international climate agreements that they might not otherwise agree to. Second, it makes offsets—payments to others to reduce emissions so as to “offset” one’s own emissions—less attractive. For example, under a United Nations agreement, a company in the Netherlands can claim emissions reductions by paying a factory in China to improve the efficiency of its processes. These payments have been in the billions of dollars per year. The valuation of local co-benefits is likely to have a reduced effect on the flow of offset funds from developed to developing countries. Similarly, state governments have used offset programs to reduce the cost of their emission reductions. Co-benefits will increase the amount of mitigation that occurs within states. While making less use of offsets is likely to raise costs, it will probably generate even greater benefits.

Co-benefits not only help justify more stringent climate policy, they imply different types of policies. Inclusion of air quality co-benefits increases the appeal of transforming energy production and use relative to other means of addressing climate change, which tend to have less pronounced effects on air quality and other co-benefits. For example, the appeal of forest preservation will diminish relative to emissions mitigation when air quality co-benefits are included—though of course valuation of other co-benefits such as biodiversity would increase the relative appeal of forests. Similarly, air quality co-benefits reduce the attractiveness of adaptation and climate engineering relative to mitigation.

Challenges of Incorporating Co-Benefits into Policymaking

Considering co-benefits in climate policy design would almost certainly improve outcomes because those benefits are substantial and because previous policy analysis has not valued them. But consideration of co-benefits also faces challenges as it moves from academic research to policy adoption and implementation. First, difficulties arise from the fact that poor air quality is a different problem than climate change. For example, the Wisconsin study pointed to four main reasons climate policy analysis does not typically account for co-benefits: differences in uncertainty and risk; governance by different institutions; knowledge maintained by disconnected research and analysis communities; and measurement issues. The very differences that make co-benefits complementary to climate benefits and help mitigate risk also make them less likely to be adopted and implemented well. Second, policymakers may simply choose to address air quality directly since reducing local air pollution directly is likely cheaper than accomplishing that goal via climate policy. Countries, especially developing ones, may come to consider the damage they avoid by controlling climate.
change as a co-benefit of efforts to reduce air quality. This eventuality is less of a risk in the United States now that the EPA is requiring states to develop their own climate plans. But this possibility seems especially pertinent in developing countries where climate change mitigation has to date been considered a developed country responsibility. A third issue is that co-benefits are helpful to jump start climate policy, but less helpful in the long term, which in the climate domain means many decades. At higher levels of greenhouse gas mitigation, where abatement costs become expensive, co-benefits start to look relatively small. Physically, some air pollution, known as aerosols, has the counter-intuitive benefit of reflecting sunlight and thus cooling the Earth. As air quality and health improve, we will have less reflecting and thus more global warming. In the longer term, we will see a need for even more emissions reductions as air quality improves. Putting these concerns in perspective is important: These are concerns for after 2050.

Climate policy has been devolving. Progress on an international climate agreement has continued since 1990, but to date only a minority of global emissions is covered. Without the United States and China, the two emitters that contribute more than half of the world’s emissions, a partial international agreement is a precursor at best and possibly even a diversion from meaningful action. Perhaps in part due to this impasse, individual countries have set their own rules and targets, which vary considerably, in breadth, stringency, and compliance mechanisms. The United States has begun to develop its own unilateral approach. Over the past three years, the EPA has initiated regulations of greenhouse gases under the purview of the Clean Air Act originally signed by President Nixon in 1970. EPA rules issued in June require U.S. emission reductions of 30 percent by 2030 and give each state two years to come up with their own plans for meeting these targets. The wide discretion the EPA has given to states is an acknowledgment of the diverse conditions across states and the consequent need to develop policies that take these into account. But this federalist approach to climate policy is also likely to lead to policymaking that not only minimizes local costs but also maximizes local benefits. Given the physics of the atmosphere, the direct climatic benefits to a state of reducing emissions in that state are close to nil. Greenhouse gas emissions from a state are dispersed across the globe within 12 months and stay in the air for decades. Now that state policymakers have been tasked with designing their own climate policies, they are likely to become interested in co-benefits. Their local, near-term, and less uncertain impacts will appeal to those for whom globally dispersed benefits provide insufficient motivation for near term investment. Those co-benefits are likely to affect policy design as well. ◆
on them, and issue the final promulgations. The substance of the rule is important and the process of making them is important—that's how public policy is implemented in response to a law passed by a legislature.

