

FROM LEFT FIELD

# Seven really good candidates, one tough choice

As I watched the special school board meeting Monday night, I could not help but think over and over again what a great crop of candidates were up for the vote. I smiled even wider when those same candidates recognized that and shared aloud the same sentiment.

It was incredibly unfortunate for the district to lose Teri Ellefson from the School District of Monroe Board of Education in March. Teri is an incredibly well-respected person in our community, who has faced the toughest of tests in life. And yet, she used her experience to find ways to assist our community and our students with help in mental health, and camaraderie, and the basic sharing of love.

Losing Teri from the board was truly a loss for us all. But as we



**Adam Krebs**

have all learned, life must go on. To fill Teri's seat, seven candidates applied. All seven brought honest-to-god qualities with them. To those who watched, you could tell that without question each candidate was passionate about their community. They brought a variety of skillsets, a wide range of ideas, and were open and honest during the 2-hour meeting/interview process.

The school board had a choice that seemed impossible to make — which one was the best fit? At the same time, it was the easiest choice, as I believe all seven would have made a great addition to the board.

You had teachers and those with educational backgrounds. There were blue collar businessmen — those that both had to work the business end, while also fully aware and understanding of the grittiness of "getting the job done." There were others with previous history on school boards in other parts of the state. You had candidates that moved here 10, 20 or even 40 years ago. There were other candidates yet that were born and raised here.

Young candidates, candidates with young children either already enrolled in the district or will be in a year or two. Others were retired, with grandchildren in the district.

While every candidate received about only 10 minutes of talking time during the whole process, it felt like a personal conversation that went on for an hour. I was invested, and not just because I was writing a story on it, or I personally had known this candidate or that for 30 years. I was invested because this crop of candidates was incredible.

Board president Rich Depez even made a hearty quip about re-sizing the board to 15 members instead of 9, so that all seven could make it. Honestly, he's not that wrong with that assessment.

One thing that tugged at me personally was, "how can we at the Times do a better job for the next election?" For years our process has been to send out a questionnaire and let the candidates fill them out. Some do extensively. Some scribble a sentence or two per topic, and some never respond.

I sometimes wonder how much a

person would want the job if they are unwilling to even fill out a simple candidate profile questionnaire. Then again, maybe we have been doing it all wrong. Perhaps we will need to take an approach like this special school board post, regardless of how impractical it might be on our end. It's one thing if, in order to get the job, they HAVE to show up for an interview in front of the board. We don't have that kind of power.

Even still, I think a town hall/debate style open mic questionnaire with the candidates all getting small segments to speak directly in front of voters — their neighbors, coworkers, and local strangers — would mean more than any town hall brought on by a major politician. Hearing these passionate, smart, invested candidates share their ideas and why they would be a good fit is so much more riveting than any Facebook comment thread could ever produce. We would be a better community for doing this more.

I offer my congratulations to Jim Curran, who was elected in the final

opportunity by the board and will have one year to prove his worth. I think he will do great. I've known Jim for many years, and he is passionate about education, the youth in this town, and the community in general.

But now I also must devise a plan for 11 months from now, when the next election comes due. My favorite part about living in a democracy is letting the people's voice be heard, one way or the other.

I also understand that I have the responsibility to my community to present them with the best depiction of each candidate in a local race. Monday's process reinvigorated me to be better than the status quo, and to devise a plan of action to present a deeper, more colorful and well-rounded background of the candidates before we go to the polls to choose.

— Adam Krebs is the editor of the Times. His column "From Left Field" appears periodically. Adam can be reached at editor@themonroetimes.com.

