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A Life Lived “in the Theater in the Round”: An Interview with Walter John Chilsen

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Introduction

On July 28, 2009, former political reporter John Powell interviewed former Wisconsin State Senator Walter John Chilsen for the Legislative Reference Bureau’s oral history project. The two were both former “newsmen” at WSAU-TV in Wausau, where Chilsen announced the news from 1954 to 1964 and earned a reputation as “the Walter Cronkite of central Wisconsin.” Following his career in broadcasting, Chilsen served in the Wisconsin State Senate from 1967 to 1990. This publication traces Chilsen’s path from bombardier to broadcaster to state senator, and shares his remembrances and reflections on public service.

Childhood in Merrill

Walter John Chilsen was born on November 11, 1923, and grew up in Merrill, Wisconsin, where the Great Depression shaped his childhood. Friends and neighbors were either unemployed or earned very low wages. Although he “wore a few more hand-me-downs than ordinary,” his family was “wealthy by many standards, because we had enough to eat and plenty of heat in the wintertime.” Chilsen’s father, Walter Sr., owned the *Merrill Daily Herald* and accepted payments however people could make them:

People couldn’t pay the subscription to the paper. Farmers, especially, often would bring produce or wood. We had a wood-burning furnace; they’d [deliver] wood to our house and keep their subscription to the newspaper in that fashion.

Unsurprisingly, his father had a “tough time” paying his employees, Chilsen said. Once, his father took the entirety of 12-year-old Walter John’s savings account—about \$35—to meet his payroll.

But his father’s position meant that Walter John had the opportunity to meet many Wisconsin politicians when they visited the *Daily Herald* offices. Three governors came to the Chilsen home: Walter Kohler Sr., Walter Kohler Jr., and Walter Goodland. “Politics was discussed in our home all the time,” Chilsen explained. Walter Sr. was a Stalwart Republican and voiced frequent criticism of President Franklin Roosevelt.¹ Chilsen wryly remarked that, while he was too young to appreciate the nuances of politics in the 1930s, he heard often from his father that “all those who were holding high office at the time were the enemy of the people.”

Service in World War II

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Chilsen was a student at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. Until that point, Americans were divided on whether the United States

1. In the early twentieth century, the Republican Party consisted of two separate factions called the Stalwarts and the Progressives.

should enter the war. Many people, he recalled, were inclined to say “let the Europeans fight their own wars,” wary of yet another “war to end all wars” that would not live up to its name. But enthusiasm for the war effort intensified in the wake of December 7, 1941. That evening, Chilsen was supposed to sing Handel’s *Messiah* with the Lawrence choir: “It was extremely ironic to be singing about peace on earth and goodwill toward men,” Chilsen said, when he knew that he and others would soon be caught up in a global conflict.

Chilsen resolved to enlist. Looking back, he explained why he sought specifically to join the Army Air Corps and convinced his brother Pat to join him:

To enlist in the Army or the Marines . . . and to get into hand-to-hand combat or trench warfare . . . just had no appeal to me. I couldn’t imagine shooting somebody else with a rifle if you saw them standing in front of you. I imagine you develop that as you see your friends being shot, and it’s a self-defense thing, maybe—get them before they get you. But I was pleased that all of our targets were military targets.

After being called up in December 1942, Chilsen underwent bombardier training in Victorville, California, and aerial gunnery training in Las Vegas, Nevada. There, he discovered he was “an automatic expert with a shotgun”:

They were teaching us how to lead a target, and I got 18 out of 25, which qualified me for a free dinner at the only nightclub in Las Vegas at the time—and a blind date with a WAC.

Chilsen described the date with the WAC—a member of the Women’s Auxiliary Corps—as “just a long goodbye.”