For BILLD, we work hard to come up with the right mix of internationally renowned scholars, professional development experts, and legislative leaders. In times of strident partisanship, BILLD offers a chance for lawmakers to talk across the aisle, across state lines, and across international borders without regard to party affiliation. It has proven to be a special program over the years.

BILLD is also an excellent opportunity to showcase the University of Wisconsin–Madison with its beautiful setting, vast resources of a world-class research campus, and highly ranked school of public affairs. Indeed, two recent international studies give the University of Wisconsin–Madison high marks for the quality of faculty research in public affairs. The campus ranks second for the articles faculty published in the four top public administration journals for 2009 to 2013. A second study ranks the campus fourth for public administration research.

Our award-winning research has far reaching benefits that accrue not only to Midwestern legislators. Our students benefit because La Follette School faculty regularly weave their cutting-edge research into the courses they teach, whether that research is on performance management or the macroeconomic effects of current account balances. In turn, lawmakers and taxpayers benefit from this research because many of our students go on to work for local, state, and federal governments as budget and policy analysts. They do the work to answer legislators’ questions and help ensure taxpayers money is spent efficiently on programs that achieve the best results.

In addition to regulatory reform, this year’s agenda included policy sessions on the regional economy, infrastructure needs, and government-reform initiatives. In addition, the BILLD fellows participated in professional development sessions on time management, effective communications, and consensus-building and negotiation skills. La Follette School Professor Emeritus Dennis Dresang spoke on how leadership styles affect individuals’ abilities to perform in various settings, with an emphasis on committees and small-group decision-making. Current and former legislative leaders from across the region talked about strategies for being more effective legislators and policymakers.

The institute was started in 1995 by Virginia Thrall, then Director of the Midwestern Office of the Council of State Governments, and Professor Peter Eisinger, then Director of the La Follette Institute. Since then, BILLD has graduated more than 600 alumni.

The La Follette School of Public Affairs

**Congratulates Professor Maria Cancian**
on her nomination by President Obama to become Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Does Online Voter Registration Pay?

By Iseul Choi, Steven Kulig, Katie Lorenze, and Amanda Wilmarth

More than 2 million eligible voters across the United States were unable to cast ballots in the 2008 general election due to ongoing problems with their voter registrations, the Pew Center on the States estimated in 2010. Pew highlighted unnecessary costs and administrative burdens on state and county election offices stemming from outdated registration protocols. In hopes of addressing these problems, state election officials have pushed to modernize registration systems. Arizona became the first state in the nation to implement an online voter registration system in 2002. Since then, the National Conference of State Legislatures counts 19 more states that have started offering paperless registration. Another six states have passed legislation authorizing the creation of online voter registration systems. These systems are believed to reduce labor costs and improve efficiency of voter registration, but they also incur extra infrastructure and maintenance costs.

In Wisconsin, the Assembly passed legislation in June 2013 mandating the Government Accountability Board (GAB) to create and maintain “a secure Internet site” where voters with appropriate identification from the Department of Transportation (DOT) can register online to vote. The newly created online voter registration system would build off the My Vote Wisconsin website (myvote.wi.gov), which the GAB established in September 2012 to allow voters to fill out registration forms online and then print for in-person submission.

