

Michael Poliakoff ([00:11](#)):

Governor Walker, welcome. We're enormously honored to have you here on Higher Ed Now for a great number of reasons, as we'll talk about more. You were an education governor. You did things that really, really changed the equations. I'm trying to speak as neutrally as possible, but changed expectations and equations about higher education. Its funding, its operating principles, and you're now leading Young Americans for Freedom. Since this is a podcast rather than a video, I can't show our audience the wonderful posters that, over the years, Young Americans for Freedom has produced, one that fingered college presidents for mispending federal research money on such things as wine at the reception, or Steuben glass, or charter airplanes, because the president didn't like flying the way the rest of us do. And YAF produced this brilliant poster of pigs.

Scott Walker ([01:21](#)):

Yes, pigs at the trough.

Michael Poliakoff ([01:25](#)):

And of course, now a few decades later, we've seen the extraordinary damage that is done. And then the magnificent posters about President Reagan, and his vision and courage in saying what none of the leading economists would ever have the sense to have uttered that he was dealing with a broken system, and an evil empire. So I'm thrilled to have both the former governor of Wisconsin and the current head of Young Americans for Freedom. Welcome to the podcast.

Scott Walker ([02:00](#)):

My pleasure. Glad to be here. I love that you have those posters too. That's some great stuff from the past, and builds off the stuff we're doing now.

Michael Poliakoff ([02:06](#)):

I can well imagine what's now going to be coming from YAF. Well, going to this point of being education governor, I noticed that the Chronicle of Higher Education called you the anti-education governor, which I must say I found rather bemusing. You had looked at issues at the time, starting your tenure as governor in 2011, that are now front and center issues. So I wanted to invite you to talk about, perhaps starting with tenure, you were willing to essentially attack one of the sacred cows of higher education.

Scott Walker ([02:54](#)):

Well, that's exactly right. Higher education, public education, K through 12, even just government employees in general. Our legislation that we took on very early on in my tenure as governor in the first term, was part of a budget process, but we knew we had to change collective bargaining. I had been a county executive, which was effectively the mayor of a county, for eight years before I was governor. And I could see firsthand the challenges that posed in terms of even realistic sort of alternatives to layoffs, or other problematic areas. I always said I was for a reduced number of employees, but you don't do it through random pink slips. You do it through very surgical reforms and well-thought-out... And so, we came in overall and changed collective bargain. In doing so, that effectively wiped that tenure and seniority in all different levels of government.

([03:47](#)):

And as I like to say, when it came to whether it was schools, universities, or just the local fire and police departments, things of that nature, what we really did was allow them to hire and fire based on merit,

not based on seniority or tenure. That meant we could put the best and the brightest in the classroom, and keep them there. Unfortunately, a lot of the union bosses and the activists didn't like that very much. And at one point I had about a 100,000 protestors occupy my state capitol. I often joke, I apologize, the Occupy movement did not start on Wall Street, it started on my street in Madison, Wisconsin. Only did they move to New York City after they failed to win in Wisconsin. But it was very much an intimidation factor, because they knew that was a protection that usually protected the weakest link, the people who weren't doing the work, be it in the classroom or elsewhere in government, and collective bargain was and tenure was the thing that that kept them protected.

Michael Poliakoff ([04:51](#)):

We've noticed, actually, some of the citizens, the good citizens of the academy, disclosing that there's a pretty high percentage of their colleagues who are coasting, tenured colleagues who are coasting, and not performing up to the levels that the professoriate should be adopting as their standards. I speak as somebody who is still a college professor. I teach one adjunct course in the evenings for George Mason, but it is a calling that's supposed to pull out the best from all of us, and real dedication. And when you've got people within the world of political science, the world of natural science saying, "We don't see that trust being fulfilled," it really falls upon leaders to do something about it.

Scott Walker ([05:50](#)):

Well, exactly. What I saw that both as governor and I continue to see that, probably in some cases even more so now as the president of YAF, because the challenge... And for years you've heard this, I know, as I did in office, was the pushback on any sort of changes, be it with tenure, be it with standards of any sort, is, "Oh, academic freedom, academic freedom."

([06:14](#)):

Well, I said there really isn't academic freedom in most institutions of higher education these days. For all the talk of diversity, the one area that's lacking is diversity of thought. There isn't academic freedom if you have a view that's anywhere to the right of Stalin. And so, it is really frustrating that, particularly in the arts and sciences, you get a little more balance in maybe the schools of business, the school of engineering, but in large part, those who have views more aligned with mine are more quiet, versus some of the other arts and sciences, liberal arts type students on campuses.

