



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on September 1, 2011

More Wisconsin Teachers Opt for Retirement

Wisconsin public employees unions were not able to stop Governor Walker's plan to remove benefits from the items subject to collective bargaining. The unions first persuaded Wisconsin state senators to flee to Illinois, so that a quorum could not be formed to conduct business on that issue in the Wisconsin legislature. Then these unions thronged Madison, trying to intimidate Republican state legislators; these legislators, however, refused to be intimidated. State Supreme Court elections, which once were pro forma referenda on the ethics and competence of justices, was transformed into an ideological policy issue in which Judge Prosser was targeted for elimination because it was felt that he would uphold the constitutionality of Walker's reforms; that failed too. Finally, public employees unions tried to recall enough Republican state senators to tip control of the state senate back to Democrats; that failed too.



Ironically, the impact of the governor's reform, which was intended to preserve teachers' jobs by reducing the cost of teacher positions, has been positive. Nevertheless, many Wisconsin teachers according, to the Associated Press, [have decided to retire](#) — twice as many as in a typical year. Ginny Fleck, a 69-year-old teacher German teacher in Green Bay, explained her choice: "It wouldn't make sense for me to teach one more year and basically lose \$8,000," adding: "All of the leadership is gone. Some of these younger people who come in need help from the older teachers and they are gone. Plus, the morale is really down."

Fleck's salary at her retirement was \$60,000 a year. (For comparison, the [median salary for a teacher](#) in Los Angeles is \$49,474; in New York City, it is \$50,279.) C.J. Peters, another Green Bay teacher who has 24 years of experience, also decided to retire early. She cautioned that it will be hard to replace her: "You can't get experience through a book, you've got to teach. I think a lot of talent has been lost."

About ten percent of the public school teachers in Beloit are retiring this year. School Superintendent Steve McNeal said: "It's a significant loss to our system; it's a significant loss to education. We lost a whole bunch of talent and a whole bunch of talent all at the same time. It disrupted the normal cycle." He noted, however, that the retirements had actually saved the school system \$920,000 a year. Higher education has also had an increase in retirements as the University of Wisconsin reported a jump in retirements from 480 to 1,061.



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Throughout state government, the Wisconsin Department of Administration noted, retirements have been growing. Many of those positions may not be filled. Carla Vigue of that agency said: "Each agency is looking at the vacancies created by retirements — case by case — and making decisions based on the needs of the agency, as well as with an eye toward keeping costs down for taxpayers."

In fact, retirement of state employees is one of the easiest ways of addressing state budgetary problems — and states, in general, are suffering from drastic long term budgetary hurdles. Teachers, like the vast majority of state employees around the country, have merit protection and, in the case of employees who belong to public employees unions, additional layers of armor from collective bargaining agreements.

In practice this means that indifferent or incompetent employees, simply by staying in their protected state job, acquire seniority and promotions regardless of whether they are doing a good job or not. The raucous fight by public employees unions in Wisconsin when Governor Walker wanted to simply remove one item from collective bargaining is an indication of how much these employees rely upon raw power and how little on genuine worth in a market economy.

The long term fiscal consequences for Wisconsin are positive when teachers and professors — a considerable number of whom are not very good at their jobs — choose to retire. Personnel costs are the principle costs at virtually every level of government. When teachers who have done the same job for decades leave, it may require that school administrators to be creative and consider other ways of instruction, but that often produces genuine innovation and improvements. That would be a very good thing for the state, if the genuine concern was the education of the children of Wisconsin.



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