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Implementing Work Requirements in Wisconsin

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ABSTRACT

When Western counties seek to reform welfare so that recipients have to work in return for aid, this poses implementation as well as policy problems. This study of work requirements in Wisconsin illustrates the challenges. It also confirms success of a top-down model of implementation. Wisconsin's welfare work programs had little impact on dependency through the mid 1980s because work was not a priority and work programs were underdeveloped. From 1985–6, however, the state increased funding and built up the employment bureaucracy. It required that more recipients participate in work programs, enter jobs rather than education, and avoid welfare if possible. It attuned the bureaucracy to its goals through funding incentives. These measures along with strong economic conditions then drove the welfare rolls down, with largely good effects. Wisconsin's achievement rested on its good-government traditions. Not all regimes have the same capacity.

Western counties now seek to require that more working-aged doubts who receive assistance from government work or look for work as a condition of aid. The goal is to reduce assistance costs and to reduce the social separation between the poor and mainstream society. These polices are being applied to varying extents to the unemployed living on jobless benefits and to single mothers, who traditionally raised children without a work test. The new work demands are strongest in the United States, but lesser moves in the same direction have appeared in Canada, Britain, and other European countries. This attempt to combine aid with work requirements is currently a leading innovation in Western social policy.

That endeavour demands that scholars pay more attention to the administrative side of welfare policy. The tendency has been to focus on the initial enactment of social programs and then assume that their execution followed. Most scholarship about welfare reform in the United States has centred on legislative politics. We have treatises on why the proposals to expand welfare made in the 1960s and 1970s

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were defeated (Moynihan 1973, Lynn and Whitman 1981) and why later, more conservative reforms were enacted (Teles 1996; Weaver 2000). These studies focus on the struggle, in and out of Congress, over the basic shape of family assistance in America. The local implementation of welfare reform has received much less attention.

The main focus of reformers' attention was Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which supported poor single-parent families. The last and most radical American welfare reform was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, which recast AFDC as Temproary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under TANF, families were no longer entitled to aid simply because they were needy, they were limited to five years on the rolls, and work requirements were stiffened. Equally important, states were given much greater control over many details of welfare policy. This just increased the importance of local implementation.

States say that they are implementing the new work standards vigorously (Nathan and Gais 1999), but how far they changed local welfare operations varies widely. To make work tests real on the ground requires complex programming. Recipients must receive support while being referred to employment programs, while they also receive child care and other services in order to participate. Enough recipients must participate so that work becomes, not exceptional, but a routine part of welfare. Then the employable will seek work on their own, allowing welfare to concentrate on serving the most disadvantaged. These demands have often proven insuperable in the past. In the U.S., Northern states with large caseholds tend to have large welfare agencies that are difficult to change, while Southern states commonly lack the bureaucratic resources to implement work tests seriously (Norris and Thompson 1995).

To illustrate the challenges, this study analyses the buildup of work requirements in Wisconsin, the state that has led American welfare reform. Beginning in 1986, Wisconsin launched many experiments in welfare, including stronger work incentives, limiting some families to two years on the rolls, and paying newcomers to the state only the benefit they received in their prior state, among other changes. Here, however, I focus on the strengthening of administrative work tests — demands that recipients of aid work or look for work in return for support, as work enforcement turned out to be the centerpiece of the Wisconsin reform.

In 1996–7, Wisconsin finally implemented the most radical reform plan in the country. The new system, called Wisconsin Works or W-2, is uniquely demanding *and* generous. It conditions virtually all aid on work and pays the same grant to families regardless of the number of

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children. At the same time, it pays all child support received directly to the family, without first covering welfare costs (Gallagher et al. 1998). It also provides unusually generous support services, including subsidized health and child care for the entire low-wage working population.

The buildup of work requirements that I focus on here occurred prior to W-2, but it laid the basis for the new system. This phase of the Wisconsin reform was most comparable to what other American states, and some European countries, are contemplating today. One goal is to dramatize the bureaucratic challenges these governments face. Another is to explain a successful case of top-down implementation, something not often seen in social policy.

The Implementation Problem

How can policymakers who establish a new program ensure that it is carried out as intended? Implementation first appeared as a serious difficulty in American antipoverty policy in the 1970s. Many Great Society programs failed to achieve their ends, and one reason was that they were not carried out as designed. The early literature on the problem was pessimistic and pluralistic. Social programs were thought to fail because the problems they addressed were intractable, or because the local agencies that ran them could not be controlled from above, even if higher authorities were paying the bills (Nelson 1977; Pressman and Wildavsky 1973).

Later, a more authoritative view developed that programs could achieve their formal goals if they were better-designed, top-level actors put enough political will and money behind them, and lower-level agencies were able and motivated (Mazmanian and Sabatier 1983). Still later, a more sophisticated view arose that top-level actors would control a program when certain conditions were met, particularly that goals were agreed, and lower-level actors would dominate when they were not (Sabatier 1986; Goggin et al. 1990; Matland 1995).

My hypothesis is drawn from the top-down perspective. It is that Wisconsin's welfare work programs began to succeed when they met the three main conditions suggested by the top-down paradigm; political will, effective design, and economic resources. Despite capable bureaucracy, the state's welfare work programs had little effect on the caseload up through the 1980s. This was mainly because the state accepted growing dependency and showed limited commitment to work programs. But in the mid 1980s, a political consensus formed to enforce work, and spending to do this increased. The state also redesigned programs to require that more recipients participate, enter jobs

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rather than education and training, and avoid welfare altogether. And it backed the changes with ample resources.

Top-down change is not the whole story. In other research, I have shown how several Wisconsin counties helped develop the welfare reform programs that were later adopted by the state. Overall, the implementation of reform involved an interaction between the center and the periphery, with each reacting to innovation by the other (Mead, 2001). I focus here on the top-down part of that story — how the state government toughened up work policies so as to make a work requirement real throughout the state.

