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Communicating During Tough Times (continued on page 3)

- ◆ **Key messages:** They represent the ideas and points you want to relay to your target publics. Key messages need to be shared with anyone who is discussing the issue. Principals, school secretaries, custodians, and bus drivers who live in your community are discussing the latest teacher job action as they stand in line at the grocery store. Make sure that they have accurate and factual information to share with their interested friends and neighbors.
- ◆ **Internal Communications:** Organizations often make the mistake of communicating with external publics before their staff. Staff should be considered your key public. Never presume teachers in your district know what is happening with labor negotiations. Provide them with ongoing information of what is happening in the process. This will help dissipate rumors and misinformation running rapid through your district.
- ◆ **Positive Beats Negative Any Day!** The last communication component to have in your plan is a consistent positive and factual message strategy. Don't forget that schools are in the business of educating children not contract negotiations. Although it may be tempting to communicate your issues through letters to the editor, this war of words will produce negative results. Parents and community members do not distinguish between the school district and the teachers' union. Everything they read about the disagreement forms their perception about the quality of your school district. Don't forget to tell parents about all the good things happening in your schools this year.

Where do we go from here? School districts are caught in a war being fought on a state level. It is up to all of us to educate our communities on the current school funding crisis. This budget crisis has only begun. If taxpayers do not understand what is at stake for public education our message will never be heard. Districts have already made significant cuts to their budgets. Communicate the cuts that your district has already made. Begin to discuss areas that may be next if things do not change. School-funding in



WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

Doyle Elected Governor, GOP Controls Legislature

Capitol Scandal Sinks Senate Dems

■ Joseph H. Quick, Madison Metropolitan School District

Governor-elect Jim Doyle will find himself in the same situation as Tommy Thompson did when he took office in 1987 — having to work with a Legislature controlled by the opposition party. But Doyle also has the misfortune of taking office when an anticipated \$3 billion deficit must be dealt with as part of the 2003-05 biennial budget.

When the new Legislature is seated in January, Republicans will have a hefty 58-41 margin in the Assembly and a narrower 18-15 edge in the Senate — the widest margins the Wisconsin GOP has held in 45 years. Control of the chamber is important because the party in power sets the agenda, decides which bills will be scheduled for debate, decides who will chair committees, and has the upper hand in all procedural matters. While Doyle will have to contend with Republicans in the Legislature, Wisconsin's chief executive sets the state's agenda through the introduction of the biennial budget and has enormous power reviewing the final product via the veto.

One bright spot for Democrats was winning a Dane County/Madison seat, where challenger Sody Pope-Roberts defeated 9-year incumbent Rick Skindrud (R-Mount Horeb). Pope-Roberts lost to Skindrud by nearly 5,000 votes in 2000, but redistricting last year considerably altered the 79th Assembly District. Pope-Roberts is the former legislative director for the Wisconsin PTA and made education issues the cornerstone of her campaign.

Senate Democrats suffered three losses in tightly contested races where three incumbents — two closely tied to tainted Senate leadership — lost to challengers. The 9th Senate District, where incumbent Jim Baumgart (D-Sheboygan) lost to Rep. Joe Leibham (R-Sheboygan) by 20 votes, is in a recount at this writing. The outcome will not affect Senate Republicans' control.

Olive Branches?

After a horrendous campaign generally devoid of serious discussion about how lawmakers will balance the budget in the face of a huge deficit, and with the Capitol still reeling from scandal, partisans on both sides of the aisle have extended olive branches. Recognizing that the deficit and scandal are huge

issues that must be dealt with, legislators seem ready for a change in leadership to set a new tone and direction.

Assembly Republicans selected Rep. John Gard (R-Peshtigo) as Speaker, generally considered the second most powerful position in state government. Gard, the former co-chair of the Joint Finance Committee, has helped to hammer out budget agreements with Senate Democrats when they were in the majority. Assembly Republicans did, however, retain Majority Leader Rep. Steve Foti (R-Oconomowoc), charged with a felony in the Capitol caucus scandal. Foti was re-elected with 60 percent of the vote.

Rep. Spencer Black (D-Madison) left the minority leader position to devote more time to public policy issues; Assembly Democrats chose Jim Kreuser of Kenosha. Senate Democrats, poised to elect new leadership in the near future, will have to work closely with the governor and Republicans to accomplish policy objectives. Sen. Jon Erpenbach (D-Middleton) has indicated his interest in the Senate minority leader position. Sen. Mary Panzer (R-West Bend) will lead Senate Republicans.