Another highlight of training was spending time with his Lawrence classmate, Bob Curry, although the good-natured friends caused some trouble. In one instance, Walter John attempted to deploy humor with an officer during bunk inspection:

You had to have your footlocker and everything just so, your clothes in a certain place, and your bed had to be made in a certain fashion. . . . Well, he looked at my stuff and he came up to me, nose to nose, almost literally, and said “Mr. Chilsen! . . . Where is the U.S. supposed to be?” Well, on the blanket there’s a *U* and an *S*. The open end of the *U* is supposed to be toward the pillow. And immediately when he asked the question, I realized that my blanket was upside down. How am I going to get out of this? I thought, well, maybe a little humor will apply. And he said, “Where’s the U.S. supposed to be?” And I said, “A little bit south of Canada, sir!” And Curry standing rigidly at attention went “Pfft!” And [the officer] said “Mr. Chilsen, you’re going to be marching tours this weekend.” That meant with a heavy overcoat, and a gas mask, a backpack and all that—for [roughly] seven hours you had to march up and down in front of the administration building. “You’re going to be marching tours this weekend, and so is your friend who thinks you’re so funny!”

Chilsen eventually went overseas to fly B-24s over Guam, Saipan, and Okinawa. He shared the story of an especially dangerous mission that ended in a crash landing near

Saipan. Shortly after dropping antipersonnel bombs over Iwo Jima, his crew's plane lost hydraulic control, making it difficult for the pilot to land. Rather than bail out, Chilsen suggested attaching parachutes to the tail guns and using them as brakes to slow the plane as it touched down. But as the pilot attempted to land, the plane "did a cartwheel," and something exploded:

I woke up deep in the water and swam to the top. I was not a very good swimmer. I looked around and there was a life raft. . . . [I] found out many years later that a plane flying with us had dropped the life raft down for us. And then I swam to it—and it was upside down, but we didn't bother turning it over—and dragged it around to the other people. Of the crew, we had 11 members—one person extra riding with us at the time. He was never seen, and two of our teammates were never seen. So eight of the ten survived.

Although he did not mention it during the interview, Chilsen received the Purple Heart for helping his crewmates after the crash. Together, they flew several more missions before their pilot became incapacitated from injuries sustained that day. Meanwhile, enthusiasm for the war lagged back home as Americans heard "bad news" from Europe and learned the terrible extent of casualties at Iwo Jima. Reflecting on the battle, Chilsen recognized it as "a terrible thing for soldiers on both sides." He sympathized with fellow soldiers who were traumatized by their experiences in Japan, but also expressed sympathy for Japanese civilians upon whom American bombs had wrought widespread death and devastation. American leaders, he surmised, had become convinced that these civilians would have taken up arms against invading Allied troops, "So they justified the killing of civilians in that fashion." Asked if, given the opportunity, he would travel to Japan, he replied:

I don't have any recriminations. I apologized one time to a group of Japanese people that I met who were obviously on tour, maybe at the Milwaukee Museum or something like that, for the dropping of the atomic bomb. I cheered along with everybody else, I guess, when I heard about it when we were on Okinawa, because that clearly meant the end of the war. But in truth, negotiations to end the war were already going on. I don't think it was necessary to drop the two bombs on populated areas.

Returning stateside and being "bitten by the bug"

After World War II ended, Chilsen returned to Lawrence University to complete his degree. He quickly became interested in acting; as he put it, "I got bitten by the bug." Ted Cloak of Northwestern University served as his mentor, encouraging him to perform in a summer theater program in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Leading parts eluded him, but Chilsen's deep, baritone voice secured him roles playing older men.

Eventually, Chilsen returned to Merrill, began selling insurance, and even found a

way to perform, doing part-time work reciting “syrupy poems [set] to music” on a radio station owned by Congressman Alvin O’Konski. But “the bug” still bothered him, prompting his mentor to offer some advice: “Well, you better do something about it, or it’ll bother you all your life.” So Chilsen joined Cloak at a summer theater program at Northwestern University, and subsequently moved to California with an eye toward working in Hollywood.

Ultimately, however, love drew him back to Wisconsin. Before she had even met Walter John, a young woman named Rose Edl had fallen for him. Recalling the poems he read aloud on the radio, Chilsen explained: “My wife heard that and fell in love with my voice before she ever met me. So that worked out pretty well.” Rose followed Walter John to California, where she worked as an X-ray technician, and together they returned to Wisconsin and married in September 1952.

The Walter Cronkite of central Wisconsin

Upon returning home, Chilsen resumed his work for Congressman O’Konski, doing “rudimentary” news reporting for the radio station:

I would watch the Army-McCarthy hearings on television at my folks’ home, take notes, and then run back to the radio station and give a report of what I’d seen on television.