Earlier research discusses the policy and bureaucratic decisions states make to institute work requirements, but without the hard evidence I provide on how programs changed at the service level (Hagen and Lurie 1994; Norris and Thompson 1995; Nathan and Gais 1999; Liebschutz 2000; Wiessert 2000). Some recent studies describe administrative changes designed to raise work levels at the service level, but only in the mid 1990s (Pavetti, Holcomb, and Duke 1995; U.S. General Accounting Office 1997b; U.S. General Accounting Office 1998). There are evaluations of work programs that discuss their implementation to a limited extent (Gueron and Pauly 1991). There are also studies — including one on Wisconsin — that probe their implementation in more depth, but at one point in time (Mead 1997; Meyers, Glaser, and MacDonald 1998). There is, however, no published research that I know that traces the implementation of work requirements longitudinally, in detail, and using program data.

My sources for the study include program data, state documents explaining work policies, interviews with Wisconsin officials in Madison and in ten counties between 1987 and 2000 (chiefly in 1994–7), and a small secondary literature. In the sections following, I cover the early growth of the state's welfare work programs, the buildup of funding and reporting systems that transformed the programs after the mid 1980s, and the policy changes that gave the bureaucracy rising authority over the caseload. I also discuss how state officials attuned the bureaucracy to their goals and how improved implementation helped cause greater job entries, caseload fall, and other favourable effects. Finally, I discuss the implications for other governments that might attempt similar reforms.

Early Welfare Work Programs

A century ago, the Progressive movement battled at the state and federal level to limit party influences on politics and administration. The movement vested nominations to political office in primary elections,

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thus wresting control from party bosses. It also instituted civil service systems at the state and federal level so that bureaucratic posts were filled on the basis of ability rather than political loyalty. As the birthplace of Progressivism, Wisconsin became an exemplar of good government, a reputation it has kept since. Economists from Wisconsin helped shape national social programs during that era and again in the 1930s and 1960s. The state's leadership of recent welfare reform, thus, is nothing new.

Wisconsin derives a capable bureaucracy from this heritage. As a result, it has excelled at all the American programs that have attempted to promote work in welfare. The oldest of these is the Employment Service, often known today as the Job Service. Established in 1933, the ES is a federally-funded labor exchange that helps voluntary jobseekers find employment. Federal funding for state programs depends in part on how well they perform in generating job entries in the private sector. Research in the 1970s found that the ES in Wisconsin exemplified the most efficient form of ES organization. It had personnel who approached their task analytically and managers who delegated heavily to the staff serving the clients, while also holding them accountable for results (Chadwin et al. 1977).

While jobless welfare recipients might already use the ES to find work, Congress in 1967 created an adjunct of the ES especially for them. The work Incentive (WIN) program was supposed to place employable welfare recipients in work or training. Unlike the ES, it could obligate recipients to participate, on pain of cuts in their welfare grants. The control of WIN was vested jointly in the ES, which did the job placement, and in state and local welfare departments, which provided child care and other support services. Again, Wisconsin had an exemplary organization (Mitchell, Chadwin, and Nightingale 1980; Schmitt 1996).

Yet Wisconsin's work programs failed to restrain dependency. The number of people on AFC in Wisconsin rose steadily from 213,000 in 1980 to 301,000 in 1986. In 1980, Wisconsin had 4.5 percent of its population on AFDC, the nation 4.7 percent. By 1986, the figures had changed to 6.3 and 4.6 percent, respectively (data from the U.S. Administration for Children and Families and the Census). Wisconsin's rise reflected the recession of the early 1980s and the insistence of the state government on raising AFDC benefit levels. Higher grants allowed rising numbers of families to qualify for aid. But work programs also lacked a political mandate.

There were bureaucratic problems as well. Among academics, the usual criticism of the ES is that it did not promote an ambitious employment policy for the general population. It did not seek to train

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the mainstream workforce or guarantee jobs, in the manner of Sweden, for example. It focused mostly on helping individual jobless find jobs in the private sector (Mucciaroni 1990). The British Employment Service, which is in some ways similar, is also criticized for seeking chiefly to ensure that unemployment benefit claimants were "actively seeking work" (King 1995). That role was necessary because the "dole" supported the jobless indefinitely. In the United States, in contrast, jobless benefits are limited to six months, except during recessions. Government usually counts on that time limit to prod the jobless back to work, without further oversight.

Among welfare policymakers, rather, the criticism of the ES was that it served welfare recipients poorly. Its routines were formed around helping voluntary jobseekers find work. So it gave lower priority to serving the mandatory clients that WIN referred to it. The ES resisted obligating recipients to participate, while it also failed to give them the special help that they often ended to work. WIN also faced the problem that its employment and services sides were run by different agencies. These problems occurred even in high-performing Wisconsin.

In response to these dissatisfactions, Congress in 1981 allowed states to replace WIN with a "WIN Demonstration Program" wholly controlled by the welfare department. This Winconsin did in 1983, when it inaugurated the Wisconsin Employment Opportunity Program (WEOP). Control was vested in the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), the state welfare department. But since DHSS still contracted with the ES for job search services, little changed.

In addition, WIN's funding was reduced by Reagan-era cuts. In part, WEOP was a response to this, as it concentrated mainly on job search and dispensed with much of the costlier education and training that WIN had also provided. Job search means helping recipients search for jobs by having them call employers or referring them to possible openings. Recipients may do this both individually and in groups called "job clubs". Under staff leadership, job club members meet to offer each other feedback and support, then go out and seek jobs.

Wisconsin augmented WEOP with other work-oriented activities that had been permitted by OBRA, such as employment search and the Community Work Experience Program (CWEP), in which recipients "worked off" their grants in unpaid government jobs. However, due to the cuts, by the mid 1980s, WEOP's staff fell from 300 to 100 and the program could serve only 22 of Wisconsin's 72 counties (Corbett 1995, 34).

The Buildup Begins

The Wisconsin welfare reform began seriously in 1985–6, when legislators of both parties grew alarmed at the growing rolls. They quickly

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formed a consensus to promote employment in welfare (Mead 2000). The first decision was to build up welfare work programs. In 1986, the legislature created the Work Experience and Job Training program (WEJT), backing it with state money. WJET was to be broader than WEOP, by providing more education and training as well as CWEP. It also aimed to reach more of the caseload. Control of WEJT was firmly vested in DHSS, demoting the ES to a contractor's role in some counties.