2003-05 Budget

At the crux of the next legislative session is handling the deficit. Doyle sets the tone with the introduction of the 2003-05 biennial budget in late January or early February. Historically, governors end up with as much as 80 percent of their budget intact. Doyle's education-related campaign promises are deep.

School finance issues clearly will be paramount. Doyle promised to end revenue limits and the Qualified Economic Offer (QEO), putting him at odds with legislative Republicans, who campaigned to maintain the law. Both Doyle and GOP legislators promised to continue the commitment to fund 2/3 of the total K-12 spending — which comprises about 40 percent of the total state budget. Every percentage point (67 percent) of K-12 resources represents about \$80 million and could be scrutinized to balance the budget. Both Doyle and GOP leaders have said they would remove new school building costs from the 2/3 equation, meaning local taxpayers would fund school construction.

(continued on page 2)

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From the President . . .



Amanda
Brooker

Dear WSPRA Members:

I'd like to start out this letter thanking those who attended the WSPRA annual fall conference in November in Green Lake. I know how hard it is to leave the office. And for many of you, budget constraints force you to choose one conference over another.

Two years ago, I attended Gary Marx's one-hour session at the NSPRA conference in Minneapolis, MN on the "Ten Trends." Several of us left the session wishing it was a full-day seminar. WSPRA was fortunate this November to experience the full day "Ten Trends," with Gary expanding on the factors that are rapidly changing the face of society, and how it will affect us in education.

What was even more enriching was how all the speakers, either consciously or subconsciously, tied into the information presented during the "Ten Trends." This well-rounded conference emphasized just how important these predictions are. Kudos to Janay Wittek-Balke, WSPRA President-elect and Franklin School District's Coordinator of Communications and Public Engagement, for putting together a very strong conference.

Speaking of the conference, the WSPRA Board is looking at revamping the format. We have one more year in our contract at the wonderful Heide House in Green Lake. However, we feel a change in location will be needed to help attract other members to the conference. In addition, we are looking at streamlining the time period from three days to two. Please email me at abrooker@greenbay.k12.wi.us with suggestions of what you would like to see in the coming years. Your feedback is important to us as we plan for the next year.

On closing, I would also like to welcome Chris Preisler of Oconomowoc

Capital Scandal (continued from page 2)

Doyle campaigned on creating a fairer school aid formula, highlighting the fact that school spending per student ranges from less than \$7,000 to over \$14,000. He embraced the state Supreme Court's standard to ensure "a sound basic education" for every student. He proposed more resources for low-income students and students in special education.

Sen. Michael Ellis (R-Neenah) has proposed using existing K-12 resources to re-write the school aid formula. He would provide extra resources for bilingual/English Language Learners, students in special education and low-income students. To "equalize" school funding, Ellis creates a statewide property tax at \$8.40 per \$1,000 of property and provides about \$8,100 for every student. Spending above that level could occur with a majority vote of the school board. But Ellis allows local voters to oppose a BOE's increase by requesting a referendum if they can gather signatures of 10 percent of the voters in the last gubernatorial election. Doyle said he supports "95 percent of the plan" and Ellis mused "he didn't know which 95 percent" Doyle supports.

Facing a sputtering economy and a huge deficit, expectations are low for any new spending programs. The first six months of 2003 will set the session's tenor. ❖

Wagner Receives Lifetime Membership

■ Mabel Schumacher, Fort Atkinson

At WSPRA's first general session, Past President Hjordy Wagner of the Eau Claire School District was honored as WSPRA's 2002 Honorary Lifetime Member. Wagner was described as a person who exudes openness and caring, is wonderful at facilitating and reading the crowd, continually remains focused on how WSPRA can support the professional, and always makes sure that people were not allowed to leave a WSPRA conference feeling like a stranger.

Wagner's contributions to WSPRA include serving as a board Director in 1994-95, Vice President in 1995-96, President-elect in 1996-97, and President in 1997-98. She is currently Media Specialist in the Eau Claire School District where she uses all of her community relations skills to enhance her school and program. Eau Claire Superintendent William Klaus stated in a congratulatory letter that her work in community relations set the standard for future district growth and her current work to create a web site at South Middle School is commendable.

Honorary Lifetime Member is a membership status created by the WSPRA bylaws, is restricted to WSPRA members who have been active members for 10 years or more, and is granted as a result of outstanding performance as approved by the Board of Directors. ❖

2002 President's Awards

■ Mabel Schumacher, Fort Atkinson

Each year, WSPRA's past president selects one or more individuals to be recognized at the annual fall conference for support, friendship, and guidance given during that president's term of office. This year Immediate Past President Mabel Schumacher selected four individuals to receive the award.



