

Senator Vinehout's Answers to Professional Employees Council
Gubernatorial Candidate Survey
August 11, 2018

A Brief Introduction:

I was one of the Wisconsin 14, proud of it and haven't run from the label. I am publically for collective bargaining. My father was a union laborer. We had a tough childhood, but his job gave us health insurance, Christmas gifts and gave my dad a pension. All my life, I have supported labor. As a professor, I was a member of my union's executive committee (AFT Local 4100). As Senator, I have fought against, talked against, led the fight against all the recent legislation that has diminished worker protections, even when some of my colleagues were on the other side.

Returning Wisconsin to a state that leads the nation in public employee bargaining rights is my mission. We need the votes to change laws. As Governor, I will work tirelessly to gain the seats we need to change the laws. Meanwhile, as we gain the votes to overturn Act 10, I have many ideas on how to improve state working conditions.

1) What specific steps would you take to restore employee input into the terms and conditions of employment?

Far too long, those who serve have taken the crumbs. They've been beaten, manipulated, lied about and abused.

And they've stayed loyal. Worked long hours with no raises in pay. They've done their own job and the jobs of three more that have retired or moved on – for better wages – to the private sector.

All this suffering must be acknowledged, as well as the impact the current governor's decisions have had on the state workforce. I share information I learned from the work of the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) in the King Veteran Home to provide some insight into how we might document the challenges facing our state workforce. These are my words from a prior survey:

The audit showed serious problems in employee morale, low wages and retention. While workers are very dedicated, they are suffering with poor staffing and mandatory overtime.

Auditors found three fourths of employees responding to the LAB survey said morale was poor or very poor. Over one-quarter of employees (responding to the survey) said they have applied for a job outside of King in the last 6 months. Almost 40% said they planned to look for a job in the next 6 months. Over 70% said they are not paid competitive wages and some said they haven't

received a raise in years. Others said Kwik Trip employees made more than them. Half said they were not happy with how overtime was assigned.

People are falling asleep on the way home from work, they have short notice on working mandatory overtime, they have trouble getting enough sleep and they are dispensing meds in areas where they do know the patients while working a 16-hour shift.

Studying the audit, I learned that management must improve how they seek input from employees if the state is to improve care to our veterans. We must improve the hiring process and increase staffing levels.

Nearly 40% of respondents who witnessed abuse, neglect or misappropriation of funds did not “always” report it – some were afraid of negative consequences. Thirty-seven people said they had experienced retaliation because they reported abuse or neglect.

These data provide damning evidence of the incompetency of management at King. Any executive should be horrified at these results. I fear, many of these findings would be repeated throughout state government if we can repeat these surveys.

My approach is very different from that of the current governor.

Let me share a bit of my management philosophy. I’ve long supported participatory management. I studied international management approaches and organizational development. In both my masters and PhD work, I earned a minor in management from the School of Business. As professor, I taught graduate and undergraduate courses in management and leadership. In my professional work, I evaluated and conducted satisfaction surveys through state agencies. I also taught management development in the private sector and served in various health management roles.

As Governor, I intend to bring my philosophy of participative management to state government and support an engaged, highly knowledgeable and professional workforce.

To begin, I intend to conduct a staff satisfaction and engagement survey. I will use the results as a baseline to evaluate the effectiveness of our interventions supporting state employees. I plan to create an Executive Order that changes the relationship with public employees.

I will begin repairing the executive’s relationship with staff by working together to craft methods of employee input and regularly meet with employees to better understand their jobs, the challenges they face and the changes we can make. Further, I will use methods of employee involvement that are actually helpful and useful – and not the latest fad of some contractor.

I intend to embrace the spirit of employees’ determination and tell their stories. I aspire to visit each public facility. To sit with workers. To walk beside them as they do their job.

To hear the stories of abuse. To embrace the pain and humility they've suffered. To tell them clearly and face-to-face: your work is valued. The people of Wisconsin Thank YOU!

A few of the basics: To put honor and respect into action means raising wages, and doing away with mandatory overtime. It means returning statutory tenure and shared governance. It means replacing party-line bosses with managers who know the work of the public and the fields of those they supervise. It means lifting up good ideas in a work environment that values everyone's participation and shares the credit with all those who've done the work.

Respect means getting the votes to repeal Act 10, regular wage increases, professional development, mentoring, and the same respect, support and benefits provided professionals in any well-run private company.

2) What criteria would you use to determine appointments to state agencies and commissions?