At the end of 1986, the Republican Tommy Thompson won the governorship, partly on the welfare issue, ousting a liberal Democratic incumbent. Thompson, backed by a bipartisan coalition in the legislature, went on to initiate the many welfare experiments, mentioned above, that led over a decade to W-2. As a first step, DHSS used WEJT to expand participation in welfare work activities. The program was instituted first in five counties in 1987, then by 1989 in 33 counties, including all the largest ones. By 1990, either WEJT or a combination of CWEP and job search was operating in every country (Legislative Fiscal Bureau 1991, 22).

WEJT gave the state a running start on implementing the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS), the next welfare work structure to come down from Washington. JOBS, which resembled WEJT, was established by the Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988. Where WIN had obliged mothers to participate when their youngest child turned 6, JOBS lowered this to 3, allowing it to involve more of the caseload. It also provides more funding for training, education, and child care. The new program, like WEJT, was entirely controlled by the welfare department.

Wisconsin was the first state to lodge its JOBS plan with Washington (Wiseman 1996, 16), and it was one of 14 states that implemented the program as early as possible, in July 1989 (data from the U.S. Administration for Children and Families). The plan was approved, the state noted, "Because we had in place the required aspects of the program in a majority of counties" (Department of Health and Social Services 1990, 2). By July 1990, JOBS was operating throughout Wisconsin. WEJT and other earlier programs were folded into it. The state now could make a work obligation real on the ground. As one state official remarked to me, "The JOBS program was everywhere, and no one was exempt because JOBS did not exist."

The social context of reform was also favorable. The state began its changes in the late 1980s, at the crest of a national economic boom that had lowered unemployment rates throughout the country. The ensuing recession of the early 1990s was milder in Wisconsin than in most states. It was followed by another boom that generated plentiful jobs throughout the state during the run-up to W-2 and beyond. The

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Wisconsin caseload was also somewhat less disadvantaged and more employable than typical of the country. In 1988, 58 percent of the cases were white, 31 percent black, and 6 percent Hispanic, compared to comparable figures of 39, 40, and 16 percent for the nation (U.S. Congress 1990, 590). The nonwhite caseloads, however, was heavily concentrated in Milwaukee, a seriously depressed and impoverished city (Jargowsky 1997, 49–57).

Building the Bureaucracy

The new work programs aimed to put more recipients to work and reduce the welfare rolls, and in that sense to reduce the size of government. But to achieve this, paradoxically, the bureaucracy had first to grow. This it did, by expanding its staff and management information capacities, even at the expense of high administrative costs. The governor easily agreed with the legislature on this. In Wisconsin, Republicans are less anti-government than in much of the rest of the United States.

Funding

The money to run WIN and JOBS had been mostly federal, with Washington reimbursing most state funding. When it proved insufficient to implement WEJT and then JOBS in the manner Wisconsin wished, more state funds were provided. The first five counties to start WEJT received $1.8 million from Madison to serve 3,500 clients. By 1990, WEJT cost $36 million to serve 50,000 clients (Legislative Fiscal Bureau 1991, 22–6). This went well beyond previous WIN and WEOP funding.

In JOBS, the state gave counties $1,200, later $1,400, per case to run the program annually. Each county also received a child care grant of about 17 percent of its JOBS grant. The state was prepared to expand WEJT from 1989 onwards even if it spent more money than Washington would match with federal funds. It also doled out extra funds to meet special needs — such as meeting federal standards for a 40 percent participant rate for two-parent families in AFDC, to raise participation rates in Milwaukee, or to ensure that counties' JOBS funding would not drop just because caseloads were now falling (Legislative Fiscal Bureau 1989, 3; Department of Health and Social Services 1990, 11; Legislative Fiscal Bureau 1995, 21, 24). These increases were the more remarkable because the caseload fell from 1986 onwards, but for a brief rise during the recession of 1991–2, and one might have expected funding to fall too.

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Overall, Wisconsin's spending vastly exceeded its usual federal funds. Using 1995 dollars, the state's JOBS authorization grew only moderately, from $24.5 million in 1990 to $28.2 million in 1995 (calculated from JOBS data in U.S. Congress 1991–6). But the state's overall spending on employment and training soared (in 1995 dollars) from about $15 million in 1988 to over $80 million in 1995. The rise was particularly steep during 1988–90, during the launching of WEJT and JOBS (Wiseman 1996, 529–30). Outlays specifically for welfare-to-work programs grew from $13 million to $43 million (Corbett 1995, 27).

How much of the extra money was Wisconsin's is unclear. Some if it came from a "waiver savings" deal that Tommy Thompson negotiated with Washington in 1987. Under this arrangement, some $148 million of the savings in federal welfare costs imputed to the Thompson experiments became available to the state over the years 1987–97 (Wiseman 1996, 524–5). But since the money came as matching funds for state spending, Wisconsin still had to invest new money of its own to create its welfare work system.

Separate figures on personnel are unavailable, but state officials said that much of the new money went simply to hire more staff for welfare work programs so that they could involve the caseload more fully. By 1994, state and local JOBS workers told me in interviews that case managers in the program typically had caseloads of around 150 clients each, the range running from 75–80 in small counties to 300 in Milwaukee, the largest city. This is below the typical numbers found in other WIN and JOBS Programs I have studied, especially in urban settings. In addition, during the buildup of the late 1980s, Wisconsin's caseload was already falling. Smaller caseloads allowed staff to oversee the remaining cases more closely. That allowed them to help and motivate yet more clients to get jobs or dispense with welfare. Thus, as one official put it, the growing bureaucracy "ratcheted" the caseload down. Many other states faced limited funding for JOBS, so they could not get on top of their caseloads in the same way (Hagen and Lurie 1994).

Management information systems

Wisconsin also made critical investments in the computerized management information systems (MIS) that run welfare. The process of rationalizing these systems went back to the 1970s, when the state combined the paperwork used to apply for AFDC, Food Stamps (which provides the poor coupons to buy groceries), and Medicaid (the largest health program for the poor). DHSS computerized much of case management operations for these programs using a Computer Reporting

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Network, at that time the most advanced such system in the country (Corbett 1995, 21).

