



*Changing lives. Changing communities.*

## **Team Studies in Washington, D.C.**

*-Sarah Schlosser, Executive Director, Leadership Wisconsin*

*Two philosophies and uncovered disconnects raise questions for leaders studying policy through an economic and community development lens*

In the July issue of *Wisconsin Counties* magazine, Mary Hookham shared reflections on studying agriculture and natural resources in Washington D.C. She was among 12 leaders who explored national policy as part of a 2-year experience with Leadership Wisconsin, an educational non-profit affiliated with the University of Wisconsin-Extension. This month, we hear from Becky Nichols and Jen Thatcher.

Nichols and Thatcher were joined in their exploration by Harry Hertel, an attorney with Hertel

& Harless of Eau Claire. You can read about these leaders at <http://leadershipwisconsin.org/programs-events/signature-program>.

In 2018, they will travel to Croatia to examine entrepreneurial leadership from an international perspective. Leadership Wisconsin is currently accepting applications from individuals who would like to join the group. To learn about the International Seminar to Croatia go to <http://leadershipwisconsin.org/events/international-travel-seminar-croatia>.

## **In the Field: Group XVII**

*-Becky Nichols & Jen Thatcher, Group XVII Fellows, Leadership Wisconsin Signature Program*

*Nichols has been an Alderperson in the City of Menasha since 2013. Thatcher resides in Wilson where she offers financial advisement to small businesses and individuals.*

As Leadership Wisconsin Group XVII examined issues relevant to leaders over the next five years, economic and community development emerged as common thread throughout the program's seminars on Education, Criminal Justice, Natural Resources and Food Systems. Based on our shared passion for community and interest in making a positive difference, we are leading this exploration of policy through an economic and

community development lens.

We bring different perspectives and experiences, yet, we agreed to approach the issue with a focus on small business and entrepreneurship, intending to increase our knowledge of: (i) what successful economic and community development looks like, (ii) what drives decision-making; and (iii) how economic and community development are connected and influence people's decisions and daily lives.

During seminars in Wisconsin and D.C. we met with leaders involved in economic and community development efforts. They included elected officials, non-profits, private investors, government agencies and lobbying organizations. Throughout the conversations, several themes emerged around small business supports and entrepreneurship, including access to capital, successful business planning, and using contracts to grow business.

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Almost all leaders we met agreed these challenges face most small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Across all sector visits, it was clear entrepreneurs and small business owners have access to assistance through small business centers scattered across Wisconsin. These services are available to all small businesses—from your corner coffee shop to small manufacturers. Many non-profit organizations in urban centers are also working to connect current and potential business owners with financial resources necessary to start or expand their businesses, counseling to create a successful business plan that often includes an international perspective, and contracts to get businesses off the ground.

We uncovered different philosophies during our visits. The first was the more traditional and widely accepted model of investing in companies, industries, buildings and systems. The other being a shift in thinking towards an incomparable value of investing in people and ideas.

In most cases, the traditional model of investing directly in companies applied to the public sector, operating under the belief that private companies have the ability to put public investments to work through the creation of jobs. This model also infers that the private sector is the primary



*Leadership Wisconsin Group XVII taking advantage of WCA's view of the State Capital*

driver of the overall United States economy. However, this model tends to be risk averse and some would argue the results have been inconclusive.

The second model, investing in people and ideas, is gaining ground in certain parts of the private sector. This model is motivated by the belief that sharing ideas and information leads to innovation, ultimately stimulating positive economic development. This sort of investment requires more risk and is primarily funded by and applied in the private sector. Additionally, it offers entrepreneurs the foundational skills of

running a business while connecting people to counseling, capital and contracts.

It was a huge challenge to weave community and economic development together during our conversations. Community development was seen as something left to individual communities and there were not many connections drawn between the two in our visits.

