

Third party candidate runs uphill in 26th Senate race

By Mike Dorsner
Wisconsin State Journal

Independent candidate Andy Heidt isn't just challenging Democratic incumbent Fred Risser and Republican Curtis Brink in Madison's 26th Senate District, he's taking on the two-party system.

Both parties share the blame for making Wisconsin's tax system work better for the rich than the poor, Heidt says. And in a local version of trickle-down economics, he says, Democrats have colluded with Republicans on public funding for the proposed Monona Terrace convention center and a new Milwaukee Brewers stadium.

The Legislature's four separate caucus staffs amount to "dirty trick machines," Heidt says. If he's elected, he'll ask for his own independent caucus staff.

He also would convene a "community caucus," composed of activists on issues such as tax reform, child care, universal health care and organic agriculture.

"I think it's really important to expand the terms of the debate," he says. "If I got there, the state Senate would never be the same."

But Heidt, who has twice been elected to Madison's City Council, admits it's unlikely he'll unseat Risser, a 36-year incumbent and president of the Senate since 1979. Risser says it's even more unlikely Heidt could get anything done if he was elected to the Senate as an independent.

Third-party candidates, no matter how good they are, cannot accomplish much in a two-party system," Risser says. "He or she can have the best idea in the world and it's not going to go anywhere."

Risser knows, he says, because his

father was the last third-party member of the Wisconsin Legislature. Fred Risser Sr. won a Senate seat in 1936 as a Progressive and remained there until 1948, finishing as the party's lone state officeholder.

"He used to tell me he could caucus in a telephone booth," Risser recalls. As a legislator, Risser says his father was "one of the best," but even he couldn't get anything done outside the two-party system.

When it comes to third-party legislators, "I know more than Andy Heidt knows," Risser says. "You have to work within the system and change the system from within."

Heidt has a lot of respect for Risser, saying he must have "a good heart" to devote over half his life to public service. But Heidt remains undaunted by predictions of his demise. Peppering the podium with "Heidt" yard signs, he plugs along like a low-budget, long-haired, liberal Ross Perot.

"I don't know if I'm going to win or not," he says, "but I know I couldn't win if I wasn't on the ballot."

Heidt believes he will get more votes than Brink, a Republican who entered the race just before the filing deadline in June. Brink has been almost invisible, tucking his campaign around the corners of his life as a full-time graduate student, part-time father and building consultant.

Brink calls this year's campaign "a learning experience." If there's a next time, he'll start earlier in order to raise more funds and hire at least one staff person, he says.

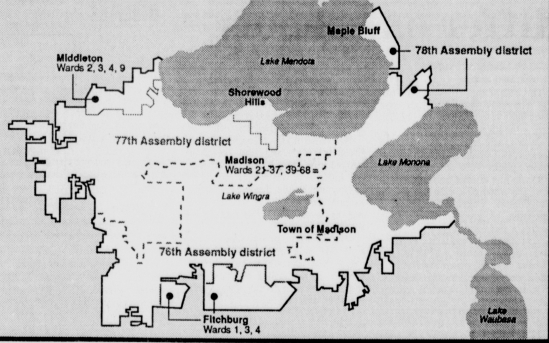
Brink has raised \$341 and spent \$336, according to the latest reports to the state Elections Board, his explanation being that a lot of Republicans contributed to Michael Christopher's big push to defeat Risser in the Democratic primary.

Risser withstood that challenge, winning 56 percent of the vote, but in doing so spent his entire campaign war chest of nearly \$60,000. He expects to win the general election by spending between \$5,000 and \$10,000 more, running no TV or radio commercials and without any support from Christopher or Madison Mayor Paul Sogin.

For the future, Risser is holding out no encouragement to those who hope this will be his last four-year

term in the Senate. Although he has buried his aspirations for Congress or other higher office, Risser says he can hardly wait for the beginning of the next legislative session — and the next and the next — as long as his health remains good.