*Congress* shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

— First Amendment



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**TODAY'S QUOTE**

**"The truth is, unless you let go, unless you forgive yourself, unless you forgive the situation, unless you realize that the situation is over, you cannot move forward."**

— Steve Maraboli

## Appreciation is not enough: Action is required

**GUEST VIEW**

Last month, I had the honor of appearing before a Student Finance Committee, a group of high school students in Mount Horeb who conducted a hypothetical budget hearing with me. I provided testimony, and students followed up with questions about the needs they see in their school. Their questions were constructed as a mock exercise, but my answers don't have to be. Because their questions were about how the state budget could better support the adults working in their schools, and the solutions are all in Gov. Tony Evers' budget. Some have been carved out by the Joint Finance Committee, but we still have a huge opportunity to take action on key solutions. I wish they had been there to listen to the Student Finance Committee because they would have heard an important message on how to appreciate and support our teachers.

During the student-run hearing, these future leaders asked me how the state budget could address teacher turnover, teacher workload, teacher mental health,



**Jill Underly**

a substitute teacher shortage, and student teacher retention. And every single time, they advocated for a solution: increasing teacher pay. The learners occupying the seats in Wisconsin's classrooms know this will make the most impact on their own education. That is why we asked for their ideas in the form of a Student Finance Committee hearing. It doubles as a great civics lesson, but the objective was to hear from those most impacted by the budget (students) about what they hope that impact to be. It turns out they want an investment in teacher recruitment and retention because they cannot learn and be competitive in careers and colleges if they don't have educators today who are there to teach and support them in that learning.

Thinking about it, maybe the civics lesson is really for people like myself, the elected officials who lead our great state, but also more specifically, the committee the students were trying to emulate could stand to learn a lesson from this exercise. After the students asked their questions, we turned the tables and I got to ask them a few. The first was, "What did you learn in this process?" One student had an immediate answer: "This is about public service, about using our position to do what's best for other people."

I couldn't agree more; that is exactly what being a legislator, or any elected official, is about. It is also a great description of teaching. Our Wisconsin teachers do us an incredible public service by caring for and educating our children. We owe them more than appreciation. We owe them investment. We owe them opportunities like Grow Your Own programs, stipends for internships and mentorships, and funding for programs that will support the needs of the students in their classrooms, like school nutrition and mental health services. We owe our staff working in schools the opportunity to earn a salary that will allow them to own a home in the community where they teach, or not have to rely on food assistance programs or additional jobs to support their families.

And today, we owe them action — action to change the challenges standing in the way of them providing the level of care and education they want to provide, and this state requires. Some of the K-12 provisions were cut by the actual Joint Finance Committee. I can't help but wonder what the Student Finance Committee would have done instead.

As we left Mount Horeb, one of the students thanked me for coming. She said, "This was awe-

some — you actually listened to us." The good news is that the Joint Finance Committee still has a chance to do the same, to make some of the impact the students want to see. They can increase per-pupil aid and revenue limits, providing more general aid funding to our school districts. Doing this will enable our districts to turn around and increase teacher pay, investing in the future of our state by supporting the educators who are teaching our children. Because we all know that by supporting our educators, we are investing in our kids.

The young people who formed the Student Finance Committee are going to lead this state one day, and I am very much looking forward to that. They are our future, and I don't expect them to lead now, but I do expect those of us who are in leadership positions to listen to them today, so they can be well prepared to lead tomorrow. They are telling us to invest in public education, pay our teachers more, and in turn, invest in them. Let's do it. Because action is how we show teachers appreciation.

— Dr. Jill Underly is the Wisconsin Department of Instruction State Superintendent. Go to [DPI.wi.gov](http://DPI.wi.gov) for more information, or contact her office at (608) 266-3559.

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**Trail clean up thank you**

From Christine Belle  
Belleville

**To the Editor:**  
The Friends of the Badger and Sugar River State Trails, along with the DNR, say thank you to the groups, families, and individuals who helped clean up the trails to honor Earth Day. The health of these trails depends on local stewards, and we are grateful to count you among them.

Thanks go out to:  
Everlight Solar  
Lake Winnetka/Sugar River Improvement Association  
New Glarus Schools  
Monticello Schools  
Belleville Girl Scouts  
Albany Schools  
Monroe High School  
The Belleville High School  
Environmental Club  
The Girls Scouts of Belleville  
Renee Funseth  
Ralph Henry and the Prairie Enthusiasts  
Phil Fransen  
Mary Winn  
The families of the Friends Board Members

Thank you also to volunteers whose names we've missed and to those who have worked to clean up the trails on their own.

