Preface

This book recounts how Wisconsin led the nation toward welfare reform. In this state, more than in any other, welfare was transformed to condition aid to families on work by the adult recipients. I explain not only the dramatic changes Wisconsin made, but also how. It is an inspiring story of politicians who faced up to difficult challenges, and of administrators with the talent to implement waves of reform programs. Together, leaders and officials rebuilt the welfare state around work. Wisconsin did not avoid all errors, but it still struck the most telling blow against family poverty that government has managed in forty years of struggle.

I also make the broader argument that Wisconsin's success reflected its good government qualities. This is a state where, at least compared to the national norm, politics is high-minded and public administration is highly developed. Here we see government actually doing what American voters want it to do everywhere—tackle social problems with political resolution and determined programming. Case studies of welfare reform elsewhere show that Wisconsin's story is not unique. Most of the other states that led reform also have good government traditions. Strong institutions were their leading resource in the struggle against poverty.

The book was written using mainly data, documents, and interviews from the state itself. My first debt is to the many officials who gave of their time to generate or explain these sources to me, and to give their own accounts of reform. Among state officials, I particularly thank Jim Bates, Ginevra Ewers, Bob Korb, John McPeek, Joanne Rowe, Madelyn Scheer, Joe Stafford, Jason Turner, and Peter Van Ness. Special credit to Jan Van Vleck, who answered more questions than anyone else. I also spoke to local officials too numerous to name. I especially credit the leaders of several county welfare departments who helped to shape the state reform, notably Jon Angeli and his staff in Grant County, and Clark Earl, Larry Jankowski, and George Leutermann in Kenosha.

I am also grateful to the Rockefeller Institute of Government and the Urban Institute for case studies of welfare reform at the state level. I use these to establish a link between good government and successful reform that stretches beyond Wisconsin. Dick Nathan and Tom Gais at RIG allowed me access to unpublished reports from their study states that were invaluable.

My able research assistants (most of them graduate students at NYU or Princeton University) included David Dodenhoff, Kendal Elliott, Ian

Gold, Kevin Kosar, Matt Mercurio, and Adam Shrager. I am grateful to the Department of Politics at NYU for allowing me much time off from teaching to write this book. This time and other costs of the project were generously funded by the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the John M. Olin Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, and the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute.

I drafted much of the book during academic 2001–2002 when I was on sabbatical at Princeton as a visiting fellow in the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions. Created by Robert George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton, the Madison Program seeks to explore in depth the nature and implications of the American regime. The program involved me in wide-ranging discussions with the other fellows and many visiting speakers. An attentive staff dealt with our every need. This was an ideal setting in which to finish my project.

I received valuable comments on all or parts of the manuscript from Tom Corbett, Jason DeParle, Tom Kaplan, Jean Rogers, Jason Turner, and Michael Wiseman. Many of my readers are themselves published experts on Wisconsin and welfare reform. A team of officials headed by Mary Rowin from the state welfare department also provided valuable comments and corrections. I benefited as well from expert anonymous reviews commissioned by Princeton University Press and two other publishers. All this input saved me from many errors and oversights. However, I did not adopt all the suggestions made, and responsibility for the final product remains my own.

At Princeton University Press, my editor Charles Myers has been a pleasure to work with. He encouraged this project from an early point. He improved the book by astute comments and by requiring me to cut the length substantially. Kevin McInturff, Gail Schmitt, and other staff dealt capably with the production of quite a complicated volume.

I acknowledge permission to reprint the following articles. Each title is followed by the journal in which it appeared, the volume and issue, and the publisher: "The Politics of Welfare Reform in Wisconsin," *Polity* 32, no. 4 (Summer 2000), Northeastern Political Science Association; "Implementing Work Requirements in Wisconsin," *Journal of Public Policy* 21, no. 3 (June 2001), reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press; "Welfare Reform in Wisconsin: The Local Role," *Administration and Society* 33, no. 5 (November 2001), © Sage Publications, reprinted by permission of Sage Publications; "Optimizing JOBS: Evaluation versus Administration," *Public Administration Review* 57 no. 2 (March/April 1997), American Society for Public Administration; "Welfare Case load Change: An Alternative Approach," *Policy Studies Journal* 31, no. 2 (2003), Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.; and "Welfare Reform: The Institu-

tional Dimension," *Focus* 22, no. 1 (Special Issue 2002), Regents of the University of Wisconsin System on behalf of the Institute for Research on Poverty.

I emerged from this study with deep respect for many people in Wisconsin, from Tommy Thompson, the dynamic governor who led most of the reform, right down to the recipients, who adjusted to radical changes with remarkably little complaint. But especially I credit the state's welfare administrators. As one of them said to me, with an immodesty atypical of the state, "It's because of us. We are welfare reform." That is an overstatement; reform is a national movement that has arisen from localities across the country. But it is not untrue. Wisconsin administrators asserted their own responsibility for solving the welfare problem, often before political leaders did. What they did had epic consequences.

They became quite literally world statesmen and stateswomen. Ambitious local welfare officials first transformed welfare at the county level. They then sold their programs to the state, which in turn helped to sell work-based reform to the nation, and beyond. And so the deeds of these local and state administrators finally echoed to the ends of the earth. Today, welfare officials from New Zealand and Europe travel to Grant, Kenosha, Madison, and Milwaukee to learn how they too might get a handle on their welfare problem. These Wisconsin officials exemplify, not only effective social policy, but their state's intense faith in the public enterprise.

I also know that they are not alone. Others like them labor to improve welfare in cities and states across the country. They may do so more obscurely, with less support and resources than their Wisconsin counterparts enjoyed. Nevertheless, they progress more rapidly than anyone would have guessed only a few years ago. Since the enactment of the radical national reform of 1996, welfare has changed in many states with a speed that astonishes longtime observers of American government. As in the Badger State, reform is a high-stakes gamble that by requiring, as well as helping, adult recipients to work in return for aid, they and their children may enter more fully into American life. In orchestrating that revolution, I believe, America's welfare administrators hold the nation's future in their hands. With admiration and gratitude, this book is dedicated to them.

My final debt is to my family—my wife, Robin, and our daughter, Nora, who is the light of our lives. In addition to running the household, taking care of Nora most of the time, and pursuing her own career, Robin found time to read every word of this book, making valuable suggestions and catching many errors. She is my reality test. If it makes sense to her, and provokes no outrage, then I believe my audience will hear it. She also

provided steady support during my long labors, first to do this research and then to get it accepted by journals and publishers. Nora, for her part, is too young to read, but her delight in "Dada" sure gives me a further reason to come home at night. Both of them remind me—and I do sometimes need reminding—that social policy is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a means toward what the Founders called "the pursuit of happiness."

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