26th Senate district



WSJ graphic

Key issues	Brink	Heidt	Risser
Abortion rights	Support	Support	Support
24-hour wait before abortion	No	No	No
Target property tax cuts to homes	No	Yes	Yes
Expand school choice program	Yes	No	No
Let UW academic staff unionize	No	Yes	Yes
Let UW faculty unionize	No	Yes	No

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<p>Curtis Brink</p> <p>Age: 41 Personal: Lives in Madison. Divorced, two children. Occupation: Graduate student, leader. Political experience: Lost in 1980 Republican Assembly seat. Other public service: None listed. Education: Bachelor's from UW-Madison and now working on a master's in real estate investment analysis at UW-Madison.</p>	<p>Andy Heidt</p> <p>Age: 31 Personal: Lives in Madison with partner, Nancy Jean Bradley. Occupation: Dane County juvenile court worker. Political experience: Madison City Council member since 1989. Other public service: Community Development Block Grant Commission, United Refugee Services, United Way Joint Needs Assessment team. Education: Bachelor's in political science from UW-Madison.</p>	<p>Fred Risser</p> <p>Age: 65 Personal: Lives in Madison with wife, Nancy. They have three grown children. Occupation: State senator, attorney. Political experience: State Senate since 1962, state Assembly 1968-62. Other public service: State Historical Society Board, Historic Sites Foundation board, Disabilities Board. Education: Bachelor's and law degree from the University of Oregon.</p>
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State focuses workers on the poor

Local Wisconsin governments dedicate more workers to programs for the poor and elderly than most states, while employing proportionally fewer for jails, courts and public health, a report says.

Higher education and libraries also are high priorities in Wisconsin compared with other states, based on the federal census study, which measured total state and local employment per 10,000 population.

As a whole, state and local governments and school districts rank 33rd among the states and District of Columbia in full-time employees per 10,000 people, the report said.

State government ranked 43rd, but paid its full-time employees about 16 percent more than the national average, about \$3,000 more a month. Government experts say that reflects in part the high number of higher education professionals in the state.

Local government employed an estimated 377 workers per 10,000 people, the 16th highest in the country. Average pay was below that of state government workers and at or below the national average for local employees.

James Morgan, president of the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, a private, non-partisan research organization, said he wasn't surprised by the report.

Wisconsin has less patronage hiring than other states and long has provided most government services at the local level, Morgan said. The study also reflects Wisconsin's commitment to education, he said.

State Revenue Secretary Mark Bugher said that, given the state's reputation for providing high levels of service at all levels of government, the overall ranking of 33rd for number of employees reflected well on the efficiency of government workers.

"We have a long tradition of a high quality work force, and I know that sounds corny," Bugher said. "There is a commitment to doing more with less here."

The census report analyzed government payrolls for October 1991. Figures for local government employment are based on a sample of municipalities.

Other findings include:

- Only four states ranked higher on employment for public welfare programs, defined as including home care assistance, nursing homes and care institutions for the poor.
- New York, New Hampshire, the District of Columbia and Alaska topped Wisconsin.
- The state was ranked eighth in employment in higher education, 13th in libraries and 24th in instructional employees in elementary and secondary schools.
- Wisconsin was in the bottom 10 on employment for corrections and courts. Morgan said the state's relatively low crime rate may help account for that. Bugher noted that state government had recently stepped up its prison construction to fill a need.
- The state scored low on workers dedicated to public health and pollution control (41st) and natural resources (32nd), including fish and game, land management and conservation.

Officer sentenced for sex bribes

ELKHORN (AP) — A former Darien police officer who authorities say sought sex-related bribes from more than 120 male victims was sentenced to two years in prison.

Donald K. White, 36, a police officer for 11 years, pleaded guilty to charges filed in 1991. He was sentenced Monday by Walworth County Circuit Judge James Carlson for third-degree sexual assault.

The prison sentence is to be followed by five years' probation for felony misconduct in public office. The convictions were White's fourth and fifth on charges involving sex-related misconduct.

A Walworth County Sheriff's Department report said White sought sex-related bribes from an average of 12 male victims per year during his 11-year career.

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