CRN had the limitation, however, that it covered only the eligibility and grant payment side of welfare. As employment activity became more important, the state built up reporting systems in that area. At the time of WEOP, local work offices monitored client assignments using a Job Service Information System that was based on the ES's Employment Security Automated Reporting System. ESARS recorded how many clients were in certain statutes within offices, but it did not allow managers to track individual cases as CRN did. An improved Work Programs Reporting System was implemented in 1989–90 in order to run JOBS, but it still had no connection to CRN or the welfare side of the system. And as the welfare department took control of work programs in most localities, the ES's systems were no longer available.

Finally, in 1994, the state implemented Client Assistance for Reemployment and Economic Support (CARES). This system automates the input of client data and the calculation of benefits. It encompasses both the claims payment and work sides of welfare. This fact reflects the welfare department's dominance of work programs. CARES records clients' activities within work programs, although not the features of private jobs that they enter. The system is complicated, its implementation was troubled, and it had to be modified for W-2 in 1997. But it was still an improvement and a better system than many states have (Kaplan 2000, 104–5).

Administrative costs

One apparent downside to the bureaucratic buildup was a dramatic rise in administrative costs. Overall in welfare, Wisconsin appears efficient. If one looks at Medicaid and Food Stamps as well as AFDC, and if one considers all fiscal years between 1989 and 1993, the state spent $148.96 in federal matching funds to administer each case annually, compared to a national average of $159.30. In 1993, administration ate up only 4.8 percent of federal program costs in Wisconsin, compared to 5.8 percent for the nation as a whole (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1995, tables 1 and 8).

But state and local costs specifically to run AFDC exploded. In 1986, prior to the WEJT buildup and the Thompson reforms, Wisconsin spent only $10.56 on administration per month per AFDC case, the lowest figure in the country. By 1994, however, that amount had soared to $61.55, only 37th best among states. Wisconsin's proportional increase since 1986 — almost six times — was far and away the largest in the nation (U.S. Administration for Children and Families 1995, 7). Much

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of this cost went for the new personnel and bureaucratic apparatus, including reporting systems, needed to run Wisconsin's elaborate welfare reform programs.

In return for these expenses, however, the state achieved an equally dramatic drop in welfare dependency. Between the state's budget for 1987–9 and the budget for 1993–4, overall spending for welfare in current-dollar terms rose 61 percent or $1.2 billion, but much of this was accounted for by Medicaid, which is huge and costly. If one focuses just on AFDC and closely-linked programs for work and other purposes, spending dropped by 11 percent or $68 million. The saving was largely due to smaller grant payments because of the caseload fall as well as higher child support collections (data from Department of Health and Social Services). Thus, from the time of WEJT, Wisconsin invested millions in stronger government to get control of welfare. At least in financial terms, that gamble paid off.

Raising Participation

Armed with these bureaucratic resources, the state could now change the design of work programs so that they promoted work more effectively. Experts had debated whether welfare work programs should be voluntary or mandatory (Lynn 1989), but it was apparent by the late 1980s that mandatory programs had larger effects on employment and dependency (Hamilton and Friedlander 1989). The key to performance was to raise participation. This Winconsin did with rule changes that obligated more recipients to participate in WEJT or JOBS, and for more hours.

As mentioned earlier, JOBS had lowered the age of child when a mother had to participate to 3, but even then only 41–44 percent of welfare adults were mandatory for the program (data from U.S. Administration for Children and Families). Wisconsin, however, obtained a waiver from Washington in 1987 that allowed it to obligate mothers when the youngest child turned 1. Under this authority, the state in 1988 set the age at 2, then in 1995 lowered it to 1. This meant that a large majority of mothers were now mandatory for work.

Hours of participation in JOBS were normally limited to 20 a week, or half-time, but Wisconsin's waiver allowed it to increase the demand to as much as 40 hours. The state began to demand 35 hours of effort a week in Milwaukee in 1995, and in 1996 an expectation of as much as 40 hours was insisted statewide. The full-time standard was set as part of Pay For Performance (PFP), a reform that anticipated W-2 by expecting welfare parents to work as hard as taxpayers on a regular basis.

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TABLE 1: *Rates of JOBS mandatoriness and participation among AFDC adults*

	Wisconsin			Median state		
Year	Percent of AFDC adults mandatory for JOBS	JOBS partic rate (per cent)	Overall partic rate	Percent of AFDC adults mandatory for JOBS	JOBS partic rate (per cent)	Overall partic rate
1991	40.1	38.8	24.7	39.9	14.8	12.7
1992	52.7	33.3	20.9	39.3	17.7	12.4
1993	40.4	30.9	14.5	43.6	17.9	12.5
1994	40.7	31.7	14.2	41.6	20.8	13.1
1995	56.5	35.5	23.6	42.1	27.6	15.4
1996	66.7	60.6	37.0	42.6	33.0	19.4

Note: Data are for federal fiscal years. The JOBS participation rate is the percent of mandatory adults participating in JOBS for required hours. The overall participation rate is the percent of all AFDC adults participating in JOBS at any level.
Source: U.S. Administration for Children and Families; U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Overview of Entitlement Programs: 1994 Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 15, 1994), 357–9; U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *1998 Green Book: Background Material, and Data on Programs Within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 19, 1998), 484–6.

Pressure was put on the contractors running JOBS and on the clients to meet these standards. Most of the contractors were county welfare departments. As of 1994, they were expected to serve 80 percent of the recipients referred to them by the income maintenance side of welfare. I discuss below the financial incentives that backed this up. Monitoring of client compliance also decreased. Traditionally, recipients subject to work obligations had been allowed two failures to report to assignments before the state began proceedings to "sanction" them (reduce their grants). In 1995, that was cut to one instance. The penalty for noncompliance also rose. Traditionally, only the share of the cash grant attributable to the noncooperating adult was cut; benefits continued for the rest of the family, including children. As part of PFP, however, the state changed to full-family sanctions. Benefits were now reduced by the minimum wage (then $4.25) for each hour by which a participant's activities fell short of his or her assignment, and if they fell below 25 percent of assigned hours, the entire grant was cancelled. The family could still, however, obtain Food Stamps and Medicaid.