([06:49](#)):

And we found that YAF in survey after survey, not only overall, but even for simple things like commencement addresses, we find routinely that the vast majority of the top, so-called 100 College and Universities, according to US news and report, overwhelmingly have liberal or at least non-conservative lead and commencement speakers, they have faculty that in often cases have little or no voices on the staff, that are again, anywhere to the right of Stalin. And that's a real disservice I think to young people... And I had plenty of liberal professors when I was a student, I don't want them to be eliminated, but I at least want to have some ability to have a dialogue, which sadly is largely become extinct on many of our institutions of higher education.

Michael Poliakoff ([07:37](#)):

It's from challenge, debate, discussion that we grow, and being in an ambience in which nowadays you might even be reported for raising heterodox ideas. That's so antithetical to what we would consider to be a liberal, rather than an illiberal, education.

Scott Walker ([07:58](#)):

That's right.

Michael Poliakoff ([08:01](#)):

And as I think about it, having once been a junior faculty member and then a tenured faculty member, I gave up tenure to get into the hurly-burly of government and administration. But as a junior faculty member, you have so little academic freedom, because you're living in fear of what your tenure and review committee is going to say or do. And when we look at the surveys that show what the balance is of Republican and Democratic political donations or stated political affiliations, we see prima facie, there's a problem here. And I'm not calling for affirmative action for Republicans, but I am questioning a system in which, in some fields, the ratio might be 65 Democrats to one Republican. That's not good for students, it's not good for faculty who really need to be challenged, who need that robust exchange.

Scott Walker ([09:07](#)):

Precisely. Well, and have laughed even with those surveys that show that incredible balance, whether it's party affiliation, contributions, I said, even that doesn't fully account for the fact that I think some of the remaining unaffiliated, aren't unaffiliated neutrally, they're actually further left. They're outright socialists or communists, they're not just Democrats, so it makes it even worse in that regard. Ironically, when we talk, the number one thing I hear from students who go to our conferences, we do more right of center lectures than the other group, we do conferences all across the country from the Reagan Ranch to Washington DC, and everywhere between, we do digital, we just surpassed a billion views on our YouTube site, YAFTV, and we now have more than a million and a half subscribers at YAFTV, as well. But our students, more than anything, the number one thing we hear at our gatherings, is not just the speakers, not just the debate and all, which is exciting.

([10:03](#)):

It's the fact that they can't believe there are other kids that think like them. They're not alone. And what I've increasingly found with advisors and others who help our chapters along the way on campuses is, educators feel even more isolated, as intimidated as students are on campus. And I don't even mean just conservative, certainly they feel intimidated, but increasingly I've found people who say, "I'm not necessarily a conservative. I just want to teach a class and be objective."

([10:32](#)):

And the idea that someone, for example, in American history wants to just teach American history, the good, the bad, the ugly. I am not for whitewashing things, but wants to not just lead with a 1619 approach. Those people are probably as intimidated as anyone out there, because they know, not only for their review committees for tenure and placement, but just oftentimes even pushback from colleagues, and even students on campus, who target people who have the audacity to actually teach the truth.

Michael Poliakoff ([11:07](#)):

Governor, before we started this conversation, we were talking a little bit about North Carolina, that has an extraordinarily brave board in Chapel Hill. We just honored them with our Jerry L. Martin Prize for Excellence and Trusteeship, for their willingness to stare down those who were misrepresenting what they were trying to do. But it reminded me of that, how shall I call it? Just baffling response to the North Carolina Reach Act, that would have required a three semester credit hour course in the fundamentals of the history of our nation. Talk, please, a little bit more about that.

Scott Walker ([11:51](#)):

It is baffling, not only to point out that it was needed in North Carolina, I think it would be wise to replicate in every state across America, because it's exactly that. The audacity, just to think about something like this being radical, at least in the eyes of some out there and largely those on campuses, they were asking for students who took this course to read the Constitution of the United States, to read the declaration, to read the Emancipation Proclamation, to read Dr. King's Letter from Birmingham Jail, to read not all, but at least five of the Federalist Papers. I mean, things like this, to me at least, should be common. And it's not just because of our age, saying, "Oh, you guys are old, times have moved on." No, these are the building blocks of a free and just society, of this great republic that we live in.

