HALF-FULL REPORT 03/11/11

The country is falling off a fiscal cliff. The world is on fire, and Zero's dithering and incompetence is pouring gasoline on it. And I've still got the flu.

But the hero governor of my home state has won a victory that will reverberate through the nation, and perhaps through the ages. So this week my stein is filled to the brim with Leinenkugel's Red, the sophisticated Wisconsinite's choice to accompany bratwurst and cheese on celebratory occasions.

On Wednesday night, Republicans in the Wisconsin state senate repackaged the budget repair bill as a non-appropriations measure (to avoid the requirement for supermajority for a quorum) and passed it on a 18-1 vote .

Some conservatives had advocated doing this when the stalemate with the fleebagging Democrat state senators began.

But Governor Scott Walker was reluctant to take this step. He insisted the changes he seeks in collective bargaining rules for public employees is a fiscal matter.

He had a good reason for being reluctant. A Rasmussen poll Tuesday indicated 57 percent of Wisconsinites oppose "weakening collective bargaining rights." But the same poll showed majorities and pluralities support Walker on specific provisions.

Gov. Walker issued a press release Tuesday illustrating some other provisions of collective bargaining agreements few Wisconsinites would support, if they were aware of them.

Here are two examples:

Under the Green Bay School District's collectively bargained Emeritus Program, teachers can retire and receive a year's worth of salary for working only 30 days over a three year period. This is paid in addition to their already guaranteed pension and health care payouts.

While the Green Bay Emeritus Program actually requires teachers to at least show up for work, the Madison Emeritus Program doesn't even require that. In addition to their pension payouts, retired Madison public school teachers receive annual payments of at least $9,884.18 per year for enrolling in the Emeritus Program, which requires ZERO days of work.

When this program began, 20 days of work per year were required. Through collective bargaining, the union successfully negotiated this down to zero days.

Gov. Walker apparently changed his mind after the fleebagging Democrats rejected a compromise

he offered, and indicated they were planning to stay away from Madison indefinitely.

The labor unions and their Democrat puppets were surprised, and they freaked.
A mob marched on the capitol and broke down police barriers.

Death threats were made against Republican lawmakers.

Please put your things in order because you will be killed and your familes will also be killed due to your actions in the last 8 weeks.

The next day, teachers and city workers in Madison staged another wildcat strike .

Police had to carry out protesters to permit the Assembly to meet.

But Republicans weren't intimidated. The Assembly passed the bill Thursday, 53-42, sending it to Gov. Walker.

Jesse Jackson said the protests would escalate anyway.

University of Wisconsin Law Professor Ann Althouse thinks the protesters have made a big mistake by featuring Jackson and Michael Moore: click to view

I wonder if the teachers and other Wisconsin union members who got the protest started 3 weeks ago appreciate having Michael Moore absorb their issue — maintaining the quality of professional public employment in Wisconsin — into his larger anti-capitalist agenda for America.

This is a problem with extending the protests. The crowd changes, new infusions of energy come from outsiders who see a ready-made platform to climb up on. These old-school, left-wing attacks on corporations have little to do with the distinct problems of jobs in the public sector — where, management is the government of the state and its citizens.

The battle will continue. Democrats are circulating recall petitions against eight Republican state senators. They must gather within 60 days in each state senate district the signatures of at least 25 percent of the people in that district who voted in the gubernatorial election last fall.

A Democratic party official in Wisconsin told Greg Sargent of the Washington Post they've already collected 15 percent of the signatures they need.

Lefties already have raised nearly $2 million for the recall effort.

State Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald said Obama's political team is involved in the recall effort.

Republicans have filed recall petitions on eight senate Democrats, but are keeping mum about their progress in collecting signatures. Under Wisconsin law, a public official can be recalled only after he or she has served at least a year in office, so the recall petitions are for senators who last faced the voters in 2008.

But if Gov. Walker stands firm, it's hard to see how labor can win now. Walker's popularity has taken a big hit. But recall elections usually fail. Recall elections can't be held before June. Public passions likely will have faded by then.