Under JOBS, states were supposed to achieve certain activity levels among recipients on pain of reductions in their federal funding. Seven percent of recipients that states judged "mandatory" for JOBS were supposed to participate in 1990, rising to 20 percent by 1995. Wisconsin was more ambitious. In addition to changing the rules for clients, Madison pressed the counties to raise participation rates. Table 1

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shows, for 1991 through 1996, the percents of AFDC adults found mandatory for JOBS and two measures of participation in JOBS, for both Wisconsin and the median state in the nation. The first participation rate is the official JOBS measure — roughly, the share of mandatory adults meeting the 20-hour standard. The second is the share of welfare adults, mandatory or not, who participated in JOBS to any extent.

The figures show that Wisconsin did not classify an unusual percent of its welfare adults as mandatory for JOBS in the early 1990s, but the figures rose sharply to two-thirds by 1996, reflecting the above rule changes. In JOBS participation, the state was consistently well above the median state, especially at the beginning and end of the period, and even further above JOBS standards. In overall participation, Wisconsin dipped close to the median state in 1993–4, but again soared well above by 1995–6. In JOBS participation in 1996, Wisconsin ranked eighth; among larger, more urban states, only Florida, Oregon, and Washington scored above it. In overall participation in 1996, Wisconsin was fourth, with only three small rural states ahead (data from U.S. Administration and Families). Between 1994 and 1996, Wisconsin raised its overall participation by nearly 23 percentage points. This was by ten points the most in the nation.

Toward Work First

Other rule changes reoriented JOBS from an emphasis on education and training toward employment in available jobs. When the program began in the late 1980s, most experts believed that the best way to overcome dependency and poverty among poor families was to improve the skills of parents so that they could get better jobs. This view was reflected in JOBS, whose rules favored assignment to education for parents who had not completed high school. However, it became apparent by the early 1990s that JOBS was overemphasizing remediation. Many clients were in school, but few were going to work. States became impatient to raise participation and work (Lurie 1996, 580–4). Evaluations of the 1990s suggested that programs that stressed "work first" realized larger gains in employment and earnings than those emphasizing education and training (Riccio, Friedlander, and Freedman 1994; Freedman and Friedlander 1995).

In Wisconsin, state policy documents initially said that the purpose of JOBS was to target "the most difficult to employ". This meant that "Job Search is not the primary activity." Rather, there should be "an emphasis on using education and training, as means to

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improve the employability of welfare recipients." In 1990, the legislature endorsed the idea that the aim was "long-term training/education," including postsecondary programs that might last more than two years (Department of Health and Social Services 1990, 2, 17–20).

But by the early 1990s, reflecting the national trend, DHSS pressed JOBS contractors to place more clients in work. According to state officials, in 1994 the contractors were expected to place 12 percent of one-parent cases and 40 percent of two-parent cases in "work components," which included CWEP, Work Experience (another form of unpaid work), Work Supplementation (where welfare subsidizes a private-sector job), or on-the-job training (OJT). In 1995, these figures were raised to 18 and 50 — later 60 — percent, respectively.

Restraints were placed on higher education, which had allowed some recipients to go to school for years without taking a job. In 1995, education programs were limited to two years in length except in unusual circumstances, and four-year programs were disallowed. In that year also, clients in education or training programs for less than 20 hours a week were expected to undertake work components as well, and in Milwaukee 75 percent of all clients in education or training were expected to be in work components or working part-time. Finally in 1996, the inauguration of Pay For Performance required that recipients "earn" their grants through near-full-time hours of work activities. PFP forced counties to abandon the remediation strategy, if they had not already done so.

Such polices could be effective, of course, only if managers had the work assignments available to absorb the clients shifted out of education and training. When PFP came on stream in 1996, administrators in Milwaukee struggled to create CWEP slots on a large scale, so as to guarantee that those who were now expected to work could do so in government, should they fail to find private jobs. Again, the implementation of work tests — although designed in part to reduce the rolls — hinged critically on bureaucratic resources. "The revolution is PFP," one manager told me. "It's all over after that. If we can do PFP, W-2 will be a cakewalk."

The shift in priorities is dramatized in Table 2. It shows the average monthly proportions of JOBS participants that Wisconsin and the United States as a whole assigned to various activities, or components during the years 1991–6. The figures show, first, that Wisconsin sharply cut the percent of clients involved in assessment. This was a sign of tightened administration, since assessment delays the assignment of participants to activities. The state never assigned

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TABLE 2: *JOBS participants assigned to task components*

Component		1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
		Average monthly percentages					
Assessment:	WI	42.5	10.2	12.4	8.2	6.7	4.6
	US	21.3	16.5	17.6	12.5	11.1	10.3
Job training:	WI	2.4	3.2	3.1	3.7	0.0	0.0
	US	14.5	15.8	15.4	15.8	15.8	13.4
Remedial education:	WI	17.8	15.9	16.6	14.6	12.2	9.6
	US	25.6	24.5	23.3	23.9	22.7	19.7
Postsecondary education:	WI	21.1	24.4	22.7	25.7	16.7	12.1
	US	19.4	14.9	15.7	18.8	16.7	13.7
Job search:	WI	13.8	14.8	13.4	15.8	22.6	37.9
	US	11.9	9.4	8.0	5.5	6.1	9.0
Work readiness:	WI	5.9	4.2	2.8	3.5	3.6	2.3
	US	5.9	4.5	4.5	5.2	6.2	7.4
Work supplementation:	WI	0.4	1.0	1.2	2.3	1.6	3.0
	US	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3
CWEP:	WI	2.8	3.3	3.7	4.9	5.2	14.0
	US	2.8	3.7	4.3	3.6	3.8	8.8
Job entry:	WI	NA	15.1	14.4	15.1	21.2	15.2
	US	NA	7.2	7.7	10.6	12.3	14.6

Note: Data are monthly averages for federal fiscal years. Remedial education includes high school, GED, and ESL. Job training includes job skills and vocational training. Postsecondary education includes both assigned and self-initiated. CWEP means Community Work Experience Program and includes other unpaid work. OJT is omitted because it was very small and changed little. Job entry means the share of clients who entered jobs in either the current or prior month. Totals for a year may exceed 100 because clients may be in more than one activity. Totals may also be less than 100 because some clients are unassigned.