([12:41](#)):

Now the beauty is, you don't have to interpret them the same way, every student can read into them something different, but at least read the original document. When this was proposed, nearly 700, nearly 700 professors, members of the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, wrote a letter in opposition to this, claiming it somehow infringed upon their academic freedom. I look at that and say, what that tells me is something much deeper than just that they're liberal. It tells me that many of these professors there, and I think largely elsewhere across the country, want to be the sole conduit through which students understand what it means to be American, what it means to understand American history.

([13:30](#)):

If these students can actually read it for themselves, well, my guess is they're going to largely interpret things in a different way. And I've always been about, give us a chance, just give us a level playing field as a conservative, I believe firmly on our ideas. Prime example is, I'll take it one step further, a story that I just love. So before I became President at YAF, I was in between being governor and was doing some projects, but the president at the time, Ron Robinson, asked me to speak on a number of campuses. So I was at Cornell, went to Stanford, all these really easy places for a conservative to be at.

Michael Poliakoff ([14:05](#)):

I'm sure you got a very warm reception.

Scott Walker ([14:07](#)):

Exactly, exactly. Again, having 100,000 protestors, a few hundred pale in comparison. So I was like, come on, you can do better than that. But so I go, the last place I spoke at, before COVID shut things down obviously for some time, was Stanford. And after the program, I wanted to talk to the three students who had organized this. Stanford's a good example, sometimes we do it through our chapters or on campus, Young Americans for Freedom chapter. Sometimes we do it through College Republicans or other groups, some club that's on campus. This case it was the College Republican. So I asked the three students a little bit about themselves, what they were studying, what year they were, and then I asked, how'd you become a conservative? Two of the three very normal. It was their family, their parents, their grandparents, their interests all aligned, and the school they went to before college.

([14:58](#)):

Okay, that made sense. Third kid named John says, "Oh, well, governor, I'm glad you asked that. My parents are both hardcore democrats."

([15:07](#)):

I said, "Well, John, how did you become a conservative?"

[\(15:10\)](#):

He said, well, one day in high school he borrowed his dad's car, he went driving someplace for about an hour. He flipped through the radio, he was bored, he was trying to find something to listen to bide the time. He comes across this guy on the radio that really captures his attention, and he said, so he listened to him for the ride, and he was enamored. So every time he'd get in the car by himself, even if it wasn't that long of a trip, he'd look for that station again. He'd listen, and of course those listening now might have already jumped to the conclusion, it was Rush Limbaugh. But more than just listening to Rush, this was really telling, this John said he would read the books that Rush would talk about, he'd read the articles.

[\(15:48\)](#):

Because over three plus decades in broadcast, he didn't just talk about it. He'd say, "Oh, such and such has a great book out you should read, or this article is very interesting."

[\(15:58\)](#):

And anyway, John did just that. So John comes to Stanford, his mother's alma mater. He's a full-fledged conservative, but precisely the kind that at least I love, because he's thought this through, he's very empathetic. He just believes people are better off controlling their own destiny, than depending on the government or others. Well, that story is great, but here's the explanation point. John Rice Cameron is the son of Susan Rice. The reason I contend that many on the left, particularly in our colleges and universities, don't want conservative voices on campus, whether it's on the faculty, on the staff, or even just there as a speaker, often as we try to bring in, is because they're afraid that people like John will hear a different point of view and actually be attracted to it.

[\(16:47\)](#):

And so that's to me at the heart of cancel culture. And that's an issue where someone like a Bill Meyers, or others who are very clearly got liberal views on a vast majority of issues, but people like him are at least intellectually honest enough to say, you can't have a society where, be it the government, be it bureaucracies or others, dictate only one point of view for the public, the student body, whatever it is. To live in a free and just society, you've got to have a free interchange of ideas. And to me, that's one of the most compelling things about the work that you're doing, and the work that we do at YAF as well.

Michael Poliakoff ([17:22](#)):

It's the DNA of this country from the very start, sometimes unbelievably turbulent, but how much better than the controlled society that I fear some of the people who are educating our young, really rather believe in. And that's a terrible thought to have, that they fear the generation of people that I knew in college. People like Donald Kagan, who was a mentor of mine, of Harvey Mansfield, and Bob Piquette, dear friend who's just emeritus at Hamilton College. I once did a little cyber sleuthing about my friend to see what his students were saying, and one of them said, "If you argue with him, he'll respect you more." And I thought, that's the sign of a great professor, of a great mind. And if we lose that, then we have lost the lifeblood of a liberal education.