In fall 2013, our La Follette School team performed a cost-benefit analysis of implementing a full online voter registration system in Wisconsin. We concluded that implementing online voter registration in Wisconsin would result in benefits that exceed costs. Local governments would see most of these savings through reduced time and monetary costs. Based on our cost-benefit analysis, we strongly recommended in our presentation to the GAB that it support passage of legislation to implement a full online voter registration system. Although 2013 Assembly Bill 225, which would have required Wisconsin to implement an online voter registration system, did not pass the Senate before the end of the legislative session, we continue to recommend that the GAB support such legislation should it be introduced during the legislative session beginning January 2015.

Current Policy

Wisconsin voters can register to vote by mail or in person at their municipal clerk’s office, by a special registration deputy for their municipality, at the polling place on Election Day, or through My Vote Wisconsin. With the exception of Election Day registration and registering in person at the clerk’s office during the closed registration period, each of these methods must be completed during the open registration period, which closes 20 days prior to the election. With the exception of registration using My Vote Wisconsin, all of these methods require manual entry of data from the registration forms into Wisconsin’s Statewide Voter Registration System mandated by the federal Help America Vote Act of 2002. Municipal clerks verify all registrations and updates (except for those done in person) through a U.S. Postal Service mailing to the registration address.

Online Voter Registration Legislation in Wisconsin

In June 2013, the Assembly passed legislation authorizing the implementation of an online voter registration system. Had this legislation become law, the system would have allowed a voter with a current and valid driver’s license or Wisconsin DOT-issued identification card to register to vote electronically on a secure website maintained by the GAB up to 20 days prior to Election Day. Under this new system, individuals would fill out a standardized voter registration application form online, and the GAB would use the DOT’s database to
verify the accuracy of the information submitted. As part of the online process, the registrant would give the DOT permission to forward his or her electronic signature to the GAB, so that the GAB could use this in place of the “wet” ink signature the law currently requires.

The completed registration would be verified at multiple stages. First, the legislation mandates a synchronization of the agencies’ databases to facilitate instantaneous verification and flagging of irregularities, such as multiple addresses or dates of birth. The notification of an error would trigger a GAB investigation, rendering the application incomplete until the issue is resolved. To further authenticate the accuracy of online submissions, the bill retains the requirement of verifying registrations by sending letters or postcards to the registrant through first-class mail. The online system would also allow registered voters to change their information online up to 20 days prior to an election.

A Full System: Data and Methodology

Our analysis of costs and benefits draws heavily from a survey we created and distributed to municipal and county clerks to gauge the time and labor involved in processing voter registration forms and to determine how a full online voter registration system could affect processing times and staffing. Regarding costs of infrastructure and implementation, we used estimates from the GAB and the DOT. Last, to predict usage of a full online voter registration system in Wisconsin, we looked to other states that had implemented online voter registration prior to the November 2012 general election. We gathered data from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission’s Election Administration and Voting Survey. That instrument includes state-by-state data on the number of voter registrations processed and by what methods they are received.

The complexity of cost-benefit analysis makes it difficult to calculate with certainty a point estimate for all of the components of benefits and costs—and hence, net benefits. In practice, many of these costs and benefits are uncertain and require simplifying assumptions; therefore they have a range of plausible values. When these uncertain values are used to calculate the net present value, alterations in any of them could greatly affect the net benefit estimate. Rather than ignore this uncertainty, our analysis uses what is known as a Monte Carlo simulation that estimates a range of possible net benefits by repeating randomized sampling from an assumed distribution for each uncertain variable.

Monte Carlo analysis follows two basic steps. First, uncertain variables are assigned a uniform distribution of values. Second, the simulation randomly draws 100,000 values from each uniform distribution to calculate a range of net benefits. Uncertain variables in our analysis included the total annual number of registrations received, potential reductions in poll workers hired, the percentage of total registrations that would be carried out via the online voter registration system, implementation and maintenance costs, and clerk staff time savings. All wages and postage, paper, and ink costs were held constant.