Ramesh Ponnuru of National Review summarizes the challenges facing the public employee unions and their Democrat puppets:

I keep reading that Democrats will reverse the new collective-bargaining law in Wisconsin "the next time they." But let's keep in mind that they have to take total power: both houses of the legislature and the governorship, since it's unlikely that a Republican governor or state legislature would let any reversal legislation through. Just beating Walker in 2014, or even recalling him before then, wouldn't be enough. And of course one likely long-run effect of the legislation is to make it harder for Democrats to pull off that total sweep–which is, after all, the main reason the Democrats were opposing it in the first place.

And Scott Walker is not the type to go all wobbly.

Scott Walker believes he's following orders from the Lord, wrote Matthew Rothschild in the Progressive magazine.

Mr. Rothschild, of course, thinks that's a bad thing.

Former Michigan Sen. Spence Abraham noted that 20 years ago, when GOP Gov. John Engler tried to cut taxes and spending, *the vested interests went nuts. Protest marches on Lansing were followed by huge demonstrations on the state capitol lawn. Soon Jesse Jackson arrived on the scene to lead the demonstrators and decry the "draconian" cuts that would most certainly lead to death and ruin.*

Engler's approval ratings fell to about half of what Walker's are now. But Engler hung tough, and in 1994 was re-elected with more than 60 percent of the vote.

What the Michigan experience proves and what will be demonstrated again in Wisconsin is that in the short run, fighting the kind of fight Scott Walker is waging will not produce high levels of popular support for the proponents of change. For now, the headlines and mainstream media attention will

make the "victims" of change appear sympathetic figures. Moreover, the allegations being made about the impact of the new policies will sound frightening to voters. Everyone fears the unknown, and scaring voters is something at which organized labor and its allies have proven themselves adept.

But, if Walker and company stick to their guns and make the changes needed to put their state on the right path, they will find their actions increasingly popular as Wisconsin gets back on track. When voters realize that the "sky didn't fall" and that their schools and public services do not suffer any diminution in quality, their concern will turn to respect for politicians who stood their ground and made the tough decisions, as opposed to those who ran away from their duties.

Thurman Hart thinks public employee unions are doomed.

The surest way to ensure the survival of any program is to spread the benefits of it as widely as possible - give everyone a reason to fight for its continuance - but hide the costs by concentrating them on a small, but unsympathetic group.

The fastest way to kill a program of any kind is to concentrate the benefits but to make everyone pay for them.

There is no reason for ninety percent of the population to rally for benefits that accrue to only ten percent of the workforce **when they themselves are cut out of those benefits.** So Wisconsin Democrats found themselves a powerless minority, whose only recourse was to run and...hope that tomorrow a new world would dawn. Such hopes are foolishness. And the Wisconsin Republican Senators showed them exactly why that is so.

Cornell Law Professor William Jacobson thinks this will determine the outcome: click to view

The vote will be taken with the feet of tens of thousands of Wisconsin public employee union members, who will have the choice for the first time in memory of deciding whether to join the union and pay the union dues, which have been estimated in the $700-1000 per year range.

The public employees will have to make a choice, take a pay increase or pay the union.

I think we know how that vote will turn out, and whether the employees -- once given a choice -- will buy what the unions are selling.

Meanwhile, the Idaho House passed by more than a 2-1 margin a bill limiting collective bargaining for teachers and eliminating teacher tenure. The state senate had passed it earlier.

In Michigan, a scheme to force day care providers to join a union has been blocked .

In Indiana, GOP state legislators are serenading fleebagging House Democrats with this parody of John Denver's "Country Roads."

House Speaker John Boehner wants to restore the District of Columbia school voucher program Obama, Pelosi and Reid shut down.

The U.S. Senate voted down, 44-56, the House Republican plan to cut spending in the current fiscal year by $61 billion (three GOP senators voted against it on the grounds it didn't cut enough), and voted down, 42-58, the Democratic leadership plan to cut less than $5 billion. Ten Democrats voted against the Democrat plan, two apparently because they think it cut too much.

As you know, Congress never adopted a budget for the 2011 fiscal year. The current continuing resolution funding the government expires March 18. House Republicans will pass another short term funding bill, with $4 billion in cuts. If the Senate rejects it, the federal government could shut down.

This is not as dire as it sounds. Essential services would still go on. The military would remain on duty. Social Security checks would go out. Interest would be paid on the national debt. But "nonessential" services would stop.

Democrats won the debate over the brief government shutdown in 1995, and seem to be inviting one now, assuming public opinion will be on their side once again.

