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Decade of Loss.

Both decent jobs and strong schools, we may face another education for kids. Without more concerted attention on build a base of decent work for parents and secure strong forged today in the state’s schools. Wisconsin needs to Wisconsin’s challenge is clear. The future of our state—

The jobs, income, and wage data make economic challenges for working people in the state clear. But these data can feel abstract or remote. What does it mean for a state when family income falls across a decade? Or when workers can’t find jobs or the hours they need to make ends meet? Or when wages and benefits are too low?

The two maps below make it clear what happens in schools, families, and communities when economic performance is poor. These maps show the share of students in Wisconsin school districts with income low enough to qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch. The increase from 2001 to 2012 is breathtaking. In 2012, families with kids in school are in greater financial distress all across the state—in our urban centers and rural areas, in the woods in the north, along the rivers and hills of our dairy lands, and in bastions of conservative and liberal thought alike. Throughout the state, many more families struggle to make ends meet in 2012 than did at the turn of the new century.

But even as need has grown in our schools, our public investment in them has waned. The teacher working hard to educate a poorer and more distressed and distracted student population today is also dealing with larger classes; or outdated books; or insufficient technical, counseling, or health support. Teachers’ jobs are harder. And in 2011, teachers’ take-home pay slid downward and further.

Wisconsin’s challenge is clear. The future of our state—of our families, communities, and businesses—is being forged today in the state’s schools. Wisconsin needs to build a base of decent work for parents and secure strong education for kids. Without more concerted attention on both decent jobs and strong schools, we may face another decade of loss.

The jobs deficit remains enormous, un- and under-employment are high, income is down across the decade, and the economic and psychological toll on families and communities grinds on with no relief in sight. Labor Day 2012 finds too many Wisconsin workers waiting. Waiting for an economic recovery strong enough to produce jobs, higher family income, and a stronger a sense of economic security in the state.

A biennial release from COWS since 1996, The State of Working Wisconsin uses the best and most recent data available to help refine our understanding of exactly how working people in Wisconsin are doing. The news in 2012 is grim, due to long-term trends of rising inequality and declining job quality for those at the bottom of the labor market and to the shorter-term grind of a recovery caught in the doldrums. The news for African Americans in the state is especially bleak.

Wisconsin needs jobs. The 2007 recession devastated our job market, and the anemic recovery has yet to fill the gap.

The numbers are stark. In December 2007, Wisconsin had some 2.88 million jobs. In July 2012, the state had just 2.72 million jobs. Wisconsin’s jobs deficit is more than 245,900; these are the jobs we need just to make up for losses and population growth since the recession began.

Worse, in 2011 Wisconsin fell off the weak national and regional pace of job growth, fueling concern and contentious debate about the accuracy of different data sources. However, using any source of data our job market is a national and regional laggard.

Miserable income performance dominates the economic news of the new century. Adjusting for inflation, median income for four-person families in Wisconsin fell $8,500 from the start of the decade, falling from $84,500 to $76,000. Income is down nationally as well, breaking with more than 60 years of economic performance where family income has risen each decade.

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UNEMPLOYMENT REMAINS HIGH

From 2000 to 2011, unemployment doubled, the share of the unemployed who had been out of work for more than six months tripled, and the share of workers who wanted full-time but could only secure part-time hours more than doubled as well.

One in four young workers (ages 16-24) is unemployed or underemployed.

BLACK PROSPECTS BLEAK, UNEMPLOYMENT WORST IN NATION

In 2011, the 25 percent unemployment rate for African Americans was the worst in the nation. And the median wages of black men ($14.65 per hour) and black women ($13.67) lag the state’s median wage ($16.84) by more than $2.00 per hour. More than one in four African American workers who hold jobs earn poverty wages.

MANUFACTURING A SOURCE OF GROWTH, BUT STILL BRUTALLY DOWN ACROSS THE DECADE

Recently, Wisconsin’s manufacturing sector has added jobs. The welcome gains of the last few years are dwarfed, however, by job losses across the decade. Wisconsin has three manufacturing jobs today for every four in 2000—down from 600,000 to just 450,000 jobs.
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WISCONSIN WAGES: WEAK GROWTH, INEQUALITY

The state’s 2011 median wage—$16.84 per hour—exceeds the 1979 median by just one dollar, though today’s typical worker is more productive—being substantially more educated than in 1979 and working with better technology.

From 1987 to 2009, the share of Wisconsin workers that obtained health insurance through their jobs fell from 63 to 54 percent.

Workers with four-year college degrees (or more) earn a median wage of $22.91. Workers without high school degrees earn less than half as much ($10.35). Associate degree holders earn nearly $18 per hour.

POVERTY WAGE JOBS

More than one in five Wisconsin workers held a poverty-wage job in 2011 (wage under $10.97 per hour). One in four black workers held poverty wage jobs.

Just 23 percent of workers in poverty-wage jobs receive health care insurance through their employers. In better-paying jobs, 63 percent of workers get health care coverage through work.

Just 20 percent of poverty-wage workers participate in their employer-provided pension benefit, but 64 percent of higher-wage workers do.
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MORE KIDS IN NEED: A CHALLENGE TO OUR CURRENT COURSE

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THE STATE OF WORKING WISCONSIN 2012 Executive Summary

The Great Recession officially ended three years ago now, and the recovery is—or at least should be—well underway. But the jobs deficit remains enormous, un- and under-employment are high, income is down across the decade, and the economic and psychological toll on families and communities grinds on with no relief in sight. Labor Day 2012 finds too many Wisconsin workers waiting. Waiting for an economic recovery strong enough to produce jobs, higher family income, and a stronger a sense of economic security in the state.

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WISCONSIN JOBS: MASSIVE DEFICIT

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FAMILY INCOME: A LOST DECADE

Miserable income performance dominates the economic news of the new century. Adjusting for inflation, median income for four-person families in Wisconsin fell $8,500 from the start of the decade, falling from $84,500 to $76,000. Income is down nationally as well, breaking with more than 60 years of economic performance where family income has risen each decade.

WISCONSIN’S JOBS DEFICIT THROUGH JULY 2012

Change in median income by decade for four-person families, Wisconsin and U.S.

More jobs needed in boom or with population growth (2011 dollars)

U.S. Census Bureau, CPS and ACS; data series changes from CPS to ACS in 2004-2005

COWS BUILDING THE HIGH ROAD

Visit www.cows.org/soww to order additional copies of the executive summary or full report.

COWS is a nonprofit think-and-do tank, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, that promotes “high road” solutions to social problems. These treat shared growth and opportunity, environmental sustainability, and resilient democratic institutions as necessary and achievable complements in human development. COWS is nonpartisan but values-based. We seek a world of equal opportunity and security for all.

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