The Costs of Implementing a Full Online Voter Registration System in Wisconsin

We estimated that creating and maintaining an online voter registration system would cost the GAB and the DOT approximately $2.06 million over the assumed 10-year life of the project, including one-time infrastructure costs incurred during implementation as well as ongoing software and personnel costs. We also accounted for potential advertising costs that could be associated with implementing an online voter registration system.

GAB and DOT Implementation Costs

Combined GAB and DOT implementation costs would be approximately $576,000, based on the agencies’ estimates. The GAB faces personnel, software, and training costs of approximately $423,000. According to the GAB, the equivalent of seven positions would need to be redirected from other projects to create the hardware for a full online system. The GAB would have to upgrade its servers to store voter registration data and electronic signatures, and to train employees, clerks, and staff. According to department estimates, the DOT would face implementation costs of $154,000, which would encompass one-time database development expenditures.

GAB Maintenance Costs

We estimated that GAB maintenance costs would total approximately $813,000 over the 10-year life of the project. Adding an online component to the Statewide Voter Registration System would require ongoing software maintenance and personnel support beyond the initial development phase. The GAB estimates software maintenance costs to equal the initial purchase price, or approximately $32,000 per year. Based on the experience of developing the My Vote Wisconsin website, the GAB estimates its annual personnel costs incurred would total approximately $64,000.

GAB Public Outreach and Advertising Costs

Because our prediction of cost savings is directly linked to the number of voters who would eventually use the online voter registration system, we strongly recommended that the GAB conduct a comprehensive outreach and advertising campaign to maximize its usage and realize full potential benefits. The campaign should focus on informing voters about how to register to vote and update their registrations online. We suggested...
that public outreach and advertising occur throughout the first year of implementation, and that the GAB follow a similar television, radio, and newspaper media campaign plan that it developed after the passage of Wisconsin’s voter ID law. GAB has yet to launch this campaign, as the implementation of the voter ID law has been delayed in federal court. Based on the GAB’s estimated media campaign budget for the implementation of the voter ID law, we expect a campaign would cost approximately $638,900.

While we believe it is important for the GAB to conduct a public outreach campaign, we are unclear about the extent to which increased outreach would lead to increased online voter registration system usage. We interviewed election officials in six states who have implemented online systems, none of which had a comprehensive outreach budget for the new system. Instead, officials relied on free media, press releases, and information posted to the states’ election information websites. These states’ usage rates ranged from 1.5 percent to 23 percent during the first two years of implementation. While such activities require diverting staff resources from other activities, it is difficult to estimate the opportunity costs of these activities and how they affected system usage.

To provide the GAB with a more comprehensive analysis, we considered three additional outreach campaign scenarios to explore the effects of media usage on use of an online voter registration system. Scenario one assumes that with no outreach expenditures, benefits from the increased use of an online voter registration system would be delayed by one year. Scenario two assumes that with no money spent on outreach, benefits would be delayed by two years. Scenario three assumes that spending nothing on outreach would not delay benefits. While we considered the potential effect on net benefits of each scenario, we based our overall estimate of net benefits on the full outreach budget of $638,900.

Benefits

Figure 1 shows our estimates of the extent of utilization of a full online voter registration system over the assumed 10-year life of the program. For each year, both upper and lower bound estimates are shown in Figure 1. To predict usage of the online voter registration system in Wisconsin, we used data from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and the Pew Center on the States relating to the utilization of online voter registration in states that implemented online systems prior to the November 2012 general election.

We estimated that the benefits from implementing a full system would total approximately $2.4 million over the 10-year life of the project; these benefits are primarily fiscal and time cost savings to local governments and individuals.

Reduced Local Government Costs of Processing Paper Voter Registrations

Online voter registration would reduce the number of paper registrations and registration updates that municipal clerks process, generating an estimated $1.3 million in time savings and reduced supply costs for local governments.

Reduction in Paper and Ink Costs

Adopting the online voter registration system would reduce the amount of paper and ink needed to print registration forms, yielding an estimated total cost savings of $15,400 over the life of the project. We estimated paper and ink costs to be 17 cents per double-side page and determined the annual reduction in paper based on the percentage of new and updated registrations that we projected to take place online over the life of the project.