That could be a dangerous assumption. The fiscal situation is much worse now than it was then, and most Americans are aware of this. The lack of seriousness of Democrats about the fiscal crisis is illustrated, as I wrote in a column this week, but their unwillingness to trim subsidies for NPR and public television. (Miko, pls provide link).

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid described Republicans as "heartless " because they want to cut federal subsidies to cowboy poetry festivals.

With much fanfare, President Obama appointed Vice President Joe Biden to head budget negotiations with the Republicans. Biden promptly left the country.

Other than looking frivolous and political while the Republicans look serious on the budget, the danger for Democrats if there is a prolonged shutdown is Americans might find out they don't miss "nonessential" government "services" all that much.

I doubt you'll be surprised to learn that when NPR executives declared they'd rejected a $5 million donation proffered by ersatz Arabs posing as a Muslim Brotherhood front group, they were lying.

President Obama is concerned about bullies.

The White House will also announce that it is hosting a conference on bullying early next year to raise awareness and educate parents, students, and teachers about the tools available to prevent harassment.

"We've got to dispel the myth that bullying is just a normal rite of passage, or an inevitable part of growing up. It's not," President Obama said in a written statement. "We have an obligation to ensure that our schools are safe for all of our kids. Every single young person deserves the opportunity to learn and grow and achieve their potential, without having to worry about the constant threat of harassment."

Bullying is a big deal to him, the president said at a White House conference, because when he was a kid he was teased about his big ears.

But Zero doesn't propose to do much about the bully in Libya.

The editors of the Washington Post are fed up with the administration's feckless policy.

The administration's response to Moammar Gaddafi seems to be having the effect of encouraging him to wage a civil war while locking in the military advantage he holds.

Mr. Obama followed European leaders in declaring that Mr. Gaddafi must be removed from power…At the same time a U.N. Security Council resolution passed on Feb. 26 referred Mr. Gaddafi to the International Criminal Court for prosecution, meaning that he is likely to be subject to arrest if he leaves Libya.

It follows that the dictator has few choices other than to try to regain control of his country by force or die trying. His troops have been waging brutal battles to retake towns held by the rebels, using artillery, tanks, warplanes and other heavy weapons - and killing large numbers of civilians. Rebel leaders say they are badly outgunned and cannot easily advance across Libya's open desert because of the threat of air attack.

Meanwhile, the State Department and the Pentagon have been adopting positions that would make intervention to change that military balance difficult, if not virtually impossible.

It's beginning to look as if what Mr. Obama has "engineered" is a situation in which the United States and its closest allies have declared that a dictator must go "as quickly as possible" - and have not only constrained themselves from ensuring that outcome but are actively hindering it by

refusing to provide arms to the opposition.

Mr. Obama, who skipped a meeting of his top aides on Libya Wednesday, may hope that the Libyan rebels will defeat the Gaddafi forces without outside help… If not, the world will watch as Mr. Gaddafi continues to massacre his people, while an American president who said that he must go fails to implement any strategy for making that happen.

On Fox last night, Ralph Peters said Obama loves the idea of being president, but he can't make a decision.
This prompted John Hinderaker (Power Line) to suggest that we make Obama king: click to view

The king would have no duties beyond golf, so Obama would be perfect for the job. Our king would need a place to live, of course--we need to coax Obama out of the White House--so I'm thinking one of those big houses in Newport, Rhode Island would be ideal. Safely out of the way.

Then we could hold a special election and choose a real president.

The Washington Post's (snarky liberal columnist) Dana Milbank has noticed that President Obama's new policy with regard to military tribunals at Guantanamo Bay is a lot like the old Bush policy he denounced.

Liberal supporters again felt betrayed. Administration officials had some 'splainin to do.

And so they assembled some top-notch lawyers from across the executive branch and held a conference call Monday afternoon with reporters. The ground rules required that the officials not be identified, which was appropriate given their Orwellian assignment. They were to argue that Obama's new detention policy is perfectly consistent with his old detention policy.

President Obama claims to have met House Republicans "halfway" on budget cuts. Washington Post fact checker Glenn Kessler gave this statement two Pinocchios (significant omissions and/or exaggerations.) Kessler's rating system is explained here .

This annoyed the White House, which *gave the Fact Checker a bunch of data and charts trying to make the administration's case for using the phrase.*

So when Mr. Obama made the claim again in his radio address last Saturday (3/5), Mr. Kessler changed his rating: Three Pinocchios (significant factual error and/or obvious contradictions).