Source: U.S. Administration for Children and Families; U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *1996 Green Book: Background Material, and Data on Programs Within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 4, 1996), 420–1; U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *1998 Green Book: Background Material, and Data on Programs Within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 19, 1998), 482–3.

many people to job training, but zeroed out even those. It sharply cut its use of remedial education and postsecondary education.

Meanwhile, Wisconsin built up job search. Work readiness is a motivational activity that declined, probably in favor of job search. Work supplementation and CWEP grew in size alongside job search, although less strongly. In most cases, the shifts are sharper than seen for the country as a whole. According to a parallel government study, the share of active JOBS participants that Wisconsin assigned to work-oriented activities soared from 40 percent in 1994 to 88 percent in 1997 (U.S. General Accounting Office 1998, 27–35). Finally, as the last line of Table 2 shows, Wisconsin's rate of job placement consistently outpaced that of the nation.

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Diversion

A final policy change was that the state tried to divert needy families from going on aid at all. The reasoning was that, although most families that sought welfare were needy enough to qualify, few had exhausted other possibilities for income. By seeking support from friends, family, or local charities, or by going to work, most could avoid welfare. Under Work First, a reform developed in Grant and Kenosha Counties and instituted in most other counties in 1994–5, applicants for aid had to spend two weeks looking for jobs while their papers were processed; many obtained jobs and never went on aid. In 1995, applicants for two-parent AFDC and for one-parent AFDC in Milwaukee faced eight weeks of looking for work if they went on the rolls.

In 1996, the requirement to look for work before one's application was approved was extended statewide under Self-Sufficiency First, a companion to Pay For Performance. Work First had applied only to applicants mandatory for JOBS, and the sanction for noncooperation was only denial of the noncooperator's share of the grant. Under SSF, all applicants had to spend 30 days looking for work prior to receiving aid, and the penalty for noncooperation was loss of the entire grant. Note that the door to aid was not simply closed. Rather, "resource specialists" worked with applicants to arrange some way to meet their needs other than going on welfare. Again, even the effort to curb dependency required an expansion of the bureaucracy.

DHSS figures show that, during 1995, 35 to 55 percent of applicants for AFDC in the counties running Work First were "diverted". That is, they were potentially eligible for AFDC but were talked out of it by the resource specialist, failed to complete their applications, or got a job before going on the rolls. Of course, many applicants for aid always fail to follow through, and there are no statewide numbers prior to Work First to prove that the incidence increased. But local and staff say it did. In Racine, which did compile figures, 75 to 80 percent of applications had traditionally been approved. Under Work First in September 1995, that rate fell to between 29 and 59 percent, depending on how many of the initial contacts would have filed papers under the earlier rules (data from Department of Health and Social Services).

One apparent cost of diversion, however, was that participation in JOBS fell. In October 1993, state data shows that 86 percent of recipients referred to JOBS were enrolled in the program. Two years later, the rate was only 69 percent. The reason was not that administration had loosened; it was getting tighter, with fewer clients

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inactive (data from the Department of Health and Social Services). State officials say that one factor was that the shift to the CARES computer system in 1994 lowered apparent participation for technical reasons. Another was that the change in the age of child rule earlier in 1995 sharply increased the pool of clients mandatory for JOBS, thus reducing the enrollment rate. But the major explanation was probably that the new work and diversion policies caused more recipients to leave welfare quickly. They would go on aid and be referred to JOBS, but leave welfare before they could enroll in the work program. Note that these data show enrollment in a single month. In Table 1, JOBS participation is measured over a year, and it required activity in components beyond enrollment, so those numbers run lower than for enrollment.

Motivating the Bureaucracy

According to top-down implementation theory, success will vary with the capability and commitment of the agencies that carry out programs. The Wisconsin welfare bureaucracy, both state and local, handled the complexities of the new work policies and the many Thompson experiments with impressive expertise. Of the several states I have researched and consulted with, none implemented so many initiatives without serious incident. Nevertheless, many personnel preferred the less demanding policies that had prevailed prior to reform. Many opposed the new work requirements, suspecting that they would lead only to hardship (Kendrick 1993, 168–73, 201–2, 223–4).

Thompson and his lieutenants recognized these doubts. In an interview, Gerald Whitburn, secretary of DHSS between 1991 and 1995, remarked on the need to "bring the bureaucracy along". In part, the administration accomplished this through leadership. Thompson was careful to challenge the bureaucracy to reform welfare without attacking it. He set "a clear direction," my respondents said, then trusted his officials to follow through. This had a "huge impact on staff," motivating them to accept change.

At the same time, the state altered funding incentives to align bureaucratic self-interest with reform. Welfare benefit payment and welfare work programs were run in most localities by county governments, chiefly by their local welfare departments, although in a few cases by other public agencies. These agencies in turn often subcontracted to private organizations to provide services. In Milwaukee, the country government declined to run JOBS, so the state had contracted it to the welfare department, the ES, and five nonprofit service organizations.

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In 1994, counties were required to "earn" 55 percent of their JOBS funding for two-parent cases by placing these clients in jobs or work components. They gained $600 per full-time job placement, $300 per part-time placement, and $200 per month for placements in work-oriented activities. In 1995, this performance pool rose to cover 60 percent of two-parent JOBS monies and 20 percent of the much larger budget for one-parent AFDC, and the payments per placement also rose. These incentives were the lever behind the plan requirements mentioned above.