Figure 1. Expected Use of Online Voter Registration System as a Percentage of All Registration Activity

Source: Authors’ calculations using data from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and the Pew Center on the States
Clerks’ Time Savings

If a full online voter registration system were implemented, local clerks would need to spend less time processing voter registration forms. For each voter who switches from registering in person or by mail to registering online, clerks would save time that can be used to perform other office tasks. We used our predicted usage rate and clerk wage data from the Wisconsin Municipal Clerks Association to obtain an estimate of clerks’ time cost savings; we monetized the hours of time saved by using the average clerk wage in Wisconsin, obtaining a value of approximately $1.3 million over the life of the project.

An online voter registration system would decrease administrative costs for local governments because clerks would spend less time processing registration forms as registrants switch to the online system, which would reduce the number of illegible or inaccurate registration forms they need to process. Based on the results of our survey to municipal and county clerks, we estimated that clerks spend, on average, approximately 5.5 minutes processing each registration form. Clerks spend an additional three minutes processing each inaccurate or illegible form. These inaccurate or illegible forms make up about 9 percent of all registration forms. With an online voter registration system, however, we expect that local governments could reduce errors and decrease the time spent deciphering incorrect registration forms, as the online system would require registrants to enter information from a DOT identification card that is instantaneously matched to the DOT database.

The estimated time savings of $1.3 million solely represents clerk staff spending less time processing registration forms and is thus a conservative estimate. If the estimated time savings is indeed realized by clerks’ offices, additional savings may be incurred through labor reductions. Based on our survey to clerks, it is reasonable to expect the estimated time savings to be associated with a reduction of at least 20 staff positions statewide.

Reduction in Number of Poll Workers Needed

If Wisconsin implemented the full online voter registration system, it would be the only state that offers both online and Election Day registration. Election Day registration is extremely popular with Wisconsin voters, and this popularity requires clerks to ensure enough poll workers are available to direct voters and assist with registrations. We assume that a certain percentage of voters who register to vote or update their registration system, however, we expect that local governments could reduce errors and decrease the time spent deciphering incorrect registration forms, as the online system would require registrants to enter information from a DOT identification card that is instantaneously matched to the DOT database.

The estimated time savings of $1.3 million solely represents clerk staff spending less time processing registration forms and is thus a conservative estimate. If the estimated time savings is indeed realized by clerks’ offices, additional savings may be incurred through labor reductions. Based on our survey to clerks, it is reasonable to expect the estimated time savings to be associated with a reduction of at least 20 staff positions statewide.

Based on our analysis and through observing similar online voter registration systems in other states, Wisconsin should not delay in updating its voter registration process.

Reduced Individual Costs to Register

The online voter registration system would result in a time cost savings of approximately $729,000 in total for all individuals who switch from registering by mail or in person to registering online. Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, we estimated that the average registrant spends 42 minutes (round trip) traveling to the clerk’s office to register, or approximately the same amount of time traveling to and from work. From the U.S. Election Assistance Commission data, we also determined that approximately 15 percent of all registration activity occurs in person at clerks’ offices during the open registration period. The approximately 3 percent who register by mail would save money on postage by switching to online registration.

We monetized the cost savings to in-person registrants by using the “leisure wage” of Wisconsin residents ($13.22 per hour), the total annual number of registrations, and the percentage of registrations predicted to occur online. We monetized cost savings to “by mail” registrants by taking the price of a stamp (approximately 50 cents), the cost of printing a double-sided form (17 cents per sheet), the total annual number of registrations, the percentage of registrations predicted to occur online, and assumed all individuals who register by mail and print the forms themselves.

Net Benefits of Implementing a Full Online Voter Registration System in Wisconsin

Table 1 summarizes our base estimates of the components of benefits and costs from implementing a full online voter registration system in Wisconsin.