I will seek candidates for commissions and agencies that have the knowledge, expertise and experience in the content areas of importance to each agency or commission. I will ask candidates to share creative ideas on how we might better provide efficient state services, avoid past mistakes, comply with audit recommendations and promote a healthy, productive and engaged staff. I will look to find candidates that share my participative management philosophy. I will seek input from employees and retired staff regarding appointments. I will create an open process for appointments and promotions that encourages employees to seek higher positions and recommend others for higher positions.

I will not tolerate retaliation against staff who report abuse, mismanagement or neglect.

Further, I will direct managers to work closely with the staff of the Legislative Audit Bureau Waste, Fraud and Mismanagement Hotline to resolve issues that are reported to the staff working the hotline. The statute governing this hotline provides the strongest confidential whistle blower protection in state law.

3) How do you propose to restore the public's trust in government's ability to work effectively for all citizens, including public employees?

Honoring and valuing the work of experts - that is, true professionals, scientists, academics, and public employees. (I am not thinking of the deer czar.)

Spending time with public employees and lifting up their work to the public. Learning of the challenges facing the state and soliciting input from those most knowledgeable and closest to the problem.

Collecting data that assist in telling of the challenges facing state government. The employee satisfaction / engagement survey is an example of collection of these data. Problems with staffing, retention and recruitment help make the case for dramatic changes in human resource policies.

Using both data and stories to tell the public of the work of state government and public employees.

Being honest and direct about the challenges facing state government.

Requiring accountability in contractors.

Providing transparency with the public and employees in decisions making.

Following the recommendations of expert boards, commissions and auditors.

Making choices in the public's best interest. Making those choice public.

4) What is your plan for balancing political appointees and career state employees if you are elected? How will you make agency / campus managers "do what they are supposed to do"?

Leadership comes from the top. Employees hear the tone set at the top and follow it. I am committed to running the best possible state government and using the best ideas to address the complex challenges facing our state – regardless of where those ideas originate.

I intend to set a tone of a commitment to public service. This begins with my appointees and continues with my management team. Yes, they must be willing to ascribe to my philosophy of participative management and dedicated public service. But they also must be, not only competent, but a leader in their field. I look to career state employees

and others knowledgeable, to assist me in finding appointees. I encourage employees to apply themselves for leadership positions.

I oppose the recent legislative changes to undermine civil service and will work to restore hiring of knowledgeable experienced professionals. I will limit the number of unclassified (political) positions that dramatically expanded under the current governor. I am also not a fan of the centralization of power done by the current governor at the Department of Administration. I will work to return support staff to the agencies.

With regard to leaders “doing what they are supposed to do”, all that the authors of this question mentioned (and many more items) are findings of the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB). I look forward to working with the Bureau to identify those recommendations that have not been followed and instructing managers to follow them.

I’ve extensively discussed with the state auditor methods by which we may hold the agencies and managers accountable. I believe he will be working with LAB staff to present a different approach to be used by the Legislature in the coming session – working with standing committees as well as the Joint Committee on Audit.

My extensive – ten years – as Co-Chair and Ranking Minority Member on the Audit Committee - provides me an unusually detailed background to take with me to the executive role. I’ve read the audits, and know the recommendations the current governor has not followed. I know the questions to ask of any applicant for any agency position and the follow-up questions to ask as that agency director gets to work.

Beginning from a commitment of “doing what you are supposed to do” with a new boss who knows where the bones are buried and what needs to be done to set things right will have a dramatic change on the compliance of agency / campus managers with recommendations.

5) Given the high rate of permanent employees leaving state service, and the increasing number of high turn-over temporary staff (political appointees and contract employees) how will you manage and preserve institutional knowledge?

This critical question should have been asked before Act 10 became law. So many employees left state service because of Act 10 and took their institutional knowledge with them. Employees who remained were asked to take on two and three separate jobs with no training and little support. Morale and productivity suffered.

As Chief Executive, I will create an environment that honors and respects the work and expertise of state employees. I will work with the Legislature to change the laws that now create disincentives for public employees to return to state service. When possible,

I will hire former employees to serve as mentors for younger employees, even if on a temporary basis.

I will work with agencies to document the cost savings of expanding state employees and reducing contract staff. I will change contracts so that staff are not forced to work side-by-side with contractors using state resources with contract staff being paid much more for the same job.

I will work with the Legislature to add staff by showing the dollars saved and the improvement in work quality. I will show the public the costs of high turnover, the importance of stabilizing the workforce and the importance of institutional knowledge.

Further, I will create an atmosphere of respect, honor and dignity among state workers so that contract staff (former state staff) actually want to come back into state service.