If you have photos or stories to share, please send them to us at [information@friendsofbadgerstatetrail.org](mailto:information@friendsofbadgerstatetrail.org) or on our Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsoftheBadgerandSugarRiverStateTrails>.

**Support LGBTQ, as Jesus teaches**

From Susan Anderson  
Browntown

**To the Editor:**  
I encourage the Green County Board to designate June as LGBTQ month in Green County.

In the words of a beloved hymn: "For they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love....Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love."

I believe that Jesus came into the world not to judge or condemn, but to teach humankind, through His words and His example, to love one another and accept each and everyone for the unique individuals that we all are.

I see the designation of June as LGBTQ month as a sign of that love and acceptance.

**SUBMIT A LETTER**

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**CHILD CARE MATTERS**

## Pay now, or pay later?

By Corrine Hendrickson  
Green County Child Care Network

Wisconsin is at a precipice. In the next few months, our state will decide whether it wants to support the most critical time in a child's life for education or whether our state would prefer to support those children who did not receive a healthy start via our juvenile and adult prison systems. The link between child care and prison is undeniable and sobering. Ninety percent of brain development occurs before the age of 5 years. We know that when children receive quality early child care those children are more likely to graduate from high school, go to college, have higher income levels, and are healthier. They are also less likely to commit a crime. It is this research that facilitates industrialized countries to support early child care. Those countries that support child care have a low rate of incarceration. Whereas the United States is ranked bottom in the bottom along with countries like Turkiye and Cyprus in funding/support for early childcare. As a result, the United States has the highest



**Corrine Hendrickson**

incarceration rate in the world. In the previous Wisconsin budget cycle, Wisconsin allocated about \$60 million in our state budget for childcare, meanwhile, the allocated funds for prisons/jails were slightly over \$2 billion. In this biennial budget (2023-2025) the state prison funding request is over \$3 billion, child care is asking for \$340 million additional dollars. In previous decades our spending on prisons has increased by over 300%. Our state spending represents our state's priorities. Wisconsin loses over \$4 billion a year due to a lack of child care. Investing in childcare is one of the highest rates of returns we have. For every \$1 spent the average rate of return is between \$4 and \$16. With higher the rates the younger the child.

During the past year, the federal government provided ARPA funds for childcare which will be ending Jan. of 2024. The federal funds provided were able to raise the wages of the childcare workforce. Previous to the ARPA funds the average hourly rate was \$10.66, the average now is \$12.66. The ARPA funding was intended to stabilize the profession. As you can imagine, even at \$12.66 an hour it is not sufficient to live off of and support a family. In addition, the profession generally does not have benefits like health care or retirement. At the same time, over half of our workforce has an associates degree or higher.

Governor Evers has requested

\$340 million for childcare in the upcoming 2-year budget. This amount is aligned with the current ARPA federal funding, it is essentially to continue as we were for this past year. Surveys were sent to childcare businesses across the state. The majority of businesses state that the ARPA funds make up between 20%-30% of their budget. With many citing they will close their doors if the funding does not continue. To maintain the budget with the \$340 million ask, we will continue to have over half of the state in a childcare desert. We will continue to lose billions a year due to a lack of childcare. And when we don't support children in their early years we are facilitating the increase in prison incarceration and costs at 10x more than had we support children during their foundational years. In addition, parents that can find childcare are paying on average 17% of their household income per child on childcare. Parents are having to choose between housing, food, medical care, or even having a job versus childcare.

In March this year, the Governor requested a \$13 increase for correctional officers making starting wage of \$33 an hour. I am sure those professionals are well deserving of a wage increase. But aren't childcare teachers worth investing in so that they can make a living wage? Especially knowing how critical the job is not only for

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