Ronald Reagan was a gentleman. Jimmy Carter was a "phony" and a "tyrant," a former Secret Service agent tells a black newspaper in Cleveland.

For good or ill, the presidential primary campaign began Monday. Five potential GOP presidential

candidates – former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, former Louisiana Democratic Gov. Buddy Roemer, and businessman Herman Cain appeared at a candidate forum sponsored by the Iowa Faith and Freedom Coalition at Point of Grace Church in Waukee.

More than 1,000 people attended, which is pretty impressive, when one considers that the population of Waukee is less than 13,000, and this group of candidates is somewhat less than the A list.

George Will thinks *there are at most* five plausible Republican presidents on the horizon - *Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, former Utah governor and departing ambassador to China Jon Huntsman, former Massachusetts governor Romney and former Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty.*

Will is not so keen on Gingrich or former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who is leading the GOP field in a recent NBC poll.

Neither is Law Prof. Glenn Reynolds (Instapundit): *I would vote for a syphilitic camel over Barack Obama in 2012, so therefore I would even vote for Huckabee or Gingrich. But I might try to talk the camel into running one more time.*

Newt Gingrich has lots of good ideas (and some really bad ones), and he expresses them well. But he has zero executive experience. He was a very successful guerrilla leader in plotting the GOP takeover of the House in 1994, but proved to be a poor Speaker. He led with his massive ego, and constantly was outmaneuvered by President Clinton.

And Gingrich has more baggage than Amtrak. As far as I am concerned, the way he treated his first two wives disqualifies him on character grounds. It was his patriotism that drove him to adultery, Newt said.

Mike Huckabee does have executive experience, but it's nothing to write home about. He was a big spender who was soft on crime.

At the forum in Waukee, social issues were the topic of the day. All the prospective candidates bashed President Obama, and said unkind things about Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels' plan for a "truce" on social issues. Gingrich was the celebrity the camera crews were following around at the start of the forum, but, said the Politico:

It was the scripture-spouting Roemer and the fire-breathing Cain who stole the show, giving a preview of what is likely to happen throughout the cycle, with lesser-known hopefuls with strong oratory skills overshadowing their more viable but more wooden rivals.

Roemer was the only candidate to knock ethanol before this Iowa audience, noted Ed Kilgore of the New Republic. The most consequential talk, Kilgore said, was given by Tim Pawlenty .

NBC plans to host the first formal GOP presidential primary debate, May 2nd at the Reagan Presidential Library in California. So far, no likely presidential candidate has committed to attend.

Will and most other Beltway conservatives write off Sarah Palin because (1) they want to, and (2) her poll numbers are dreadful. Ms. Palin plans to be in Colorado the evening the first presidential debate is scheduled to held in California. John Fund of the Wall Street Journal thinks this is a sign she won't run.

But a Palin staffer said the debate date conflict doesn't signal anything about 2012 .

If Sarah does run, she'll probably base her campaign in Arizona, the Politico reports.

On Will's list of five, two have serious problems. Mitt Romney's support of Romneycare in Massachusetts – and his continuing efforts to defend it – should be disqualifying.

I met Haley Barbour when we both worked on the Dole vice presidential campaign in 1976. I liked him very much. He is bright, affable, and solidly conservative. He's been a very good governor in Mississippi. But he's a good ole boy who grew up in the segregated South, and later became a millionaire lobbyist. The attack ads write themselves.

Mitch Daniels has an excellent record as governor of Indiana, and experience in Washington as President Bush's first budget director. But as we saw in Waukee, the truce on social issues doesn't sell well with the base.

Jim Geraghty of National Review has a plausible scenario for Jon Huntsman . His National Review colleague, Katrina Trinko , says Huntsman is more conservative than many people think.

But a former Obama administration official also will be a hard sell with the base.
Liberal pundits and some Republicans are describing the GOP field as weak. So many are pining for New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie to get in the race.

But Jay Cost, who I think has supplanted Michael Barone as the best psephologist in America today, reminds us that all Republican candidates – including the sainted Reagan – were at one time "yes, but" candidates.

The modern nomination system is an absurdly inefficient process. It goes on way too long. It costs far too much. It sets party allies against each other in open and often uncivil conflict. But it does have the advantage of thoroughly vetting the prospectives. Each of these candidates will have a chance to deal with their theoretical downsides. Huntsman will have a shot to disavow Obama.

