

Governance Vol. 19, Number 4, October 2006, pp 682-684.
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Government Matters: Welfare Reform in Wisconsin. Lawrence Mead. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. 368 pp. \$22.95 (paper), \$49.95 (cloth).

Especially since the reinventing government movement gained momentum in the 1980s and early 1990s, public sector reform advocates have often argued that government should "work better and cost less." That mantra implies two strategies for change: improving public sector capacity to produce greater value for government's clients ("work better") and making government more efficient so that it will require fewer public resources to produce results ("cost less"). Government reformers, especially elected officials, though, have frequently embraced the second strategy while undervaluing the first. In *Government Matters*, Lawrence Mead uses Wisconsin's two decades of experience with welfare reform to explain why both strategies are essential for addressing poverty in the United States. Mead challenges those who would cut government and believe that effectiveness will necessarily follow. In short, he says, "The solution to the welfare problem was not to junk welfare but to rebuild the welfare state" (213). Drawing on his unique perspective as an academic researcher and an up-close participant in policy reform, Mead explains that Wisconsin succeeded in reforming welfare not by eviscerating programs, but by committing itself, politically and administratively, to ending welfare dependence.

Mead develops his main thesis by defending three propositions, which he summarizes in Table 1.3. The first proposition is that Wisconsin's history and traditions produced a culture of excellence in government (chapters 12-13); the second is that governmental excellence was instrumental in generating effective welfare policies (chapters 2-8, and 11); and third, with effective welfare policies the state successfully reformed welfare (chapters 5, and 8-10). Mead relies on several sources to examine those propositions, including interviews with welfare administrators and state politicians, public records, secondary studies, and original quantitative analyses that document policy changes and their impacts. The quantitative sections are particularly clear because the author primarily uses descriptive statistics or, in presenting results from several regression models, focuses on the substantive implications of his analysis. Readers familiar with Mead's work will recognize much of what appears here; six of the book's 13 chapters are reproductions and extensions of his previously published research. Still, those pieces are worth re-reading in the context of *Government Matters* because they coalesce to provide valuable insights about the overall trajectory of Wisconsin's reforms.

Undergraduates may find the book's details rather thick, but graduate students and readers interested in government reform or welfare policy will enjoy *Government Matters* for several reasons. While many observers would agree that state welfare experiments informed federal reforms of the mid-1990s, in particular the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), the details of those early state-level reforms frequently receive less attention than they should. Mead remedies that shortcoming by providing in-depth coverage of Wisconsin's policy efforts from the 1980s and early 1990s that preceded the state's well-known Wisconsin Works, or "W-2," program and the PRWORA. In that respect, *Government Matters* is really two books in one. Readers see Wisconsin's early state and local efforts—some successful, some not—that produced the intellectual foundation and practical administrative experience that would help policymakers of both major political parties craft W-2; but the book also analyzes the state's efforts after 1996 (and compares it to the earlier efforts) when W-2 and PRWORA, with their focus on work, became the central organizing frames for Wisconsin's and the nation's welfare reform strategy.

Another virtue of the book is Mead's discussion of the capacity-building measures that Wisconsin enacted to reform welfare. Scholars of public administration, management, and policy implementation, in addition to public administrators themselves (the group to whom Mead dedicates the book) will find this theme particularly interesting. And readers who are primarily familiar with the poles of the welfare reform debate—involving liberals who claim that reform short-changed the poor versus conservatives who believe reform worked simply by telling welfare recipients to pull themselves up by their bootstraps—will come to understand the administrative effort that Wisconsin's policies entailed. For example, Mead explains that in 1986, "Wisconsin spent only \$10.56 on administration per month per Aid to Families with Dependent Children case, the lowest figure in the country. By 1994, however, that amount had soared to \$61.55, only the thirty-seventh best among states" (69). Further, when W-2 became law, Wisconsin was demanding in its "denial of entitlement to aid, and above all its immediate and unyielding work test" (122), but the state simultaneously spent billions of dollars to support work "on a lavish scale" (123, Table 6.1). Those administrative investments reveal the welfare reform paradox that Mead describes throughout the book: "reducing government dependency in some ways required *larger* government rather than smaller" (124).

A final virtue is that *Government Matters* provides several starting points for debates about the long-run impacts of welfare reform in Wisconsin and the United States more generally. For example, Mead does express some reservations about Wisconsin's over-aggressive reliance on diversion, or discouraging people from applying for benefits for which they are qualified (130), but generally speaking he celebrates the state's successes, especially its reduction in the welfare rolls. Critics of W-2 and

PRWORA have argued that a better measure of success would be how well the reformed safety net performs during bleaker economic times, rather than in the burgeoning economy of the 1990s that helped to reduce state caseloads. Because basically all of Mead's data are from before the national economic recession of 2001, the book cannot tackle this issue directly. Still, because *Government Matters* provides such a comprehensive look at Wisconsin's policies, readers will be well-positioned to assess the state's performance, and Mead's claims of success, during less rosy economic times.

Overall, few thoughtful readers will disagree with Mead's fundamental point that "[o]nly a government that is competent, in both political and administrative ways, can carry out the complex measures that today's poverty seems to require" (261). Achieving lofty social goals like eliminating poverty will demand that more states develop such political competence, which emerges when often-divided partisans work together. Perhaps more important, though, it will require politicians and the general public to support reforms that bolster public sector administrative capabilities even as, and especially when, government's programmatic commitments change. Ultimately, success in welfare or any other policy depends on talented administrators who, like Wisconsin's civil servants, prove each day that public bureaucracies are not simply stilted uncreative enterprises. Indeed, government does matter, and in his excellent analysis, Mead shows us why.

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Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World. Andrew Wilson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. 332 pp. \$44.00 (cloth).

This is a very interesting book, which will prove to be somewhat controversial among scholars interested in post-Soviet politics. I expect that it will cause many scholars to reconsider whether or not traditional political science inquiry has much to offer in understanding current political realities in places like Russia. The primary theme of this book is that what passes for politics in most all of the post-Soviet states is really "virtual politics." Virtual politics is where "authority is invented" and where "political technologies stage the basic mythology of the state" (xvi). "Political technologies" is the term coined to refer to the arsenal of dirty tricks, active measures, media manipulations, and other actions that maintain the very authority of the post-Soviet state. The implication is that, given what is seen is a façade, the usual techniques scholars use to study the "behavior" of politicians and the activities are of little use in the post-Soviet context. What is apparent is "unreal" and the "truth" lies beneath. To uncover this truth, the author conducts numerous interviews and interprets the available qualitative evidence to analyze the underlying apparatus of networks of collusive politicians, fake opposi-