The state also imposed a novel system of bureaucratic competition on the seven Milwaukee agencies, which it viewed as underperformers. During the first half of 1994, six of them were reorganized into two teams, one led by the local welfare department, the other by Goodwill Industries, a large nonprofit agency. The budget was divided between them and they were told to compete to achieve job placements and other goals, with the results to affect funding in the next fiscal cycle. Clients were allocated randomly between the two teams, to ensure a fair test. Faced with this ultimatum, each team scrambled to call in unassigned clients and assign people to job search as they had never done before. Job entries soared. By the time the competition ended in June 1994, placements were 29 percent above the level for the same period in 1993, and full-time placements were 38 percent above the prior year (Department of Health and Social Services 1994, 28). No other change could explain this.

The providers disliked the competition. They preferred that all agencies cooperate to run JOBS together. Accordingly, in 1995 the state replaced the teams with incentive payments similar to those set for other counties in 1994. Again, agencies scrambled to make placements, because now they earned money by doing so. Job entries again soared to as much as twice the monthly level achieved in 1994. For all of 1995, the city achieved 7,400 jobs, a 52-percent rise over 1994 (data from the Private Industry Council of Milwaukee County).

Finally, in December 1995, county welfare departments were told that they had to reduce the AFDC caseload up to 25 percent and achieve several other goals between September 1995 and August 1996 in order to be assured of selection to administer W-2. The 25-percent target was reduced somewhat for counties with difficult caseloads or which had already reduced their caseloads substantially. The vast majority of counties met the standards, but in nine counties, including Milwaukee, control of W-2 was turned over to private agencies (Kaplan 2000, 80). By these pressures and suasions, Wisconsin's leaders attuned the bureaucracy more fully to their goals.

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TABLE 3: *JOBS participants and AFDC cases, Wisconsin.*

	JOBS participants		AFDC cases	
Year	Number	Percent change over prior year	Number	Percent change over prior year
1994	29,862		76,217	
1995	32,913	10.2	70,604	−7.4
1996	39,787	20.9	55,501	−21.4

Note: Years are calendar years. Figures for participants and cases are monthly averages for the years.
Source: Department of Workforce Development, U.S. Administration for Children and Families.

Effects of Work Requirements

The purpose of the new requirements was to cause more recipients to enter employment, thus reducing dependency and poverty. The final test of implementation is whether those effects occurred. Experimental evaluations in other localities show that mandatory work programs do reduce dependency, particularly when programs enforce participation and insist on actual work (Gueron and Pauly 1991). Studies within Wisconsin suggest that WEJT or JOBS had little effect on the rolls through 1990. The inauguration of these programs may actually have slowed caseload fall (Mead 1999, 604–6; Pawasarat and Quinn 1993). That is not surprising, given that in these years the programs stressed education and training over actual employment.

That changed with the shift toward higher participation and work first. Table 3 show that by the mid 1990s, there clearly was an inverse association for the state as a whole between "engagement" in JOBS and the caseload. As engagement rose, the caseload fell, and by quite similar percentages. This is not to deny that other factors such as good economic conditions also get credit.

Over the entire period 1986–94, counties that had higher proportions of recipients active in JOBS, and fewer inactive, than the average county also had more caseload fall, even controlling for the labor market and other factors. This cross-sectional association does not, strictly speaking, explain the downward trend for the state as a whole. But it is consistent with Table 3 and with what local welfare officials say — welfare reform joined with a stronger economy and other factors drove dependency down (Mead 1999, 602–4, 606–12).

Recipients led by several routes, all of them tied to JOBS. One was entering employment. Despite a falling caseload, JOBS achieved rising job entries — 16,067 in 1994, 19,504 in 1995, and 23,280 in 1996. While Milwaukee had traditionally lagged the state, the increase in entries in the city now was even larger than elsewhere, as the

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demanding policies of 1995–6 took effect. After 1996, job placements fell, probably due to an accelerated caseload drop in 1997–8 as W-2 was implemented (data from Department of Workforce Development). Like the caseload fall, the statewide growth in job entries jibes with a cross-sectional association: In 1993, counties with higher proportions of JOBS clients enrolled and in job search or job readiness activities also has higher proportions entering jobs and leaving the rolls, again controlling for the demographics of the caseload and the labor market (Mead 1997, 119–20).

A second route was diversion. As applicants for aid were confronted with an immediate demand to work or to make other arrangements for themselves, more did so. This depressed new entries to the rolls and, as departures continued, drove the caseload down. In the 18 counties that instituted Work First in October 1994, the caseload had already fallen 40 percent since January 1987. The remaining cases then fell another 13 points just in the next 15 months, as more clients got jobs or avoided applying for AFDC under the new policies (data from Department of Workforce Development). Self-Sufficiency First and Pay For Performance accelerated the caseload fall statewide. Between March 1996, when they were implemented, and September 1997, when W-2 began, the number of people on the rolls plummeted from 175,541 to 88,575, or 50 percent (data from U.S. Administration for Children and Families).

A third route was sanctions. Recipients can be removed from the rolls for failure to fulfill administrative requirements linked to aid. In the early 1990s within Wisconsin, counties that increased sanctioning rates typically had more caseload fall (Mead 1999, 611–12). In a federal study comparing states in 1996, Wisconsin had the most benefit terminations — 5,700 — out of 33 states examined. This may suggest that many clients were in conflict with the program. Actually, in the vast majority of cases, clients simply failed to enroll in JOBS or appear for assigned activities, and then their grants were reduced or terminated (U.S. General Accounting Office 1997a, 20–32).

By all routes, the number of case closures came to exceed openings. In the middle 1980s, at the height of the caseload, around 20,000 cases went on and off the rolls in a single quarter. By late 1989, both entries and exits had dropped almost in half, suggesting that most of the short-time cases — those likeliest to have other options — had already left the rolls. Entries dropped again sharply in 1995, after the diversion programs began, and again in 1996 when Self-Sufficiency First and Pay For Performance came on line. The difference between entries and exits grew to 2 to 7 thousand a year, and it was this gap, year after year, that drove the rolls down (data from Department of Workforce Development).

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Nationwide, caseloads rose by a third during 1989–94, then fell by more than half through 2000. The decline was generally driven by the rising force of work requirements, but also by new federal benefits (child care and wage subsidies) and exceptionally favorable economic conditions (Ellwood 1999). However, states like Wisconsin that enforced work more resolutely typically had less increase than the average state in the first period and more decline in the second. Indeed, Wisconsin was one of only four states that actually reduced its rolls during the first period, and of these it was the only one paying high benefits (Mead, 2000). In the second period, Wisconsin's rolls dropped to only about 10 percent of what they had been at their height in 1986, a fall dwarfing that of any other urban state.