Scott Walker ([18:32](#)):

Absolutely, it is so... One of the biggest frustrations, although we're winning, because the Constitution is ultimately on our side, but one of the cases we've... High profile, but we've had to repeat it over and over again, was we brought Ben Shapiro in to the University of California at Berkeley. Now, the irony is not lost on us, certainly. Berkeley, free speech, you think of free speech, you think of Berkeley, and yet they at least were wise enough to not outright block it, period. But what they did initially was, they said,

"Well, you can't have it after 3:00 in the afternoon. You can't advertise in advance of this. And oh, by the way, security costs were something like five or six times what other groups on campus were having."

(19:15):

So we said, that's not free speech, that you're not blocking it outright, but it's not free speech. Now, we won. They ended up settling more than compensation financially, was they had to change the rules. And we constantly, when we have to go to court elsewhere, point to that case. Even in the Ninth District, at least the Constitution still has some relevance. But what is so frustrating to me is, the Constitution's on our side, but a college campus shouldn't be the place where you get just by being forced to follow the Constitution, it should be a place where free speech is revered. And yet on most of our campuses, it's where it's most at risk.

Michael Poliakoff (19:54):

I was at that event, I had to be in California anyway, and a dear friend got me one of the very sought after tickets, because they closed the whole balcony of Sproul Hall, and it was easier to get onto an airplane flight than it was to get into Sproul Hall. And Ben is wonderful. After his formal speech ended, he invited students to come up and ask questions, and said, "And those of you who disagree with me come to the front of the line." But one of the most poignant things that he said was, "Two years ago when I was here, I didn't need any security. Now I need massive security. What has changed?" And here he really laid the blame on the faculty. You were taught that speech is violence. Speech is what keeps us from violence.

Scott Walker (20:56):

Right.

Michael Poliakoff (20:57):

It's Mao who said, "Power comes through the barrel of a gun."

(21:01):

What a free society says is, "Power comes through reason and persuasion."

Scott Walker (21:08):

And free speech, of course, is the core of everything else that's guaranteed, particularly in the First Amendment, that if you don't have free speech, you can't assemble, you don't have the right to practice your religious beliefs. If they stop that, they stop everything else out there. And again, thankfully, it's still, in our troubled society as it is, it's still protected by the Constitution. But it should be, like I said, revered on our college campuses. And once was, and hopefully will be.

Michael Poliakoff (21:35):

Coming back to Dr. King whom you mentioned, a Letter from Birmingham Jail was written at a time when he didn't have a pencil, he didn't have paper, he had to kind of borrow those. And he pours out from his mind and heart, the classic texts of western civilization that he'd completely internalized. And every time I hear of some attempt to get rid of a course in western civ, I'm reminded of the fact that this has been the empowerment for so many. And coming back to American history requirements, American government requirements, a student who leaves college not understanding these things is

disempowered. And your question exactly, governor, why would anybody want to disempower the citizens?

Scott Walker ([22:33](#)):

Well, look at all this, Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address. The Gettysburg Address goes all the way back to the founding of this country, and the promise made on the 4th of July 1776, oftentimes not on campuses, but elsewhere when we talk about Juneteenth Day, I make the challenge that we wouldn't have Juneteenth Day without the 4th of July. And some people are shocked, and sometimes people on the right are shocked that I referenced Juneteenth Day, as well.

([23:00](#)):

But I said, no, the two go hand in hand to understand those things. I thought it was also interesting in Dr. King's letter, one of his critiques is not only those who are blatantly racist, but the white moderates, the white swooshes as we'd say today, who don't want trouble, who don't want challenges, who want to say the right things but aren't willing to challenge. I think you see that increasingly, not just based on racial issues, but even these very things we're talking about on campus, people who want to be aligned the right way, but are afraid to speak up and say, "No, these fundamental truths should be protected." That a few loud mouth, whether it's professors, whether it's students, whether it's activists from outside the campus, shouldn't be the ones who set the terms of debate and discussion.

Michael Poliakoff ([23:51](#)):

Indeed. So I want to pause in that moment. We're at a very, very bad juncture in higher education. I'm going to invite you to talk a little bit more about something that you really got involved in, which is cost control. But the crisis now is one of principle, one of the very nature of a college campus. And if there's one slight silver lining in these horrible couple of weeks, it is that it's causing some soul-searching. I ask myself, who educated students to come out on campus and celebrate this act of savagery? One of the worst that we have seen in modern times and for Jewish people, the worst massacre since the Holocaust. And yet we've got students celebrating this. It's quite one thing if they want to express their concern, as any person should, about the loss of civilian life, whether in Israel or in Gaza, but to celebrate an act of savagery. So I want to ask you, as a education governor, what's your read on this and most important, the way forward, how do we correct the terrible situation that we're in?

