

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

VICE CHAIR

- Judiciary and Legislation

MEMBER

- Licenses Committee
- Administrative Review and Appeals Board
- Community and Economic Development
- League of Wisconsin Municipalities
- Milwaukee Public Library Board
- Redevelopment Authority - City of Milwaukee
- Early Education Task Force



CAVALIER JOHNSON
ALDERMAN, 2ND DISTRICT

Tommy could be key partner in push for Wisconsin corrections reforms

By Alderman Cavalier “Chevy” Johnson

September 12, 2018

Last week Wednesday I was in the audience at Marquette University when Mike Gousha interviewed former Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson. Governor Thompson spoke about his journey from a modest childhood in Elroy, Wisconsin to rising through the Wisconsin State Assembly on to the Governor’s Mansion, serving as secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services in President George W. Bush’s administration, and becoming a successful businessman after his lengthy career in public service. Governor Thompson went on to candidly discuss a few missed opportunities from his time in office, and highlighted that even someone who made history as Wisconsin's first four-term governor has regrets.

In the 1990s, Tommy Thompson’s welfare reform programs gained national attention, and by his count, his name was in virtually every major newspaper in America. With his reputation as a reformer, Governor Thompson says that he had a moment in time, 1996, when he should have capitalized on his notoriety and run to serve as President of the United States. He didn’t. Instead, he yielded to Bob Dole and Bill Clinton recaptured The White House that November. Governor Thompson says that he regrets that decision and missed opportunity.

Outside of politics, the thing that Governor Thompson says that he regrets the most was also born during the 1990s: Mass incarceration. Under Tommy Thompson’s leadership Wisconsin was no exception to the allure of laws like Truth in Sentencing — however misguided. Fast forward 20 years, and we can all see the results.

- With more than 22,000 inmates, Wisconsin incarcerates about twice as many people as Minnesota, a neighboring state more similar to ours than not
- Wisconsin’s prisons have more inmates than proper space to house them
- Reducing the prison population has become a focal point in our 2018 gubernatorial election
- The sitting governor has expressed that there is no value for him to visit state prisons run by his Department of Corrections
- At \$1.2 billion annually, Wisconsin’s taxpayers spend more on locking people up than we do on education — including crucial early childhood education which could stem the flow into prisons in the first place

-More-

- Wisconsin is home to the most incarcerated zip code in the United States, 53206

Governor Thompson reflected on his regret to presiding over a massive prison building boom in Wisconsin and now realizes the error of locking so many people up, not helping them to gain the necessary skills to reintegrate into society, and labeling them felons which strips them of many opportunities to enter the workforce. On top of that, the message from the Department of Corrections upon release is, “don’t come back” — even though their return is all but guaranteed.

When democrats have reached across the aisle — even in hyper-partisan times like these, they have been able to deliver for their constituents and the state. Democrats with an eye toward bipartisanship led the charge to shutter Lincoln Hills. Democrats with an eye toward bipartisanship are working to ensure that expungement means a clean slate.

My message for democrats is simple. Take Governor Thompson at his word. Democrats want to reverse the bullet points mentioned above. It only makes sense that they capitalize on this opportunity for bipartisanship by working with Governor Thompson who a) was an architect of the prison boom and b) is probably the most popular republican in Wisconsin’s history. In a world where the GOP controls which bills are or are not heard, it would not be such a bad idea to have Tommy Thompson advocating for the same cause.

Cavalier “Chevy” Johnson is serving his first term as 2nd District alderman on the Milwaukee Common Council