Data about the other effects of work enforcement comes from recent surveys that also reflect the impacts of implementing W-2, which drove the rolls down further in the late 1990s. When surveyed, over 60 percent of Wisconsin recipients who had left welfare are working (Department of Workforce Development 2000). That level is no better than in other states (Brauner and Loprest 1999), but it has been achieved despite an unusually great caseload fall. Many of the less employable recipients who would still be on welfare in other urban states have left the welfare rolls in Wisconsin.

As in other states, the quality of initial jobs is low. Leavers usually obtain jobs paying $7 to 8 an hour. That is above the minimum wage but often insufficient to escape poverty. Administrative data suggests that most recipients lose income on balance when they first leave welfare and remain poor. But income then rises and poverty falls as earnings grow over time. When asked, most leavers report little change in income but say they are better off overall (Department of Workforce Development 2000, Cancian et al. 2000).

Recently, the nation as a whole has seen falls in welfare and rising work levels among poor adults, in part due to welfare reform. In Wisconsin, however, these effects are particularly sharp, apparently because the state has both required and supported work with unusual force. In a survey of 13 states, in 1997 and again in 1999 Wisconsin had the highest work levels among low-income parents as well as the lowest child poverty rate (Urban Institute 2000). In these respects in 1997, the state also outperformed Michigan and Minnesota, two other Midwestern states that are otherwise similar (Wiseman 1999).

These achievements do not establish that Wisconsin's polices were optimal. One might have persevered with the early focus of WEJT and JOBS on education and training. Based on evaluations outside Wisconsin, this would have produced less caseload fall in the short run than "work first," but it might have produced higher-paying jobs for the poor

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in the long term (Scrivener et al. 1998; Knox, Miller, and Gennetian 2000). Such programs, however, still must enforce participation and serious job search as a condition of benefits. So the bureaucratic challenges remain.

Discussion

Wisconsin shows the struggles that other governments can expect if they attempt to require work or work effect in return for aid. Such policies cannot just be legislated; they must be worked out in administrative detail. While money may ultimately be saved, government must first commit new resources to the bureaucracy and support services. It must set new rules for exactly who has to participate and how. Not only the recipients but the bureaucracy must be taught new expectations and motivated to meet them.

The paradox is that welfare reform reduces the scale of government in one sense but expands it in another. The welfare rolls fall, but government does far more for the recipients who remain. Its mission expands from merely subsidizing the needy to overcoming the less material dimensions of poverty, what Americans call the "culture of poverty" and Europeans call "social exclusion." The programming needed to do this is far more complicated than the procedures needed just to pay out aid.

The Wisconsin case also confirms the top-down hypothesis that programs will achieve their goals more fully when the political and financial resources behind them increase, and when program design is improved. Wisconsin achieved work enforcement when it decided to take that mission seriously, developed a bureaucracy equal to the task, and made its programs more demanding. This success is the more impressive because it occurred in just the kind of complex, human service program where in the earlier literature implementation seemed doomed (Derthick 1972; Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). Previous top-down successes typically involved regulatory programs — such as school busing or voting rights — where a strong legal mandate was enough to compel change at the local level (Mazmanian and Sabatier 1983). Here, government had to gear up to enroll large numbers of people and then equip and mobilize them to work. Legal mandates were part of the story, but equally important was bureaucratic statecraft — the development of a strong, efficient, and motivated administrative structure.

One could also model the change using Matland's ambiguity-conflict model. Prior to the mid-1980s, welfare work involved "experimental implementation." No one had defined goals or means closely. How man-

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datory should participation be as against voluntary? Was the aim immediate employment or preparing clients for "better jobs" later? Disagreements were muted, and decisions were largely abandoned to the local level. But after welfare became a crisis, state policymakers took command. They focused on a work strategy, agreed quickly to enforce higher participation, then later to promote "work first" and diversion. Implementation now entered the "administrative" mode where issues are more technical and funding is the chief determinant of success or failure (Matland 1995). By funding and staffing its programs amply, and by motivating local agencies to get on board, Wisconsin overrode all obstacles.

The Wisconsin story suggests that the frontier of social policy lies ultimately in the capacity of the regime, something the implementation literature says too little about. It was critical to success that goals were agreed at the top. But goals were agreed, in part, because Wisconsin has an enlightened political style where politicians focus on solving problems more than on partisan rivalry (Mead 2000). It was also critical that local agencies were capable and well-funded, but again strong bureaucracy derives from Wisconsin's good-government past.

Thus, the largest question raised by Wisconsin is not whether government can achieve implementation but how many governments can be this capable. The implementation of work tests by American states was traditionally troubled by serious political and administrative problems. Since PRWORA, however, several states with strong good-government traditions have reformed much as Wisconsin did. They have tried to combine aid with work demands, and consensual policies and strong administration have aided them, although no state has redesigned welfare as fully as Wisconsin. In other states, change still comes more slowly. But — pushed by Washington — probably the majority of states will achieve work-based welfare over time (Mead, 2002).

In Europe, the only redesign of aid comparable to Wisconsin's appears in Britain, where the "New Deal" has stiffened work tests for youth and the unemployed. The British reform has not yet levied serious work demands on single mothers, and it includes a greater commitment to raising incomes and overcoming poverty than seen in the United States (Walker and Wiseman 2002). Political problems have been slight, because the regime centralizes power as American politics does not. But Britain still has to resolve whether the social service agency or the Employment Service can best implement reform. On the Continent work-enforcing reform is more distant, chiefly because the political will to change is still lacking. No country has yet taken the crucial step that Wisconsin took as early as 1986 — to condition aid seriously on work, and thus to deny a claim based on need alone. Only

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then could governments start down the long road of detailed bureaucratic changes needed to make that requirement real "on the ground." Reform begins in politics but it ends in administrative statecraft. Both ends of that process pose serious tests for government.

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