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An undisciplined legislative majority's rejection of moderaton and compromise has resulted in unworkable laws while sowing discontent

Moderation is a desirable human trait. We know that from advice received from learned mentors through the ages, the likes of Aristotle ("moderation in all things") and Benjamin Franklin ("avoid extremes"), not to mention wise and sensible parents and grandparents.

It is also a key to an orderly society. We can deduce that from the state of chaos that obtains in Wisconsin owing to the lack of moderation in an institution that requires it to be effective—the Legislature.

Legislatures, where many discrete points of view collide as an inevitable part of the law-making process, can only succeed with compromise. Disdain for moderation, embrace of extreme positions and rejection of compromise have led to a string of costly legislative failures in Wisconsin.

The latest is the botched attempt to legalize wolf hunting. Gray wolves are thriving in Wisconsin. It is estimated that there are more than 800 in Wisconsin, when 350 was the goal for recovery of a species once all but wiped out here.

Livestock raisers citing depredations on their herds by wolves, deer hunters fearful that wolves will reduce the population of the game their sport targets and people who just want to kill wolves, supported by the Department of Natural Resources' position that the wolf population needs to be controlled, clamored for a wolf hunt. It was understandable that the Legislature would oblige. But it couldn't manage it without going to an extreme.

A number of states that have robust wolf populations allow wolf hunting. None allows wolf hunting with dogs—except Wisconsin. That immoderate provision was thrown out by a judge last week, leaving the DNR's wolf hunt plans in disarray.

We can only wonder at the Legislature's thinking when it blessed wolf hunting by dogs. Did the lawmakers think hunters needed an extra advantage in killing animals that are frequently sighted in the north woods and have not had the experience (at least not legally) of being threatened by humans?

And how did the legislators not see the red warning flag waving over dog-hunting? Dogs are cousins of wolves. Wolves are essentially big dogs. Didn't anyone think that loosing dogs on wolves would lead to dog-wolf fights? Or that animal rights supporters and dog lovers in general would find this objectionable?

An affiliation of humane societies and individuals sued, with the result that a judge has ruled out wolf hunting with dogs and the DNR says the difficulty of getting new rules in place by the planned Oct. 15 start of hunting may rule out wolf hunting this year.

Chalk up another piece of legislation as too extreme to work.

The same can be said for the Voter ID law. Though there was no evidence of the kind of fraud a voter ID requirement would affect, it was part an agenda almost certain to be enacted in Wisconsin with Republicans in control of the governor's office and the Legislature. Nothing shocking there—victors get the spoils in politics and government. But the victors could not restrain themselves from making Wisconsin's law one of the most stringent voter ID requirements in the nation.

The result? The law cannot be enforced because courts have ruled it unconstitutional.

The pattern for this was set by Act 10. The majority of Wisconsin residents surely supported the reform of public employee benefits promised by Scott Walker in his successful campaign for governor. People of all political persuasions could agree that the disparity in benefits between public and private sector workers was inequitable and unsustainable. It was an opportunity for progressive change.

But legislators could not discipline themselves to avoid a toxic extreme—outlawing collective bargaining by public employees—at the cost of upheaval in the state capital, millions of taxpayer dollars spent on recall elections and an enduring, debilitating bitterness in public affairs.

Aristotle and Ben Franklin would be aghast, as should everyone of who understands the value of moderation and compromise and the consequences of extremes.