

Wisconsin Jobs II

So now we have two sets of employment numbers. Which should we believe? Actually, that's the wrong question. The right question is, what is the common story they both tell, the unassailable facts no matter which numbers we look at?

To find out, I downloaded both the Quarterly Census (QC) numbers and the monthly State and Area Employment (SAE) data for the last several years, at <http://www.bls.gov/data/#employment>. I downloaded the data for Wisconsin, for the 6 surrounding states from Ohio to Minnesota, and for the U.S. as a whole. I added together the 6 Midwestern states' job totals, and then scaled both those totals and the U.S. numbers so they'd be comparable to Wisconsin's numbers. For a copy of the resulting spreadsheet, email me at mcgee@uwosh.edu.

So what do the numbers show? In 2009, Wisconsin lost 119,000 (QC) to 122,000 (SAE) jobs. Both measures were slightly better than the rest of the Midwest, but worse than the U.S. as a whole. The numbers then show steady improvement, so by December 2010 – as Doyle's term ended – Wisconsin was up by 23,000 (SAE) to 34,000 (QC) jobs for the year. This was roughly equal to the rest of the Midwest (plus 27,000 to 29,000) and substantially better than the U.S. as a whole (plus 21,000 to 23,000 – again, these numbers have been rescaled to make them comparable to Wisconsin's).

Then 2011 began, Walker took office, and the SAE and QC numbers began to diverge from each other. According to the monthly survey, for the U.S. as a whole, jobs rose by 38,000 in 2011. Job growth in the Midwest slowed, dropping to only plus 19,000 jobs for the year. And Wisconsin crashed, dropping to negative 34,000 jobs as of Dec. 2011, and losing an additional 12,000 jobs since then.

But that's the monthly survey, which Walker insists is wrong. So what does the Quarterly Census show? According to the QC, in September 2011 (the latest official data available) the U.S. as a whole was up 42,000 jobs (again, rescaled to match Wisconsin). The Midwest shows no slowdown, and is up 49,000 at that point. And Wisconsin lags behind, at plus 37,000 jobs.

But according to the numbers Walker released last week, by December Wisconsin's growth had dropped to a mere plus 23,000. That's 10,000 fewer jobs than what Doyle added in his last year as Governor. That also puts the total QC Wisconsin jobs number at 2.69 million jobs in December – 20,000 jobs fewer than it reports for June. So both data sets say Wisconsin lost jobs in the second half of 2011; it's just that the monthly survey reported a job loss three times as big as the QC.

By the monthly SAE numbers, Wisconsin was last in the nation in job growth – so Walker, who claims to be a job creator, would get an F for his job performance. And by his preferred QC numbers, Wisconsin gained substantially fewer jobs under Walker than in the rest of the Midwest or the rest of the country, gained substantially fewer jobs under Walker than in previous year under Doyle, and in fact lost jobs from June through December. By Walker's preferred numbers, he is at best a D+ job creator.

So believe either set of numbers you wish, because they both tell essentially the same story. Namely, that Walker's poor grades warrant that he be expelled.