

Scott Walker's Job Creation Record

Ever wonder where Scott Walker's promise to create 250,000 jobs came from?

Go back to 2003-06. Wisconsin was roughly at full employment, and was adding about 17,000 jobs per year. If we'd continued at that pace, between December 2007 and December 2014 we'd have added a total of 119,000 Wisconsin jobs.

But of course, we didn't continue at that pace. There was an enormous financial panic, and the economy collapsed. By December 2010, we were down to 137,000 jobs. And that's when Walker made his pledge to create 250,000 jobs.

So have you done the Math? That's right – with just a normal recovery, that returned us to the long term path we'd been on, in Walker's four year term we would have created 256,000 jobs: the 137,000 lost plus the "normal" 119,000 gain. So his promise was not to do anything spectacular. It was to just let the economy get back on keel, and to take the credit for it.

Unfortunately for Walker and for Wisconsin, we haven't had a normal recovery. The downturn was the most severe we'd had in 75 years. The debt hangover, of families owing more than what they were worth, was unprecedented. So the probability of meeting his target is virtually zero.

So the question is, is it fair to hold him to his promise? When he claimed he could slam dunk job growth, he thought he was playing on an eight foot rim. Now that we know the rim's at twelve feet, should we penalize him for not slamming it down?

And how much, for that matter, should we actually attribute state job growth to a Governor? Despite all the rhetoric, there's no clear evidence that any "growth policies" that state governments adopt have any real effect. But the rhetoric is exactly the point. Almost everything Walker has done as Governor – the union busting, the tax breaks for the well connected – have been justified because "it will create jobs." So yes, since that's the standard Walker has consistently raised, how well he's created jobs is a standard he should be held to.

Maybe not the standard of 250,000 jobs. But we should certainly hold Walker to the standard of doing at least as well as the Governors of Illinois and Michigan, Minnesota and Iowa, Indiana and Ohio. After all, they're all playing with that same twelve foot rim too. And by that standard, Walker has been a complete, utter failure. Because over the last 2 and three quarter years, Wisconsin has created roughly 45,000 fewer jobs than if it had kept up with our neighbor states. That is, Wisconsin has a 45,000 job gap (for the details online, google "wis job gap").

And no, Scott, you can't blame that on Jim Doyle. In Doyle's last two years as Governor, the job gap went from roughly zero in Dec. 2008 to about 30,000 jobs a year later. But then the outlook improved, with the job gap shrinking to about 10,000 jobs by the time he left office. By the end of Doyle's term, we'd recovered almost 20% of the jobs we'd lost, better than all of our neighboring states.

But then Walker took over, busted the unions, and the gap has steadily grown, to 20,000 jobs in Dec. 2011, then 30,000 jobs by Dec. 2012, and then 45,000 jobs last September. Since Walker took over, we've recovered only an additional 42% of our lost jobs, nearly last among our neighbors.

So should Walker be judged on his job creation record? Yes he should – as a total, utter failure.