Scott Walker ([25:21](#)):

Well, thankfully, the truth I think is on the right side on this issue. It's clear that the more you watch these videos, the more that you watch these comments, that so much of it is driven by ignorance. You mentioned the Holocaust, it's shocking in some of the surveys how few young Americans actually understand what happened in the Holocaust. You or I, or others, just take it as a given. To me, that's one of the tragic downfalls, the decline that we've seen not only in American but in world history, both in higher education and even before that, in K through 12 education, just the fundamental lack. Doesn't excuse the horrific statements by some of these students, but it puts it into some context, that it's not just their failure. It's a failure of society that we haven't done better, and not just with the Holocaust itself, but with history of the world.

([26:18](#)):

We've seen these actions before, putting content. You can have a debate, as you say, about the mechanics of what's happening, what Israel's response should be, but I just wrote a piece this week in

the Washington Times, talking about the ceasefire argument. And say, put it in context of in some ways, after October 7th, that's like asking the United States to engage in a ceasefire on December 7th, 1941.

Michael Poliakoff ([26:42](#)):

Well put, yes.

Scott Walker ([26:44](#)):

I mean, even for that matter on September 12th, 2001. There was a ceasefire before each of those days, as there was on October 6th of this year. But at some point you have to say, "What's the response?" Even more so as we've learned, not getting too far down to this path, but as we've learned from at least one of the senior officials from Hamas, who spoke on Lebanese TV, they're very blatant about their goal being total annihilation of the Jewish people and of Israel, not just of conquering control of Gaza, or their parts of what they perceive to be Palestine, but literally annihilation.

([27:22](#)):

And that puts it in a much different context. But even if that wasn't the case, just the idea that what happened on October 7th, 2023, to us, it would be like our 9/11. Unprovoked, uncalled-for, massive civilian casualties, not just a military attack. In this case, I even think in some ways worse than 9/11, as horrific as that day was. But because of the clear footage we've seen now, time and time again, of not just killing, but targeting, raping, kidnapping, people that clearly knew were not part of the military, how that is not an indefensible crime. And clearly it's not just a matter of students saying, "Well, we're yes, but don't..." Palestine, there are legitimate issues there, or there's real concerns about civilians within Gaza who might be targeted in the retribution, reaction. You can have that debate, but there should be zero debate about Hamas.

([28:30](#)):

One other thing, forgive me, for getting on a soapbox here, but I'm increasingly getting worked up over this, not just here, but beyond. This idea that Jewish students should feel threatened. I mean, the irony is beyond belief here. So we bring more conservative speakers, like I said, than anyone else out there. So Michael Knowles, Matt Walls, or Ben Shapiro, Katie [inaudible 00:28:53], somebody like that comes on the campus. And particularly these days, if say, if Matt Walsh comes in and challenges the gender discussions on campus, makes the case not just that there's only two scientific genders, but that we certainly shouldn't be imposing changes on children, those are minors. When all 50 States have laws against tattoos if you're under the age of 18, how is it remarkably even close to possible that a child can have a sex change before they're 18 when they can't get a tattoo?

([29:25](#)):

But that debate aside, when people like that come in, those on the left go bonkers. We even had at one institution, the newspaper, not just protesters, the student newspaper actually write an editorial about how the speech, the words of one of our speakers was a threat to the safety, the actual physical safety, of students on campus, and therefore should not be allowed to come on campus. You hear these ridiculous mind-boggling arguments.

([29:54](#)):

And then, when Jewish students literally are facing physical harm, if not worse, universities are suddenly nowhere to be found. It is unconscionable. The only good, as you mentioned, that's come out of this is, the Bill Ackmans of the world and others who've stand up and said, "Stop. I'm not giving any more money to any institution that doesn't wake up and at a minimum, you can't do two things. One,

denounce the horrific acts of October 7th. And two, can't do something to defend Jewish students or other students who might be aligned with supporting Israel on campus from physical, actual physical harm." That should be a given, and yet it is painstaking to watch, whether it's at Harvard, at Penn, or these other institutions, how difficult it is, if not impossible, for them to do these very simple acts.

