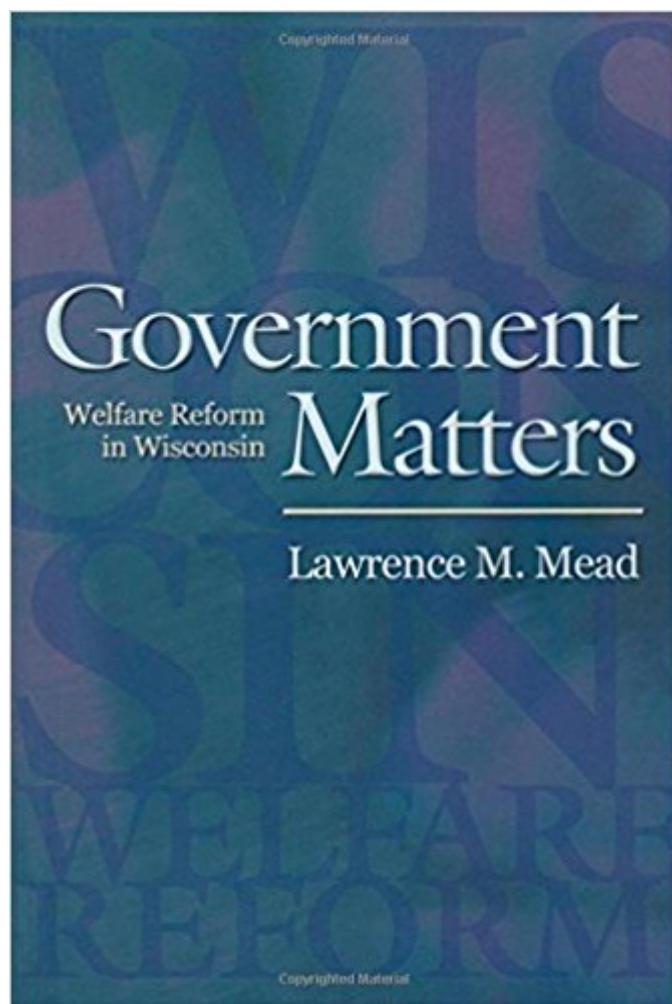


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Government Matters: Welfare Reform In Wisconsin



Synopsis

"Good government" is commonly seen either as a formidable challenge, a distant dream, or an oxymoron, and yet it is the reason why Wisconsin led America toward welfare reform. In this book, Lawrence Mead shows in depth what the Badger State did and--just as important--how it was done. Wisconsin's welfare reform was the most radical in the country, and it began far earlier than that in most other states. It was the achievement of legislators and administrators who were unusually high-minded and effective by national standards. Their decade-long struggle to overhaul welfare is a gripping story that inspires hope for better solutions to poverty nationwide. Mead shows that Wisconsin succeeded--not just because it did the right things, but because its government was unusually masterful. Politicians collaborated across partisan lines, and administrators showed initiative and creativity in revamping welfare. Although Wisconsin erred at some points, it achieved promising policies, which then had good outcomes in terms of higher employment and reduced dependency. Mead also shows that these lessons hold nationally. It is states with strong good-government traditions, such as Wisconsin, that typically have implemented welfare reform best. Thus, solutions to poverty must finally look past policies and programs to the capacities of government itself. Although governmental quality is uneven across the states, it is also improving, and that bodes well for better antipoverty policies in the future.

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Customer Reviews

Winner of the 2005 Louis Brownlow Book Award, National Academy of Public Administration "The

rich detail provided by the author and his investigation into the provision of administrative services make this a useful addition to the literature on welfare reform, state politics, and public policy."--Choice"Government Matters offers an important, in-depth analysis of the government institutions that developed and implemented Wisconsin's welfare reform program. The book will be most attractive to academic audiences, as well as practitioners and researchers who have an interest in administrative structures in general and in Wisconsin's welfare reform efforts in particular."--Susan T. Gooden and Kasey J. Martin, *Public Administration Review*"Lawrence Mead's new book is . . . an especially welcome addition to the literature on contemporary welfare policy. . . . Government Matters provides a valuable portrait of the political and administrative dimensions of putting policy into practice over time. It is an important book that raises vitally important questions about the contemporary American welfare state, governance, and the meaning of citizenship."--Laura S. Jenson, *Perspectives on Politics*"Lawrence Mead's book is an extraordinary chronicle of perhaps the most well known and successful instance of American welfare reform in the 1990s, in Wisconsin. . . . [A] judicious combination of interviews, participant-observation, documentary research, and statistical analysis."--Robert C. Lieberman, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*

"This spectacular volume adds greatly to the breadth of Mead's groundbreaking work on welfare reform. From "Beyond Entitlement" to "The New Politics of Poverty" to "The New Paternalism," Mead has been a step ahead of other welfare researchers in showing the connections between effective government, welfare reform, and increased work and earnings. Now he provides a wonderfully detailed study of these interconnections in a particular state. By studying the politics and legislation, the implementation, and the outcomes of several waves of welfare reform in Wisconsin, Mead produces the most complete and far-reaching account ever written of how good government can improve the lives of the poor."--Ron Haskins, Brookings Institution and the Annie E. Casey Foundation"Larry Mead is a superb scholar and writer. He has written some of the most influential books on social welfare policy in the United States. "Government Matters" represents both excellent scholarship and a valuable and solid contribution to the field of welfare politics and policy, by focusing on how policies are developed and implemented successfully. It deserves to be widely read."--Mark Rom, Georgetown University, author of "Public Spirit in the Thrift Tragedy"This book is extremely important not just to one field but to many: welfare policy, public management, political science, and policy analysis. It is just outstanding in every way. It is a masterly synthesis of complex ideas and complex bodies of evidence. It makes use of both quantitative and qualitative evidence,

which is highly unusual. It brings together history and more traditional social science. It is both descriptive/analytical and prescriptive/normative. The prose is clear and simple."--Eugene Bardach, University of California, Berkeley, author of "A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis

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