

Walker administration marked by planning failures and incompetence

By State Representative Debra Kolste (D-Janesville)

MADISON - Governor Scott Walker claims negative headlines have caused his his low standing in polls. But the headlines merely report his failures to adequately perform his only real job, which is to manage Wisconsin's government and programs.

Put aside for the moment the governor's most controversial political and ideological actions: Act 10, the right-to-work law, the destruction of the Civil Service system and the damage to public education and the university system.

What remains is a record of incompetence and failure.

We have learned that Walker's Department of Natural Resources has utterly failed to move against industrial water polluters. In the past decade, the DNR has failed 94 percent of the time to enforce laws against polluters. Numerous DNR scientist positions have been eliminated, which has resulted in backlogs and inefficiencies.

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) spent \$3.9 million on grants and programs for veterans and \$7.6 million on administering those grants and programs. A charity with that ratio of administrative expenses to program expenses would be reviled.

DVA staffing is up and benefits to veterans down. We have fewer veterans and more DVA staff serving them than surrounding states. County veterans offices complain that the DVA fails to reimburse them for services, partly because the DVA has failed to write administrative rules governing reimbursement.

The failure to address our crumbling road system is perhaps the most visible misstep. Wisconsin roads are ranked third worst in the nation.

Walker has failed to devise a transportation plan, despite acknowledging the need for improvements to infrastructure. The state delays projects, borrows money and then delays making bond payments. Allowing the state's roads and bridges to crumble is not conservatism. It is incompetence and failure to govern.

The Walker administration could fairly be considered inept based on a single example: the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. or WEDC.

WEDC was supposed to be a nimble, public-private partnership that would foster business development and job growth. Instead, it has been a long-running disaster that carries a whiff of corruption. Loans and

credits seem to go often to Walker cronies and some loans are spectacularly ill-conceived. Even simple bookkeeping has proven elusive for WEDC. The Walker appointees have lost track of loan payments, tax credits and jobs created.

WEDC has bumbled and botched along since 2011. Job growth in our state is dead last in the Midwest and lingers at half the national average. Our state desperately needs competent leadership on job creation.

The federal government is investigating Lincoln Hills, a youth correctional facility, where sexual assault, abuse and misconduct are alleged. The Department of Corrections generally has experienced understaffing, severely compromised workplace safety, high overtime costs and low morale.

The Walker Administration plunged into a plan to make wholesale changes to our Family Care system. About 60,000 Wisconsin residents and their families who depend on long-term care were left to wonder about the impact on their lives. The considerable uproar caused the administration to suspend a proposal that had been before the Joint Committee on Finance in late spring.

The plan would turn the long-term care system over to private insurance companies.

Perhaps that is a good idea, but other states have tested the waters with studies and pilot programs. Not Wisconsin. We were set to scrap a program that was carefully studied and then improved over nearly two decades.

The speed with which the state intended to install the new system has been called reckless, even by proponents of the changes.

How about the plan for the state to self-insure its employees? It seem to be on the front burner, although the experts say it may well cost more than the present system. Nobody really knows, and we may be self-insured before anyone really does.

The unwillingness to study a problem and make changes in a systematic way seems like bold leadership to the Walker team.

From here it seems like more mismanagement from an administration with a five-year record for incompetence and poor results.