Michael Poliakoff ([30:47](#)):

Absolutely. And going one step beyond, to take this as a wake-up call, that they have miseducated, they have misled. I keep asking myself on some of these campuses, where are the adults? Where are the people who have a moral conscience, who have a sense of responsibility, who educated students to be that savage? Or as I think of it, who poured this intersectionality nonsense into their heads, that gay students would be coming out in favor of Hamas, not even realizing that they would be tortured to death in an instant?

Scott Walker ([31:39](#)):

And if there was any doubt, one of the leaders just recently actually spelled that out, actually acknowledged and knocked the signs and comments elsewhere, and made it abundantly clear. There's no question.

Michael Poliakoff ([31:52](#)):

And of course, getting back to your point of history, how many of them would've remembered or ever realized, 1948, when Israel is invaded by five Arab nations, still in its declaration of Independence, it stretches out the hands of peace. Let's come together and build a stronger Middle East. We welcome the prosperity of Arab citizens. My guess is nobody ever, ever gave them any kind of objective history of the land, of the issues, of the attempt of Ehud Barak to offer just about everything in the two state solution. And

I shake my head in bewilderment, ACTA has of course always been an advocate of core curriculum, so that among those 120 hours, some of which will be spent on frivolous things, there would be those basics for career and citizenship, everything from American history and economics, to writing skills, and mathematics, and natural science. And how few schools seem to be able to block out 30 some odd hours for something that would be good educational policy, rather than putting out a smorgasbord of cake and candy, of every nugatory possibility. Where are the adults?

Scott Walker ([33:36](#)):

Well, and it's frustrating. We were talking about Ben Shapiro. It's interesting. One of the comments came from an associate dean, who privately said to someone on our team at the time, how he had been there in the '70s through the whole free speech debate. And while he didn't agree with much of what Shapiro said, he thought it was the right thing to do. But here he was privately, quietly saying this, "Where are those voices speaking out, so that we don't have to go to court, that we don't have to push back on any of these issues?" The reaction that we've seen since October 7th, it's just the most blatant in that regard. But it is a combination of speech and the irony of what really is a threat and what's not, combined with just... I'd say not just ignorance, because ignorance is an excuse for the professors, and administrators, and educators, and even students. I think in many cases it's willful ignorance. It's purposely not wanting to know, or not wanting to tell the truth, and that's just horrible. That is a disservice to certainly this country, and to society as a whole.

Michael Poliakoff ([34:43](#)):

Yes. Coming back to the finance, and the nuts and bolts of an institution, you had raised, and it of course caused a little bit of a firestorm, the fact that there seems to be an under utilization of faculty time. And of course in the tenure reforms, it gives schools some agility to address high need areas, and to de-emphasize others. I'd love to get you to talk a little bit about that. I realize that you probably have a few battle scars from that one as well.

Scott Walker ([35:19](#)):

Yeah, but again, it tells you oftentimes how tone-deaf some are on the opposing side. One of the people they sent out, early on when I was governor to go on the airwaves, to push back on our reforms and our changes to tenure and seniority overall, was someone who headed up one of the departments, and she literally had zero hours in the classroom that particular semester. So I thought, way to go to pick out somebody who's a compelling... Instead of picking the favorite, most exciting dynamic professor, who's teaching a four full course load. And it wasn't even because she was on sabbatical doing some great archeological dig around the Nile, or something like this.

([36:01](#)):

This was someone who was just on leave for dealing with all of her duties. And that I thought, boy, just how remarkable. We pointed out some of the changes we were making. Just asking, on average, faculty to take on one more course hour a semester, would alleviated the need for any changes in reduction of faculty and staff. But the outrage, it was almost like we're pulling out their fingernails in terms of that sort of reaction out there to us. And we even gave some outs, unless someone, for example, can say they're doing the kind of research that, either through private philanthropic funding or through government grants, be it federal or others, is generally bringing in more revenue than the cost of their programs.

([36:45](#)):

We just said, "Well, for the rest of these folks, they should be in the classroom. That's what..." Not just what we demanded as leaders of the state, particularly of our state chartered institutions, but as a parent who sent two kids, one to a University of Wisconsin system school and one to a private school, as parents, as students, as people paying, making significant investments for their higher education opportunities. There should be a certain demand that there's actually tenured professors in the classroom, particularly as people enter their junior and senior, at a minimum out there. Just remarkable the pushback on that. It's interesting, one other aside, I think it was since the late '70s, the rate of tuition, public and private overall nationwide, has gone up something like four times the rate of inflation. And yet, almost proportionately, the number of tenured professors in the classroom has gone down.