Building on that experience, he became a news anchor for WSAU-TV, or Channel 7, the first TV station in Wausau. The station first went live in October 1954: “I carry with great pride the distinction of making the opening announcement putting Channel 7 on the air.” From that moment, Chilsen became “the Walter Cronkite of central Wisconsin,” announcing the news from 1954 to 1964. He also became forever known as Walter John:

When I went on the air, they thought that Walter Chilsen didn’t seem to have enough authoritative ring to it, but Walter John Chilsen [did]. And in my family, I grew up as Walter John. My father was Walt—W. B.—and he didn’t like Junior, didn’t like Wally, so I became Walter John. . . . So they decided Walter John Chilsen had a nice [ring]—[like] John Cameron Swayze.²

At WSAU-TV, Chilsen served as a “one-man news department,” responsible for gathering the news as well as reporting it. Often he would “rip and read stories” from the United Press or Associated Press. Sometimes he even shot footage on scene for local news stories. In one instance, his haste to get a scoop spoiled his efforts completely: having heard about a fire at Powell’s Nightclub in Antigo, Chilsen grabbed a camera and “dashed

2. John Cameron Swayze anchored the NBC evening news throughout the 1950s and became “a household name in the early years of television.” Randy Kennedy, “[John Cameron Swayze, 89, Journalist and TV Pitchman](#),” *New York Times*, August 17, 1995.

over and shot all kinds of great shots of the fire.” There was just one problem—he had not loaded film in the camera.

Another memorable blunder occurred after Chilsen’s producer instructed him to abbreviate the local newscast to make time for the national news with Douglas Edwards:

[It] would be news, weather, sports in fifteen minutes rather than in a half hour. So they would give me a windup, and then a cut. “But I’ve got all these great news stories to read yet, John!” You know how that is. And I tried to rush them in, but then they said, “That’s it. Cut it.” So I said, “Goodnight.” . . . And then I looked up and there was the [station logo], and then somebody said a station ID, WSAU-TV Channel 7, and then we went blank again. And I finally said, “Now what the hell kind of crap is that!” And my microphone was still on. Well, the full switchboard lit up. You can’t imagine the vulgar things that they thought they heard me saying.

As punishment, Chilsen was “sent to [the] purgatory of radio” for a week. From his vantage point, the language viewers thought to be vulgar in those days eventually became the norm. Throughout the interview, Chilsen underscored the differences he perceived between contemporary news media and “old time news shows” of the post-war period: “[Current television news programs] are merely seeking the lowest common denominator and trying to get a larger and larger audience.” In contrast, he described his decision not to break the story of the gruesome murders committed by Ed Gein near Plainfield:

I thought, “A lot of people are going to be sitting around their dinner table watching the news.” And I thought it was improper for me to be exposing them to that kind of a gory news story. So I waited until ten o’clock. . . . So I could’ve had a big scoop and gotten credit for it, I suppose. I thought it was improper.

Chilsen looked to Walter Cronkite as a model of such discretion and considered him “the epitome of commentary and reporting excellence.” In his view, Cronkite knew when to hold back and when to “[stick] his neck out” by offering political commentary:

On the news program, [he] made political commentary after visiting Vietnam, [saying] that it was time to get out—that it was at best a stalemate and not doing the country any good, and victory was impossible, and so forth. And reportedly [President] Lyndon Johnson saw him say that, and said, “If I’ve lost Walter Cronkite, I’ve lost Middle America.” . . . I had such a warm feeling and great respect for Cronkite that I thought it made sense for him to say that. [Some] people were critical of him not just sticking to the news line, but making political commentary within the news. But I thought it was proper.

This sense of propriety, as well as his skill as an announcer, eventually earned Chilsen induction to the Wisconsin Broadcasters Hall of Fame.³

3. Wisconsin Broadcasting Museum, “[Walter John Chilsen](#),” accessed June 19, 2020.

First foray into politics

In 1964, a group of businessmen encouraged Chilsen to run against Assemblyman Ben Riehle, an “old-time dairy man” and the district’s longtime Democratic incumbent. But he declined—a decision that proved lucky, as 1964 became “the year of a debacle” for Republicans. With Barry Goldwater as their presidential candidate, the party performed poorly across the ballot.