Our base analysis found a mean present value of net benefits equal to approximately $404,300. From our Monte Carlo estimates, net benefits range from -$122.800 to $944,500, and are positive 99.9 percent of the time. This result equates to an annualized net benefit of $48,600. At a 2 percent discount rate, the distribution of present value of net benefits has a mean of $75,000, ranging from $5,200 to $1.16 million. At a 5 percent discount rate, the distribution of net benefits has a mean of $254,300 and a range of -$234,500 to $755,000.

At the GAB’s request, we also examined net present value under the alternative advertising scenarios discussed above. Under scenario one (no advertising and delay of the benefits derived from online voter registration system uptake by one year), mean net benefits are approximately $652,000 and range from $160,700 to $1.2 million with an annualized net benefit of $78,400. Under scenario two (no advertising, two-year delay), mean net benefits are approximately $341,500 and range from -$132,800 to $854,800 with an annualized net benefit of $14,900. Last, scenario three (in which no advertising would have no effect on system usage), has a mean net benefit of approximately $1.04 million with a benefit range from $530,700 to $1.6 million and an annualized net benefit of $125,000.
Recommendation

Based on our analysis, we strongly recommend that the GAB support adoption of an online voter registration system in Wisconsin. Our analysis estimated that the monetized benefits of such a new system exceed the implementation and maintenance costs, providing positive net benefits of approximately $372,000 over the first 10 years after implementation. Individuals who use the online voter registration system would realize time savings when registering to vote, and local governments would reduce costs through time savings, reduced supply use, and reduced poll worker labor.

Beyond our cost-benefit analysis, online voter registration continues to gain popularity around the country, with 19 states utilizing online voter registration systems and more considering adoption of such systems. Moreover, no state that has implemented online voter registration has considered overturning or replacing it. Based on our analysis and through observing similar online voter registration systems in other states, Wisconsin should not delay in updating its voter registration process. We confidently recommend that the GAB support the adoption of an online voter registration system in Wisconsin as written in 2013 Assembly Bill 225.

### Table 1. Benefits and Costs in Dollars of a Full Online Voter Registration System for Wisconsin

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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
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<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 8</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>312,200</td>
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</table>

Note: Columns will not add to total net present value due to rounding.
Commencement Address

Best Minds for Solving Problems

By Bob Jauch

Honored graduates, faculty, family and friends. I am so delighted and humbled to have this honor to share remarks regarding this amazing celebration.

The Assembly chamber has never looked so good. In fact as I look at the sea of talented individuals who are prepared and eager to do good things to better society, it is the best I have felt since I was sworn into office in January 1983.

It was a wonderful feeling that day but everything seemed to go downhill after that.

In fact my first vote was to say I was present, but I wished I wasn’t, for the following vote was to raise taxes and cut spending to address a huge budget deficit left by the prior Legislature.

I often tell people that they could identify me in the chambers that day because I was the one who was hiding under the desk as I voted for that controversial deficit reduction budget.

I wish all of my colleagues could be in this room observing this wonderful ceremony so that they could better appreciate the incredible return Wisconsin will receive from our higher education investment.

Graduates, you are going to make incredible contributions that pay back our citizens many times more than we spend on higher education.

This event underscores the fact that the University of Wisconsin is not an enemy of the state, but rather the envy of the nation as our graduates are highly regarded across the country.

As one who is entering the shadow of his career, and as one who loves representative democracy and this institution, I am honored to have been invited to speak to you in this chamber. You are gifted individuals who have worked hard during these past two years to meet the high standards of one of the nation’s finest graduate programs, so as to further your ability to make government work.

I am inspired by your passion for public service and so very hopeful about the enduring valuable contribution each will make to doing “good for the world.”

Excellence, diligence, quality, loyalty and desire to do good are just a few of the defining qualities that describe La Follette graduates. I have observed and benefited from the analytical and problem-solving skills that your predecessors have offered in all capacities and in every branch of government. Legislative and executive agencies seek out and carefully consider La Follette graduate candidates because they know that you have a strong work ethic, know how to approach problems, and can work with others.