([37:46](#)):

And to me, so that's not a knock on professors, it's not a knock on the concept of higher education, but it is a realization over the last several decades how far these campuses have moved away from the fundamentals of a core education, and instead have been filled with all these administrators who are typically pushing these wild woke agendas, that have little or nothing to do, not only with their professional goals, but even just with the concept of a well-rounded education, and instead are pushing very, very finite political and ideological objectives. And again, I think about the only thing positive that came out of COVID, and the only thing even less positive about this last month's reaction is that people are finally starting to wake up and say, "No, we got to demand better here."

Michael Poliakoff ([38:40](#)):

I was looking at our online tool called howcollegesspendmoney.com before you came, and I just called up University of Wisconsin-Madison to see what the trajectory has been, and I will say from about 2015 on, which is when you... Actually, it was a little later than that, when you left office, the growth curve of administrative spending per student just goes up really quite substantially.

Scott Walker ([39:11](#)):

Well, we had put not only changes we had made with the legislature, but with early on, it takes a few years to put a board. In our case, the governor appoints a Board of Regents. It takes a few years to take control of that. It takes a little while after that to undo it. Now it's completely by my successor in terms of who controls that Board of Governors, but pushing even just simple things like free speech, and I stress when I talk about free speech with state lawmakers, and even not just conservative, but objective regents and Board of Governors, and depends obviously as you well know by the state and jurisdiction. But I said, "You have to have things that are enforceable. Not just some amount of paper. It has to mean something. There has to be some consequence if someone, particularly if they continue to violate that."

([40:04](#)):

But when it comes to the spending, money talks. Not only the money that the state government, Wisconsin, like most other states are still a significant part, but they're not the lion's share, they're not the majority. It's a combination of grants, investments, philanthropic, tuition, and state support. But I said combining charitable philanthropic gifts. That's why again, the Bill Ackmans of the world, the Huntsmans of the world and others are starting to pull back on their resources, which... We tell people all the time who are supporters of YAF, "Don't just complain about your alma mater. Tell them you're upset and that you're going to pull money if they continue to offer an unchecked platform, people that hate the very values that are not just your values, but core to America." That will start to have an impact. And I think we're seeing some of that, but state legislatures and governors across America have to be engaged in it. And donors, people who make gifts to their institutions, be it their local institution or to their alma mater, have to play a more active role.

Michael Poliakoff ([41:11](#)):

And you managed to freeze tuition for a while there too, which is of course something that increasingly the public is beginning to target, that... What value are we getting, what return on investment? So that's always quite an achievement to do it in-

Scott Walker ([41:31](#)):

Well, think about it. Again, my model before I ran, just a model for being governor, was Mitch Daniels. I went down and did something unusual in politics. I actually spent a good part of a week, a year before I ran, with Mitch Daniels in Indianapolis. Ironically, actually, the staff member who took me on around the time was Eric Holcomb, who's now the governor himself of Indiana. But I thought Mitch was a great role model on many different levels. Then later, he was there before I was, so he finished off before I did, and went on to Purdue. So he became a good role model even for us with the UW system, because he froze tuition without a state mandate, without a requirement, but just use it as an impetus to provide better value to the students. Still had a high quality education, still kept a world-class staff there, but put some pressure on this, say, "No, they can't just be just spin, spin, spin without accountability." And those

measures were not only effective for Purdue, there were things that we looked at in trying to replicate as well.

Michael Poliakoff ([42:35](#)):

Yeah, these are real achievements. Well, you've been extremely generous with your time. I want to ask you one last question, which is sort of a vision question. You're now leading a group of extremely bright, generally quite young people, who've for the most part had the traditional sort of liberal arts education, and you had emphasized obviously the importance of higher education for career training. And we always say an act of the three Cs, career, community, and citizenship. And I wanted to get your thoughts on, what are our priorities? I know you were attacked over the Wisconsin idea at some point, and people spinning that in different ways, and I wanted to get your own thoughts on... I realized you had given a lesson for Republicans running for president, maybe also for those who are steering higher education.

Scott Walker ([43:43](#)):

Well, it's one of those where, yeah, I mean there's this... [inaudible 00:43:46], but

I think oftentimes there's this Ivy League approach to higher education, where people think, "Oh, it's just sitting around with lofty discussions," and that's good. That's part of a good education, but there has to be application as well. That's why I love your three Cs. Part of it, when we pushed back on the Wisconsin idea was, but where is this leading towards a career path? It's not limited to that. I love community involvement and citizenship. Sadly, those things are on the decline, particularly with Generation Z.

