



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 4, 2011

Runaway Wisconsin Democrats Face Trouble As Layoffs Loom

Democratic Wisconsin state senators who fled to Illinois in an effort to block a vote on Republicans' budget-repair proposal could be in hot water if they don't come back to work — the legislature voted to hold them in contempt and send law enforcement out to get them. Government-employee layoffs are also imminent if the missing State Senators do not return, according to Gov. Scott Walker.



GOP State Senators signed an order on March 3 stating that, if the Democratic legislators did not return by 4 p.m., they would be in contempt. None of the Democrats in hiding showed up.

The order, signed by Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald in what the Associated Press [called](#) "dramatic fashion," would also empower law enforcement to detain the missing Senators and bring them to the Capitol. The Sergeant at Arms is [authorized](#) to "take any and all necessary steps, with or without force, and with or without the assistance of law enforcement officers, by warrant or other legal process, as he may deem necessary in order to bring that senator to the Senate chambers so that the Senate may convene with a quorum of no less than 20 senators," according to the order.

Of course, Wisconsin law enforcement does not have jurisdiction in Illinois. But if the senators reenter Wisconsin, they could be detained. The state constitution does allow the legislature to force lawmakers to attend. But, how exactly that should be enforced has caused some confusion. At least one law firm in the state [suggested](#) that using police to "arrest" the senators would not be legitimate, though Republicans insist that compelling attendance using the police would not constitute an actual arrest.

At least 20 Senators must be present to form a quorum and vote on fiscal issues. Republicans only have 19, and all 14 Democrats have been missing for weeks, stalling the proposal that Gov. Walker insists is urgently needed to balance the budget and save government jobs.

"We simply cannot have democracy be held hostage because the minority wants to prove a point," [explained](#) Senate Majority Leader Fitzgerald, who said the Democrats' stunt had forced his hand. "They're insulting the very fabric of our representative democracy."

Democrat Senators, meanwhile, have [suggested](#) that finding police officers willing to obey the orders would be difficult. Even though they are largely exempted from proposed changes, many Wisconsin cops actually support the protestors. Over the weekend, more than a few of them [defied](#) orders to remove squatters from the Capitol, joining the demonstrations instead.

And orders to bring the runaway Democrats back to work may face similar problems. "The thought of using law enforcement officers to exercise force in order to achieve a political objective is insanely wrong and Wisconsin sorely needs reasonable solutions and not potentially dangerous political



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theatrics," [said](#) union boss Jim Palmer, director of the Wisconsin Professional Police Association, in a statement. Palmer was also the instigator of the [problems with police](#) over the weekend.

Republicans have tried numerous options to bring back the fugitive Democrats including an end to direct-deposit paychecks and the possibility of fines. So far, nothing has worked as leftist groups across the country continue to [encourage](#) the legislators to stand firm. Petitions to recall some of the runaway Democrats have also been circulating for weeks.

Gov. Walker has [indicated](#) a willingness to work and discuss the issues with Democrats, but emphasized again recently that he would not compromise on the essential reforms he says are necessary to save the state budget. Calling the escape to Illinois "outrageous" in an interview with Reuters news service, Walker [noted](#): "The crisis that is occurring is for one reason and one reason only - because the 14 left and abandoned their jobs."

Adding to the pressure on missing Democrats is the prospect of massive job losses among government employees - possibly more than 10,000. "I pushed it off as long as I could because I do not want to have layoffs," Gov. Walker [said](#). But if at least one of the 14 lawmakers does not return to work, Walker noted that he would be forced to start sending out notices as early as March 4.

Photo: Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald signs orders finding the 14 missing Democrats in contempt, at the state Capitol in Madison, Wis., March 3, 2011: AP Images

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