For Release
COWS Releases the State of Working Wisconsin 2016 for Labor Day
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*Interview opportunity: Authors will be available for interview on Monday, September 5 from 1-2pm at Labor Fest at the Labor Temple in Madison.*

In *The State of Working Wisconsin 2016*, COWS finds that the long shadow of the Great Recession is finally lifting in Wisconsin. The state has more jobs than ever before, unemployment rates have fallen to pre-recession levels, and workers that want full-time work are having an easier time finding it. Labor market opportunities are more clear and consistent than they have been in nearly a decade.

COWS associate director Laura Dresser: “Given the brutality of the Great Recession and the slow recovery from it, the progress on these key labor market indicators is very welcome news this year.”

Longer-term challenges that Wisconsin faces, long documented by COWS, remain daunting. Wages have been stagnant over the last three and a half decades and workers have very little to show for increasing productivity. Women earn less than men and the gap is slow to close. African Americans have suffered declining wages and growing disparity. The wage reward for higher education is evident, as is the difficulty of making ends meet without completing some post-secondary education. One-in-four workers toils in a poverty wage job and low-wage sectors are growing faster than better-paying ones. Racial disparities, while hardly unique to Wisconsin, are particularly extreme here. A variety of economic and social indicators of racial inequality consistently identify us as among the most racially unequal states in the nation.

Key results from The State of Working Wisconsin, 2016:

**87,000 Missing Wisconsin Jobs: Slower Growth than the Nation**
From January 2011 to June 2016, jobs in Wisconsin grew 7.1 percent while the national labor market grew 10.1 percent. If Wisconsin matched the national pace of growth, the state would have 87,319 more jobs.

**Unemployment Down but Opportunity Still Unequal**
From a high of over 9 percent in 2009, unemployment in the state has been steadily falling and is now 4.2 percent, below the level before the Great Recession. However, opportunity has not yet extended to all. Wisconsin African American unemployment (12 percent) is 3 times higher than Wisconsin’s white unemployment rate (4 percent). That racial disparity in unemployment rates is the third highest in the nation.
**Long Term Wage Stagnation**
Taking inflation into account, the median wage in Wisconsin grew by just forty cents since 1979, from $16.72 to $17.12 per hour in 2015 (2015 dollars). That’s an annual raise of less than 2 cents per hour.

**Gender Gap Closing (Slowly)**
The gender gap has narrowed in the last few decades. In 1980, at the median, for every dollar a man earned, women earned 59 cents. By 2015, women earned 81 cents. The shrinking gap is the result of an increase in women’s wages and declining wages for men (with those declines concentrated in the 1980s and early 90s).

**Poverty-Wage Jobs in Wisconsin**
One in four Wisconsin workers holds a poverty-wage job (wage under $11.56 per hour, not enough to keep a family of four out of poverty, even with full-time year-round work). Women and people of color are concentrated in these jobs. Importantly, forty percent of black workers hold poverty-wage jobs.

“The Wisconsin economy has finally largely recovered to pre-recession levels, but workers will need more economic growth to secure better wages. And we all need stronger policy to support broadly shared prosperity,” said COWS director and report co-author Joel Rogers.