

## **Branding and the Cheesehead Summer: Wisconsin recall fails**

Never thought I'd see the day when my beloved Wisconsin was *branded*! Last year we were living in what was called, the *Recovery Summer*. This year we're living in the summer of the *Cheesehead Revolution* and the failure of Wisconsin's Democrats to unseat and recall their controversial Governor, Scott Walker. We're pretty accustomed to branding in the West. Without our brands we'd be rustling and feeding on each other's livestock. So, from a practical point of view, the identification aspect of branding makes sense, but the brands have to mean something and stand for something of value.

### **Re-branding America's Dairyland**

Nothing is immune from branding, not even our states or our state representatives. I don't want a *brand* representing me in Congress or anywhere else for that matter. Nor do I think that states should be branded. I want representatives with slightly rough edges who actually *say something* rather than rolling out a sound-bite, and I certainly don't want any of our fabulous fifty states straying too far from their beaten paths, creating whole new identities for themselves, either.

Last night, Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin survived an intense recall effort designed to unseat him. The normally understated laissez-faire cool as cucumbers Wisconsinites spent \$17 million of their hard-earned tax dollars for the pleasure of airing their dirty laundry in public, only to confirm the validity of their initial vote. Result: Walker stays. Status quo wins. Millions more dollars were spent by the organized labor movement in their propaganda campaign leading up to last night's vote in an effort to brand Walker as a union-buster and the Republicans as cold-hearted callous anti-democratic storm troopers armed with cattle prods bent on a search-and-destroy mission for Teachers Local 36.

Way before that, the contest was branded as an epic confrontation between good and evil. It was the forces of darkness (Walker and his gang) against the people (organized labor) – the prize being the power to chart the Dairy State's fiscal and political course for the future. The only thing the branders seemed to leave out of their argument were the facts, facts like Wisconsin's dire economic straits due to escalating public sector union benefits that were bankrupting the state when Walker took office.

But last winter the branders didn't let those facts get in the way. Instead, they mobilized both in-state and out-of-state and headed for the Wisconsin Capital Building and occupied it, illegally. They shouted, screamed and in general threw a tantrum in the public square. The real victim, though, was decorum which they successfully trounced during days of heated protests with authorities. They became act II of the Cheesehead street theatre play which started with eleven of Wisconsin's Democrat legislators fleeing the state for neighboring Rockford, Illinois to avoid doing their elected duty (voting on the legislation that would enable communities to negotiate pension benefits, locally).

After the legislation passed without their vote, the floodgates were opened. The recall petition drive that followed was impressive (garnering 900,000 signatures), and it revealed the strength of the Democrat Party apparatus and of labor unions' organizational skills. The opponents of Walker forgot one thing in their zeal to brand him and his supporters of fiscal responsibility as radicals, however. They forgot that no matter how well organized you are or how fat your checkbook may be, there is nothing, repeat nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come. Maybe the Cheesehead Summer in the State of Wisconsin has come just in time for the rest of us to discuss what path we want our country to take going forward.

Wisconsin does prove one thing, however, that where there's the whey there's the will.

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