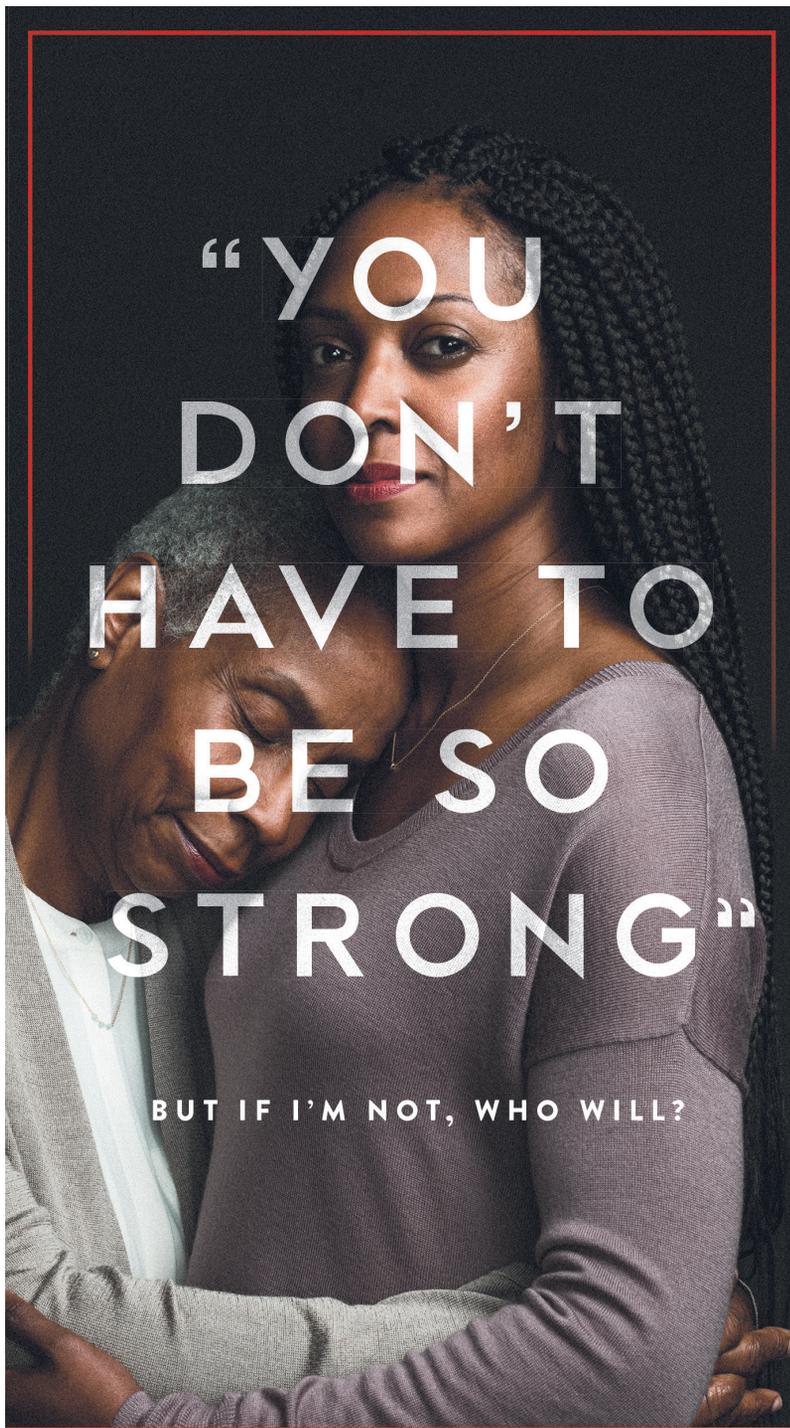
Even in our own experiences, community development and economic development are contemplated separately; community issues are reserved for the nonprofit sector while economic issues are

addressed through public/private sector partnerships. This silo-ing of economic and community development issues results in a disconnect between how policies and initiatives in their respective areas play out in communities and the lives of citizens. How can we work collectively at all levels and across all sectors and government agencies to encourage creative thinking and sharing of ideas/information that results in a more competitive environment?

What can be done? Perhaps all three sectors have a vested interest in creating healthy, vibrant, and sustainable communities. What is each sector's role in making that happen? How can they work collaboratively to achieve community and economic success?

There also appears to be generational and cultural disconnects within communities and economic development circles. These disconnects play out at all levels of government and within organizations. How can leaders initiate conversations within their communities that engage diverse groups around the issues? What strategies could be used within and across communities to create healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities?

It is our hope that our reflections and the questions we pose will help start conversations in your own communities.



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HAVE TO  
BE SO  
STRONG”

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