([44:18](#)):

The Wall Street Journal does a poll for the last 25 years, where they ask about what things do you value highly? And sadly, in the last 25 years, patriotism, religion, community involvement, having a family have all gone down, particularly over the last four years, I think parallel to the pandemic. The only thing that went up on that list was the value of money, and the irony is if you look at the cross tabs, what's really dropped that, is the huge gap between those 65 and older, and those under the age of 30.

([44:51](#)):

The irony, taking a step further is, for those who've increasingly heard from even more and more adamant Marxists on campus, they're told this lie that somehow market-based capitalism is about obsession with money. When you talk to any entrepreneur, and it's the opposite. It's about service. You service others, and if you do it well with a good product or a good service, you're productive and efficient enough in meeting those needs, you're going to be profitable, but that's not your purpose. And a good entrepreneur knows you care for your employees, you reinvest in your business, you care for your community, because that's where your customer base is at. You care for your country, and you're typically involved in your religious and charitable institutions. The money is the side effect. It's the benefit of doing that. Well, why say all that is, I love your three Cs. To me, there's got to be an applicable connection.

([45:48](#)):

You can't have a world full of people who have degrees in basket weaving unless you're a basket weaver. You've got to have reasonable expectations as to where that career path is going to be, even if it's not exactly the thing you studied.

But how does that lead? So things like, not only knowing the classics, but good writing skills. There's a lot of people I said that I'll hire to almost anything if they can write and speak well along the way. Along

with that though, being involved and engaged in their community and being good citizens, those go back to the fundamentals. Learning the difference between right and wrong. The debate discussion we're having about the reaction to Hamas is just, it's not a difference of opinion. It's the difference between good and evil, and evil cannot prevail.

Michael Poliakoff ([46:34](#)):

Moral clarity is just one of those things that every person should be endowed with.

Scott Walker ([46:40](#)):

The good news is, and you alluded to this in the way that really Ben Shapiro's perfected it for us, it's why not only our lectures are big, but he's perfected it for us. That's why our YouTube numbers have grown so much, because our other speakers largely filed that model. If you disagree, move to the front of the line. But the good news is, I've found, certainly it explains our YouTube growth, but I think even people attending the lectures, there's a hunger out there. There is a hunger out there.

([47:07](#)):

I don't believe that most students instinctively have this disregard that we see from the masses at these protests, at these riots, at these gatherings. I think most students are neither conservative nor liberal. They're just curious, they're trying to figure out life, they're trying to make it through their assignments and their exams, and probably more often than not what their friends are doing this weekend, but they're not locked one way or the other. But they're just curious. But because they're curious, they haven't figured out yet, they often are easily intimidated by voices, be it rambunctious protestors, be it an obnoxious professor, be it a stubborn administrator. And so to the extent that we can break through, either on campus with a lecture, with social media or otherwise, I think we get more people like John Rice-Cameron in the world.

Michael Poliakoff ([47:59](#)):

You said it very well, knowing that you're not alone is so very, very important. We give an award, sometimes more than once a year, but at least once a year, called the Hero of Intellectual Freedom. This has gone to people like Carole Hooven, the brave biologist at Harvard, Eric Smith at York University, Jody Shaw at Smith, Joshua Katz at Princeton, and what I found is that they all know each other, even before we made the award, and they've drawn strength from one another, recognizing that there will be forces around them that are unfair and unjust, and it can be very, very wearing, but knowing there are others who believe in what they do becomes really life sustaining.

Scott Walker ([48:50](#)):

So powerful. We can't have, as much as I like Hillsdale and love the students that are there, we can't have a faculty full of refugees from other universities. We need those voices at all the places you mentioned and some, to have an impact on this country.

Michael Poliakoff ([49:05](#)):

Exactly. Well, governor, this has been a wonderful conversation. If there's anything we forgot to cover, let me know, but I am very eager to send this out to our audience, and please do share it with Young Americans for Freedom, an organization that, as you can tell from my having kept the posters from years ago, I really quite cherish, and very much appreciate your taking the time with us today.

This transcript was exported on Nov 08, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Scott Walker ([49:30](#)):

Glad to be with you and if folks are interested, Y-A-F.org, yaf.org, to learn more about what we're up to.

Michael Poliakoff ([49:37](#)):

Thank you.

Scott Walker ([49:38](#)):

Thank you.