Just two years later, Chilsen recognized a more favorable opportunity to run for office when incumbent Senator Charles Smith announced that he would not seek reelection in 1966. “There was that vacancy,” Chilsen recalled simply, and “I talked it over with my wife.” In short order, Chilsen launched his campaign, won the primary, and beat out his Democratic opponent. All told, the campaign cost about \$15,000—which, in those days, covered “a few billboards and some radio spots, maybe a little TV.”

During his first term, Chilsen chaired an ambitious committee that sought to identify causes of civil unrest in Wisconsin and propose policy solutions. The 1969 advisory committee was established as a companion to the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, established by President Lyndon Johnson in July 1967 in the wake of civil unrest in American cities like Newark and Detroit.⁴ The so-called Kerner Commission—nicknamed for its chairman, Illinois Governor Otto Kerner—concluded in March 1968 that “segregation and poverty” were responsible for the “chain reaction” of unrest within black communities the previous summer.⁵

The Wisconsin Legislature created an advisory committee to study some of the problems the report had identified, such as unemployment and inadequate housing. Chilsen was tapped to lead the committee and collaborated with, among others, Bonnie Reese, who was a staff attorney at Legislative Council at the time and later its executive director. The committee members toured the state together and took testimony from elected officials and local leaders. However, their efforts culminated in disappointment for Chilsen, as the legislature failed to take up the committee’s recommendations:

We put out a report making various recommendations of what we thought [was] wrong: housing recommendations, wage recommendations, [and] so forth. And our report was given to the legislature and the Legislative Council study committee. And bills were drafted, presented to the legislature, went to committee, and nothing happened. Nothing happened. And, of course, it was very disappointing.

4. Lyndon B. Johnson, “[Executive Order 11365—Establishing a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders](#),” July 29, 1967, accessed from the American Presidency Project at the University of California–Santa Barbara.

5. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, “[Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: Summary of Report](#),” March 1968, accessed from the Eisenhower Foundation. For concise context, see Alice George, “[The 1968 Kerner Commission Got It Right, But Nobody Listened](#),” *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 1, 2018.

Still, the National Conference of State Legislatures recognized the committee with a meaningful award. And over the long term, Chilsen's disappointment slowly dissipated as he realized that many of the committee's recommendations became law in some way, shape, or form. He learned that politics is sometimes a long game.

In the years following, Chilsen would gain "a lot of notoriety," as he put it, for his attempts to pass obscenity statutes and to raise the drinking age. He and Powell discussed the state's drinking culture at length, and Chilsen reasserted the importance of reducing alcohol abuse in Wisconsin, especially drunk driving.

Political principles

Chilsen roundly criticized politicians who kept their eyes perpetually trained on reelection and thus voted in favor of lobbyists' interests. Instead, he emphasized his commitment to his constituents' wishes, without regard for his own reelection. Many times over, this strategy resulted in his electoral success:

I really prided myself in trying to be a representative of what I thought the people wanted. I recall an incident where we were castigated by the Republican Party for doing just that. As I recall, it was a budget bill vote, and I think it was Tiny Krueger and [a few other Republicans] and myself . . . who voted for the Democrat budget that year. And then in the following Republican convention in Milwaukee, there was a resolution passed castigating us for deserting true Republican conservative principals. Didn't make much difference. I think I easily won reelection the next time.

In fact, Chilsen suspected that his eventual loss to Democratic challenger Russ Decker in 1990 resulted from his failure to do what his constituents wanted:

I probably would have been able to beat Decker in 1990 had I, in the 1988 session, followed my own instincts and what the people wanted and voted for a bill to raise the minimum wage in Wisconsin. I thought about that a lot. There was a lot of pressure on both sides—a lot of store owners saying this was going to raise their costs, you know. Even though they were already paying more than minimum wage, it would put the pressure for them to pay more than they were paying at the present time. So I came very close, but I voted against it. . . . I regret doing that.

From Chilsen's vantage point, Decker eventually fell into the trap of owing "allegiance" to one particular group—specifically, voting too often in the interests of the Tavern League. That said, Chilsen conceded that "Russ might fire back and say that I was always voting for Wisconsin Manufacturers Association things." Asked to offer advice to future legislators, Chilsen counseled them "not to sell your soul to those powerful groups."