La Follette students are long-term thinkers. They ask, “What is the best policy that will stand the test of time?” In a world that has increasingly favored the short-term thinking of politicians who can’t think beyond their own election, we need the policy expertise of the La Follette student more than ever.

La Follette graduates provide the illumination that is lacking in our partisan landscape by focusing on solving problems instead of emphasizing our differences. Through collaboration, hard work, and data-driven analysis, La Follette graduates promote public policy that aims to improve the lives of all, instead of policies that help one party stay in power.

The La Follette School is a reflection of our finest tradition, the Wisconsin Idea. It encapsulates the vision of Senator Bob La Follette that research conducted at the university should be applied to solve society’s problems.

“The boundaries of our university are the boundaries of our state” is a magical statement because it reflects the belief that the best minds and the best ideas will be available to solve the most difficult problems anywhere in the state.

In 1999 and 2000, I served on the Kettl Commission, the Governor’s Blue-Ribbon Commission on State-Local partnerships for the 21st century. It was chaired by La Follette School Professor Don Kettl. After statewide hearings and discussions, the commission produced a 133-page report that laid out bold reforms to restructure local government.

Whether one agreed or disagreed with the final product, the appointment of a university professor to lead a statewide discussion on government reform reflected the best of the Wisconsin Idea. The task force fostered a statewide deliberative conversation that empowered citizens from all walks of life.

Going forward, our political process needs to be more deliberative and less dictatorial. We certainly need more transparency and less secrecy as state laws are adopted.

Adlai Stevenson’s description of the Wisconsin Idea

Bob Jauch has been representing Wisconsin Senate District 25 since 1983. This article is adapted from the commencement speech that Senator Jauch gave in May 2014 to the La Follette School’s graduating class.
emphasizes our challenges today. He said in 1982 that the “Wisconsin tradition meant more than a simple belief in the people. It also meant a faith in the application of intelligence and reason to the problems of society. It meant a deep conviction 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 and understanding it could find.”

Today, more than ever, we need your passion, knowledge, and dedication to help a government badly in need of repair.

Too often the Legislature seems to be stumbling like a drunkard in the dark. Politics of division and ideology have damaged this institution that has long been a national model for good government. The strategy to win at all costs and to seek political victory instead of problem-solving has alienated the average person who complains that process doesn’t seem to work. The constant partisan drumbeat has distanced the average person and discouraged their involvement because they don’t believe their voice matters.

Historically, regardless of the party in control, working for the common good has always been the Wisconsin way. However, today that task appears impossible because there lacks a genuine desire to minimize the political barriers in order to maximize our responsibility to achieve results which truly matter to the citizens of Wisconsin.

Instead of drawing lines in the sand there is a need to restore the gift of reason. Policymakers must recover the ability to practice tolerance and encourage cooperation.

Our history is not written in partisanship. It is written in partnership, yet I feel that politics in Washington and Madison have lost their way. Winning at any cost has replaced the tradition of working together to serve the common good. Today the rigid ideology that dominates the political landscape is fed by talk show hosts on the right and the left who poison the airwaves with mean-spirited indictment of those who dare to disagree. They attack officials who disagree with them and are intent on destroying reputations to pursue their purist cause. Sadly, they have pushed good and effective lawmakers from office because the public official didn’t toe their demands.

Wisconsin Senator Dale Schultz is an example of this. Senator Schultz, who is not of my party, is one of the most decent and hard-working legislators I have served with. Throughout his career he has consistently maintained loyalty to his party principles, yet has first and foremost served the best interest of his district. He appropriately refers to himself as a pragmatic policy person who tries to apply practical solutions to real problems.

Yet because he offered a reasonable alternative to a very controversial bill and sought a bi-partisan discussion and solution on another, he was ill-treated by his own party, which recruited a more ideological candidate to challenge him in the primary.