Pawlenty will have a chance to generate some buzz. Romney will have a chance to answer for Romneycare. And so on. That's one thing that the seemingly interminable primary campaign is good for.

There is a chance that none of these candidates can rise above their theoretical weaknesses, that fears about all of these candidates come true. It has happened before. But it's just too early to start betting whether that's going to happen this time around. We have to see these candidates on the stump for at least a little bit before we start presuming that none of them are up to snuff. And, to cultivate that patience, we should remember that old 1980 GOP debate in Nashua, which should remind us that Reagan wasn't really Reagan until after he had won.

Jonah Goldberg adds: click to view

It's not like the GOP has a history of nominating irresponsible firebrands. And the two nominees who were so labeled by the political establishment — Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan — are the soul of the GOP today, for "tea partiers" and establishmentarians alike.

But if the list is restricted to Will's five, only one stands out for National Review's Ramesh Ponnuru: click to view

As Pawlenty prepares to run for the Republican nomination for president, his main problem is simple:

Most Americans have never heard of him. Republicans tend to prefer known commodities: Every winner of the Republican nomination in the last 70 years had a national reputation a year before the primaries. Courage to Stand is not selling well. Yet Pawlenty may just be the Republicans' strongest presidential candidate for 2012. Compared with his competitors, he is either more conservative, more electable, or both.

Like just about every other Midwest Republican, Pawlenty is an ethanol whore. But he has no other major flaw – nothing like Christie's softness on radical Islam, or Daniels' truce on social issues.

Here's the speech Pawlenty gave at the Tea Party Patriot's conference in Phoenix Feb. 28.

Give it a listen. He's better than you think.

You remember the Race to the Top Commencement Challenge, in which the White House urges public high schools to demonstrate how their school best prepares them for college and a career, with the winning school getting to have Zero himself as their commencement speaker ?

It's not going so well.

The competition was extended from the February 25 deadline until Friday, March 11 after few schools met the original application deadline. CBS News has learned a White House Communications Office internal memo dated February 22 noted "a major issue with the Commencement Challenge."

"As of yesterday we had received 14 applications and the deadline is Friday," the memo said. The memo also urged recipients to, "please keep the application number close hold."

A follow-up memo on February 28 reported receipt of 68 applications. Noting the competition among more than 1,000 schools last year, the memo said, "Something isn't working." It called on staffers to ask "friendly congressional, gubernatorial and mayoral offices" to encourage schools to apply.

Apparently the students aren't as thrilled with the prize as the prize giver imagined they would be. Zero worship is so 2008.

Barack Obama doesn't get along well with Republicans in Congress, or with Democrats in Congress. And, according to the Washington Post , he doesn't get along with his Cabinet, either.

Gasoline prices have gone up 67 percent since Barack Obama became president.

You suspected the "investigation" Penn State University conducted into Prof. Michael Mann's role in the ClimateGate scandal was a whitewash. Now, apparently, there is proof: click to view

Penn State investigators never interviewed a principal who was able to confirm or deny a key charge against "Hockey Stick" lead author of "Hide the Decline" infamy. This individual has now been interviewed, and what he told federal investigators has indicted Mann and Penn State.

The inspector general's report specifically reveals Penn State's wagon-circlers to have been at best comically negligent/inept in allowing Mann to not answer the damning charge they were tasked with examining: did he delete or ask others to delete records? At worst, they were complicit in the cover-up.

Simply by interviewing Mann's colleague Eugene Wahl, PSU would have exposed Mann's "answer" for what it was (and wasn't). Such an interview was obviously necessary for any inquiry. Penn State chose not to conduct it, for its own reasons. A federal inspector general has now conducted it. And the result is damning of both Mann and the parties that chose not to interview Wahl.

In case you've forgotten what the controversy was about, Minnesotans for Global Warming has a

reminder.

The usual suspects are trying to tell us snow in Arizona, Louisiana and Florida is a product of global warming. But thanks to ClimateGate, fewer people are buying. Elmer and the gang celebrate the new awareness with this parody of a Monkees' hit.

Enjoy.

Jack Wheeler will be back at his post next week, so I wanted to make my last HFR a humdinger. I hope I've succeeded.