



## State Engineering Association

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE April 6, 2011

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## **2,100 years of experience -- gone** **Wave of senior WisDOT employees take sudden retirement**

MADISON - The Wisconsin Department of Transportation in March lost 74 senior-level staffers representing a collective total of 2,116 years of professional experience, a large number that's in large measure an apparent reaction to Gov. Walker's measure to make significant cuts in public employee compensation while all but ending collective bargaining.

The departed workers included experienced engineering professionals who were members of the State Engineering Association, a state bargaining unit representing about 1,100 engineering and technical professionals in numerous state agencies and the UW system. The retirements were announced in the March 31 WisDOT employee bulletin.

"All those many years of experience walked out the door from just one state agency, in just one month," said Mark Klipstein, SEA president. He said the departures are part of a fast-growing number of early retirements throughout state and local government in Wisconsin. "It will hurt government efficiency and cost everyone in Wisconsin in unforeseen ways for years," Klipstein said.

He commented as statewide SEA members gathered Wednesday at the Capitol in their annual visits to legislators. Besides Gov. Walker's measure, issues of concern to SEA-represented state employees include open government and ethical campaigning.

The members take personal time off for their visits.

Klipstein said SEA expected that Gov. Walker's measure to all but kill collective bargaining and cut deeply into state employee compensation would create a mass exodus of talent from state and local governments. "I predicted this trend would build over months or years. Try just five weeks, as evidenced by new state data that should be very worrisome to anyone who cares about good government."

MORE

**WHO:** State Engineering Association (SEA), representing about 1,100 State of Wisconsin engineering and technical employees

**WHAT:** Annual SEA Day government office visits

**WHEN:** Wednesday, April 6  
9 a.m. - Noon

**WHERE:** Room 400 SE Capitol

**WHY:** Concerned about good government issues, including loss of talent and expertise caused by early retirements and increased outsourcing to expensive private consultants.

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“We know the sudden rush of WisDOT retirements is replicated elsewhere in state and local government. It is apparent that Gov. Walker's measure -- currently tied up in the courts -- has already created what will be long-term damage to quality government in Wisconsin. Public employees are retiring quickly, and in droves.

“You don't need to be an engineer to figure out that the Walker measure's wage cuts -- totaling thousands of dollars a year for middle-class state and local government workers -- are driving this escape from Wisconsin government. Public employees in their 50s now see the loss of more benefits as their reward for working to normal retirement age. Hence a greatly increased incentive to retire early.

“That trend will create all sorts of unexpected consequences for everyone in our state. The biggest is that state and local governments and public schools are suddenly faced with the loss of considerable expertise, institutional knowledge and experience, at a challenging time that requires many practiced hands as the economy recovers. What we'll get instead is critical loss of momentum.”

Klipstein said that even if Walker's contested measure is rejected by the courts, or fails enactment in another attempt by the legislature, serious damage already has been done to good government in Wisconsin. “The next wave of retirements will show up in late June, and some of those prospective retirees have already made firm decisions to depart, regardless of how the political battle turns out,” he said.

Klipstein noted that a state study comparing private consultants versus state engineer costs showed that state engineers are at least 18 percent more cost effective than private alternatives. The outflow of experienced engineers and technical staff will result in higher costs, fewer services, or both, he added.

"Our members are very interested in ensuring that the state gets the best value out of every tax dollar," he said. “But it's obvious we also have to get the state to be more open and honest in carrying out its programs and studies, and not let political considerations drive bad public policy.

For more information about SEA, visit [www.wisea.org](http://www.wisea.org) on the Internet.

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