Stumbles and missteps

Several times during the interview, Chilsen paused to acknowledge and reflect on missteps in his political career. Most notably, he reflected on the effect of overconfidence on two failed election bids. Not long after winning election to the state senate, Chilsen ran for Congress in 1969 when President Richard Nixon appointed incumbent Melvin Laird as his secretary of defense. In the Republican primary, Chilsen faced healthy competition from Hyde Murray, an attorney with ample experience on a congressional committee:

We thought he was running a very effective campaign, and I think that was enough to scare us into running a good campaign as well.

Chilsen prevailed, but on the advice of others, refused his primary opponent's offer to help in the general election:

Murray offered to help, and unfortunately, some of my political advisors said, "Tell him to hightail it back to Washington. We don't need his help. We don't want his help." And that was a serious mistake, I think, on my part. I should not have allowed that to happen.

The general election largely revolved around a debate over price supports for milk. Democrat Dave Obey campaigned on a plan that Chilsen considered popular among farmers but wholly impractical. But concerns for practicality fell by the wayside as farmers "came storming out of the barns" to vote for his Democratic opponent on April 1, 1969, or as Chilsen put it, "April Fool's Day, which is what it turned out to be for me." He lost to Obey on a vote of 63,567 to 59,512.⁶

Looking back, Chilsen surmised that "overconfidence" had also proven fatal in the 1990 election that unseated him. He guessed that, above all, certainty that he would win created a sense of complacency among his loyal voters. As he put it, "A lot of people literally don't go and vote if they don't think [that you] need their votes." Beyond that, he slipped on fundraising and spending in the final lap of the race:

Dave Helbach was the majority leader at the time, and Dave and I were quite close—good friends. He was not helping me in getting reelected, but he did pop his head in the door one time and say, "Hey, your opponent's out of money, you know." That was a week or so before. So that made me increasingly confident. But I think Dave Obey probably got some money to Russ Decker in the last week, so he poured it on where I was slacking off.

The result of this "slacking off" was plain to see: "He whooped me!" In truth, Helbach edged out Chilsen by fewer than 700 votes, or 24,587 to 23,947.⁷

6. Rupert Theobald and Patricia Robbins, eds., *The State of Wisconsin Blue Book, 1970* (Madison, WI: Legislative Reference Bureau), 814.

7. Lawrence Barish and Rupert Theobald, *The State of Wisconsin Blue Book, 1991–1992* (Madison, WI: Legislative Reference Bureau), 912.

In other instances, Chilsen blamed certain mistakes on naïveté rather than overconfidence. As an example, he cited his support for expanding opportunities to gamble in the state:

That is one thing I wish I would've changed. I was instrumental in getting the law changed that has brought about all this gambling. . . . When the pressure grew, then, for us to have gambling at racetracks, I thought a couple of racetracks in Wisconsin would be all right. One in southern Wisconsin, perhaps one in northern Wisconsin. That'll be just fine. So we allowed racetrack pari-mutuel betting. Then, of course, we never got a racetrack in Wisconsin except dog racing, and they've been successful. And then the racetracks now have slot machines and other types of gambling. . . . I confess now that I was naïve. I should've known better.

Money in politics

The role of money in politics changed dramatically over the course of Chilsen's tenure in the senate. As he noted, his first race cost about \$15,000, and for that amount, "You could run an effective campaign . . . and be successful." Later, he recalled, Democratic Majority Leader Tim Cullen predicted, "Someday, some candidate is going to spend \$100,000 to win a seat." Both he and Cullen eventually witnessed races that surpassed that seemingly astronomical benchmark.

As the importance of money grew, Chilsen's views on money gradually changed:

I had always said, as long as there's a good reporting of who gives the money, then the people can make up their minds. And I've changed my mind on that, because people don't notice who's giving the money, even when it's reported. They don't study the contribution list. And in addition to that, we have not only Republicans campaigning and spending money and Democrats campaigning and spending money, but you've got various associations . . . spending millions of dollars in these campaigns. And people don't know where that money comes from.

Asked if he would support campaign finance reform of some kind, Chilsen answered as follows:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And the people in office, of course, don't want that. . . . "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." You've heard that quote. That's what's going on in Madison. That's what's going on in Washington. I think our democratic process is in real danger. A lot of people have been saying, "I'm not going to vote because they're going to do what they want anyway." I used to decry that, but I've come to understand that feeling now when they read some of the bad things that legislators are doing.

