

Walker was right to try to water Wisconsin's collective bargaining agreements. Even if you acknowledge the importance of unions in representing middle-class interests, there are arguments on Walker's side. In Wisconsin and elsewhere, state-union relations are structurally out of whack. It's not because public sector unions are private sector unions are very different creatures. Private sector unions are against the interests of shareholders and management; public sector unions are against the interests of taxpayers. Private sector union members know that their employers could go out of business, so they have an incentive to moderate their demands; public sector union members work for state

monopolies and have no such interest.

Private sector unions confront managers who have an incentive to push back against their demands. Public sector unions face managers who have an incentive to give into them for the sake of their own survival. Most important, public sector unions help choose those they negotiate with. Through gigantic union contributions and overall they have enormous influence on who gets elected to bargain with them, especially in state and local

As a result of these imbalanced incentive structures, states with public unions tend to run into fiscal problems. They tend to have workplaces where personnel decisions are made on the basis of seniority, not merit. There is a relationship between excellence and reward, which leads to resentment among taxpayers who don't have that

I think Governor Walker made a big error in setting up this commission as he did. The debt problems we face are huge. Even in Wisconsin

they cannot be addressed simply by taking on the public sector unions. Studies done in North Carolina and elsewhere suggest that collective bargaining only increases state worker salaries by about 5 percent or 6 percent. That's not nearly enough to explain current deficits. There are many states without collective bargaining that still face gigantic debt crises.

Getting state and federal budgets under control will take decades. It will require varied, multipronged approaches, supported by broad and shifting coalitions. It's really important that we establish an unwritten austerity constitution: a set of practices that will help us cut effectively now and in the future.

The foundation of this unwritten constitution has to be this principle: Make everybody hurt. The cuts have to be spread more or less equitably among as many groups as possible. There will never be public acceptance if large sectors of society are excluded. Governor Walker's program fails that test. It spares traditional Republican groups (even cops and firefighters). It is thus as unsustainable as the current tide of red ink.

Moreover, the constitution must emphasize transparent evaluation. Over the past weeks, Governor Walker increased expenditures to pump up small business job creation and cut them on teacher benefits. That might be the right choice, but if voters are going to go along with choices such as these, there is going to have to be a credible evaluation process to explain why some things are cut and some things aren't.

So I'd invite Governor Walker and the debt fighters everywhere to think of themselves as founding fathers of austerity. They are not only balancing budgets, they are setting precedent for a process that will last decades. By their example, they have to create habits that diverse majorities can respect and embrace. The process has to be balanced. It has to make everybody hurt.

Having begged my way into an internship with the senator, I spent most of my time making copies, keeping records and answering phones. But then on a quiet winter afternoon when there was not much else going on, my supervisor came to me with an apologetic look on her face.

The senator, she explained, had recently written a children's book called "My Senator and Me." The book depicts a day in his life from Splash's perspective. Someone — I'm not sure who — suggested including an e-mail address where curious young readers could reach the supposedly computer-savvy Splash.

That's where I came in. Someone had to reply to Splash's e-mails, in his voice, lest the children think the dog had let the

brand, and then reading the book myself to better prepare for my role, I answered every single e-mail, ending each reply with the mandatory "WOOF WOOF!! Splash."

My feelings on this assignment were conflicted, to say the least. On the one hand, I was impersonating a dog. On the other, I was heartened by the warmth that people from so many other states felt for the senator from mine.

In time I found a strange satisfaction in writing back to these puppy-crazed children, one that I never got from answering the office phones. None of Splash's correspondents cared about Senator Kennedy's position on the estate tax, or whether he'd invoke cloture on a resolution to incrementally finance

Tuesday would have been Senator Kennedy's 79th birthday. In December, Splash died, a little more than a year after his master. Reading that sad news, I remembered the "liberal lion" sitting at his desk while Splash slobbered away on a grimy tennis ball in the corner. It was an image that had soothed nervous interns and disarmed even Kennedy's fiercest critics in Congress. Then I remembered the letters to Splash, and I realized those children felt the same way that I had as a kid in Boston, and still do — that we were all a small part of the Kennedy family.

COLIN H. P. BUCKLEY is a presidential management fellow with the United States government.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Security transition in Afghanistan

Nathaniel Fick and John Nagl rightly show us some modest signs of progress in Afghanistan ("The 'Long War' may be getting shorter," Views, Feb. 22). But this progress at the military level still needs to create a positive environment for analogous improvement in the

fields of aid, development, governance and counter-narcotics. The writers only briefly touch upon what will be the key issue for the next few years: the security-transition calendar, leading to almost complete troop withdrawal by 2014.

This political calendar is not based on

the security realities on the ground, and puts pressure on NATO-ISAF and the international community at large to produce quick results for the training of Afghan security forces, while jeopardizing the modest progress that has been achieved so far.

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The view from Kazakhstan

IN HIS OWN WORDS | Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, chairman of the Senate, Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan: A proactive and determined advocate of atomic disarmament for the sake of world peace

Almost immediately after Kazakhstan emerged from the Soviet Union as a sovereign republic back in 1991, it voluntarily renounced all nuclear military hardware and closed all its related facilities, including the site of Semipalatinsk, which had a sad history of being the world's second-largest atomic



with the treaties of Rarotonga (1985), Bangkok (1995) and Pelindaba (1996), respectively.

The latest region to have joined this global nuclear-arms-free group is Central Asia, through the Treaty of Semipalatinsk signed in 2006. After ratification, the treaty entered into force in 2009 and in-