Two other Wisconsin legislators received votes of “no confidence” and no support from their congressional delegation because they refused to go along with demands by members of their party. Such “public flogging” should not be commonplace in a legislative landscape that historically has been known for openness, cooperation, and respect.

On the governor’s conference room ceiling is the phrase, “the will of the people is the law of the land.” Yet every public opinion poll demonstrates a growing disdain by the citizenry who easily have concluded that partisan politics thwarts the public will.

Regardless of political affiliation, the public is increasingly troubled by a divide-and-conquer mentality in Washington and Madison where extremist behavior prevents collective discussions that can lead to consensus. The public is increasingly frustrated that political agendas with no connection to the public good.

How can we remain a model as the world’s finest democracy when our elected officials deliberately attempt to derail important American policy in order to gain power for themselves? Another example of this is legislative behavior by both parties that every major newspaper in Wisconsin has condemned: the selfish gerrymandering of legislative districts to limit competition and voter choice. How can we remain a model of a democratic election process when the representatives select their voters instead of the voters selecting their representatives?

If you ask the citizens, they will encourage elected officials to seek common solutions for common problems and empower the citizens to achieve it. They will stress that compromise is not a sin because the best and most lasting accomplishments in Wisconsin history are those when leaders worked together.

Our state is not served if the citizens of Waukesha win and the citizens of Washburn lose. Our citizens are not served when the policies adopted represent an ideological purpose but result in harm to the citizens of the state.

Citizens clearly don’t win when their elected officials open the flood gates for unlimited spending from the wealthy, corporations, unions and other special interests at the same time that they attempt to constrain the right to vote. Legislators, as caretakers of a public trust, should instead seek to encourage greater public participation at the polls.

A strong majority of our citizens will encourage legislators to do a better job in reflecting the will of the people instead of ignoring it. They will remind them that officials who isolate, ignore, or deliberately divide citizens who disagree are charting a dangerous pathway to cynicism and the demise of our democratic society.

As members of the Legislature we are much more than partisans elected to do the bidding of those who voted for us. We are caretakers of a public trust in this democratic process that we should strive to strengthen and not weaken.

My fondest moments in this chamber and in this beautiful building always center on moments when lawmakers of different parties understood that the art of good legislating involved responsiveness to the public, balance, fairness, and shared responsibility. Whether in health care, education, higher education, or the environment we saw our first priority to do the public’s business and adopt policies that would sustain the test of time.

Time will only tell how long it will take for the pendulum to shift back to the middle and restore the Wisconsin way that set our state as the model of good government for the rest of the nation. I am convinced that our citizens want it so.
Wisconsinites have a reputation for being good and caring people. Our citizens are especially generous with their time, talents and resources in the way they take care of others, and brighten the future for their neighbors and community. They maintain a moral bond with community and strive for the common good.

They treat their neighbors as family. They look beyond their own separate interests to their shared ideals of opportunity and prosperity for all.

They are caretakers of their community and stewards of a beautiful landscape that nurtures our souls and sustains our quality of life. They want their elected officials to behave in the same manner. Legislators must encourage our citizenry to be more engaged and less enraged. We must separate the facts from fantasies and encourage a healthy, spirited, and reasoned discussion on the difficult issues we face.

There is so much work that needs to be done but you are answering that call to dedicate yourself to do what you can to strengthen a state and nation. You are not just talking about civic duty but you are living it.

Public service is a noble cause, and you are poised on the edge of a wonderful career in the pursuit of a better Wisconsin. Above all, your service will continue the enduring legacy of this wonderful school from which you receive your degree.

Thornton Wilder said: “Leadership is for those who love the public good and are endowed and trained to administer it.”

On behalf of those whose names you will never know and faces you will never meet, thank you for your willingness to train hard. Thank you for your selflessness in pursuit of the public good. Congratulations upon your accomplishment and congratulations to all the good you will achieve in the rest of your life. ♦