He added that meaningful change would require an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but that such a change would entail an uphill battle "because all of those people who

benefit now would be spending money to try to defeat a constitutional change.” But such a battle would be necessary “to make Wisconsin a much more representative democracy, the way it was.”

Friendships

Chilsen spoke at length about his friend, Senator Clifford “Tiny” Krueger. In his youth, Krueger had worked in the circus as a “fat boy”—an experience that transformed him from a shy teenager into a confident young man who got along with most anyone he met. As a legislator, Senator Krueger bragged that he represented people like himself and his former circus comrades—i.e., those who could not afford to hire lobbyists to defend their interests in Madison. That approach secured his reelection many times over—as did some effective floor speeches:

He often would give a speech on the senate floor severely attacking Milwaukee and the representatives, senators who represented Milwaukee—how they were all leeches and stealing all the money from the taxpayers of his poor northern Wisconsin district. And after he’d rant and rave like that for 20 minutes or so, one time he sat down and said, “There, that assures my reelection.”

Chilsen described him as being a “liberal Republican,” and added drolly, “There was such a thing.” But he emphasized that friendships in the legislature transcended politics in those days. As an example, he described his commutes back and forth to Madison with Krueger and other colleagues:

He would usually pick me up at the edge of Wausau, or he would come right to my home, pick me up. So we rode back and forth. . . . And sometimes we had Tony Earl and Dave Helbach in the car as well. That shows how there was camaraderie, you know, in those days—even though you might castigate each other on the senate floor or in the assembly. When Tony was governor, I worked against him, of course, but we are fast friends to this day.

Likewise, Chilsen and Democratic Senator Fred Risser “fought tremendous battles on the senate floor” but remained “close friends” long after.

Partisanship

“There was partisanship when I served,” Chilsen explained, “but not to the degree it exists now.” As a case in point, he noted how certain members of the majority party did not necessarily seek to block legislation simply because it was authored by members of the minority party:

Bless his soul, Allen Busby, longtime senator from Milwaukee, as chairman of the judiciary committee, he would hold a hearing on every bill that came to his committee.

And he would report out every bill in his committee. Never kept a single bill out. He was chastised by the majority leader, Jerris Leonard. Bob Warren would try to work on him. But he said, “No,” he’s going to report every bill out. And that’s another thing that doesn’t happen. Bills go to committees now, and they never come out of committees.

Asked to explain the “venomous” partisanship he observed by the late 2000s, Chilsen suggested that legislators no longer enjoyed the same camaraderie as he had with Risser, Earl, and Helbach:

There was a lot of co-mingling then—good socializing between the two parties. I think when that was outlawed, destroyed, that that was part and parcel of the lack of communication between the two parties. I don’t know whether that itself is not the solution. Maybe they should go off at least on a sabbatical—on a retreat together and spend a weekend together and talk about issues, and talk about what could be done to change the animosity that exists, since it’s not only a partisan animosity, it’s gotten to be a personal animosity where the Democrat leader seems to hate the Republican leader. You can’t have good government when that is the case.

This kind of animosity led Chilsen to decide against returning to politics:

Some people somewhat facetiously come and say, “Why don’t you run?” You know, “Things are terrible in Madison now, why don’t you run for [election again]?” I know they’re joking, but I tell them, “No thanks. I wouldn’t want to be down there; the way that venomous pit [is] now would not be near the fun it was and not near the pride that you could take in serving.”

Conclusion

Walter John Chilsen seemed to wear many different hats during his lifetime: bombardier, actor, broadcaster, salesman, and legislator. But to Chilsen, all these roles were interconnected. Although he did not succeed in acting—the “bug” that bit the young World War II veteran—he reveled in a career that placed him before the public in other ways:

That didn’t work out, but I wound up in radio and television, which certainly was putting your name and face before the public. And then certainly in running for public office, the same thing. So I wound up in the theater in the round, as they say: the senate. And I enjoyed every minute of it.

Chilsen passed away on December 25, 2018. During the 2019 legislative session, he was honored and remembered by his colleagues in the Wisconsin Legislature as “a kind and thoughtful leader, a skilled orator, and a consensus builder.”⁸ ■

8. [2019 Wis. SJR 4](#).