

Dave Edwards (retired DNR staffer)

Title: We Are Not The Enemy

For 28 years I proudly served the citizens of Wisconsin as a state employee. I routinely worked to assist citizens who were being adversely impacted by environmental problems. Many of these citizens had little voice or political influence, and didn't know where to turn for help. Without public employees these citizens would be left to fend for themselves.

Historically, I received decent benefits, benefits that were paid for through lower wages. I worked hundreds of extra hours without compensation, took on additional responsibilities without pay, experienced increasing workloads due to vacancies, received pay increases that never kept up with the cost of living, and have taken furlough days. I paid into my health insurance and over time experienced poorer coverage. I am retired from state service with a modest pension that was paid for through lower wages. If I had the chance to turn back the clock 28 years and reevaluate my career options, I would gladly serve the citizens of Wisconsin all over again.

When the economy is strong, little is mentioned about state employees and the meager wage increases we receive. When the economy is down we receive no pay increase, take additional furlough days, and are often vilified by the political pundits and certain legislators who also receive their paycheck from the taxpayers.

I was a member of the Wisconsin Science Professionals and served on a collective bargaining team. Unions understand the current economic conditions and are willing to pay more into their health care and pension plans as the governor has demanded. Given that, there are many non-monetary issues such as worker safety that are best resolved through the collective bargaining process. Imagine what it would be like to be a prison guard and not have the right to negotiate safety conditions in the workplace. The ability of unions to negotiate non-monetary issues provides a healthy balance between management and the employee. It also helps to isolate political influence from the process. Contrary to popular believe, it is my experience that the vast majority of items bargained for have little monetary impact on the state coffers.

State employees are not freeloaders or bottom feeders as one political pundit calls us. We provide valuable services to the citizens of Wisconsin. We are willing to work with the governor in this current economic climate. However, we are not willing to give up our right to negotiate on issues that are best resolved through collective bargaining. Stripping our rights to negotiate work place safety, work rules, and our rights to join a union, have nothing to do with improving the economic climate in Wisconsin. We know the governor's agenda is to destroy unions, to eliminate the competing forces in future elections. The governor's candid conversation with who he thought was billionaire David Koch exposed his intentions.

Some may say if you don't like your job, quit. Public employees don't consider what we do for a living as simply a job. We are dedicated public servants who take our careers in serving the citizens of Wisconsin seriously. We work for the citizens of Wisconsin, not the billionaires of

"WisKochsin". We know people have lost their jobs and health care benefits. Public employees have taken concessions, will continue to do so, and are threatened with massive layoffs as well.

When officers of financial institutions were rewarded with millions of dollars in bonuses after they were bailed out with taxpayer money, people remained silent. When state legislators received thousands of dollars in per diems, people remained silent. When the current governor gave 140 million dollars in tax breaks to corporations during a time of economic turmoil, people remained silent. But when state employees won't give up their rights to collective bargaining we are vilified.

If you are breathing clean air, thank a public employee. If you eat food without the fear of becoming sick, thank a public employee. If you feel safe in your community, thank a public employee. If snow is removed from city streets, thank a public employee. If you have rules in your workplace to keep you safe, thank a public employee.

Government employees did not create the current economic conditions. We are middle class wage earners, taxpayers, and don't work for the state to get wealthy. We provide services that improve the quality of life and health for the citizens of Wisconsin. Government employees are not the enemy.

-Dave Edwards (State Employee - Retired), Beaver Dam