WSPRA Past President Mary Ellen Marnholtz, Wausau (right) presenting award to Hjordy Wagner, Eau Claire

- ◆ **Mary Pat Pfeil**, Wauwatosa Director of Community Relations and NSPRA North Central Regional Vice President, was recognized as the individual who first introduced Schumacher to school public relations when they worked together in Wauwatosa. Pfeil was thanked for her knowledge, her willingness to share, and her passion for WSPRA and the profession. Schumacher cited several examples of Pfeil's skill and support, especially the assistance in new areas of job responsibility and during a time of crisis Schumacher's district.
- ◆ **Rick Kaufman**, Jefferson County Colorado's Executive Director of Public Engagement and NSPRA President Elect, was recognized as the individual who demonstrated the dramatic difference that a public relations professional can make in a district. Kaufman served as Director of Public Relations when Schumacher worked in Sheboygan. Kaufman was thanked for his caring nature, his skill, and his willingness to provide support to Schumacher. Even after leaving Wisconsin, he was willing to share ideas and assistance, always ending his conversations with the phrase, "Keep the faith."
- ◆ **Diane Aschmann**, East Troy Director of Instruction, was recognized as the individual who provided day to day support to Schumacher. Working together in Fort Atkinson provided a natural backdrop for communication, problem solving, and encouragement. Aschmann was described as eager to learn more about public relations issues, willing to assist WSPRA, and most importantly a true friend.
- ◆ **Vern Schumacher**, Professor Emeritus and husband of 18 years, was honored as the key person who provided consistent love and support to Schumacher during her year of presidency and beyond. ❖

Dr. Howard Moon Awarded Holtshopple Scholarship

■ Mabel Schumacher, Fort Atkinson

Dr. Howard Moon, Supt., Dodge Land School District, was awarded the 3rd annual Holtshopple Scholarship. The scholarship is named for longtime WSPRA member and former president Allan Holtshopple. In keeping with the Scholarship criteria, Dr. Moon demonstrates



WSPRA President Amanda Brooker, Green Bay presenting award to Dr. Howard Moon, Dodge Land.

a dedication to community service. He is an active member of the senior citizens' organization, Juneau and Reeseville Chamber of Commerce, and the Juneau American Legion. He has supported the creation of the K.I.D.S. (Keeping Involved in Dodge Land Schools) Organization and has started an educational foundation for the purpose of raising scholarship

money throughout the community. He has demonstrated a consistent outreach to the community by presenting programs to a number of organizations and attending at least one meeting of each of the 12 municipalities that make up the Dodge Land School District.

As an example of a successful PR project, Supt. Moon cites the transition from four Dodge Land school buildings to one new Pre-K-12 structure. The referendum was a success after 35 years and 11 failed referenda. As part of the referendum planning and post-referendum activity, Moon spoke on the local radio, submitted press releases and newspaper articles, participated in numerous open houses held during construction, developed a DVD tape showing the chronology of the building program, and conducted a dedication of the building. Moon indicated that "the result of this public relations campaign has been a smooth and orderly transition and a significant healing of scars which were created over the 30 years of conflict regarding the new school."

In his educational career, Dr. Moon has served in several capacities — Humanities Curriculum Coordinator in Kenosha; Director of Curriculum in Pennsylvania; and Superintendent, Junior High Curriculum Coordinator, Principal, and Junior

Communicating During Tough Times

■ Janay Wittek-Balke, Franklin Public Schools

The business of education provides ongoing change, challenge and from time-to-time crisis. This year school districts across the state are being challenged with difficult teacher contract negotiations. September signaled the start of a new school year, but something was different. Two-thirds of Wisconsin districts began the year without a teacher contract. And why is this significant? These districts were beginning their second school year without a teacher contract, and job actions were on the horizon if they were not already in motion.

What has changed? The advent of revenue caps, declining student enrollment and unprecedented health care increases across the state have brewed a recipe of fiscal disaster. Understanding is limited. Parents and community residents alike are not aware of the school funding issues. The state of Wisconsin is in a budget crisis and distrust of government agencies is at an all time high.

How do we communicate effectively during this crisis? As with any crisis, there needs to be a plan in place to handle possible situations. Identify circumstances that could occur in your district, (i.e. teacher job actions) and formulate a plan to handle things in both a short and long-term time frame. Hopefully, this is a plan that will collect dust on your shelf, but it will be ready if you need it!

What does your plan include? Communications Components: (1) key messages, (2) internal communication network and, (3) positive, factual, consistent messages.

(continued on page 4)