



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 25, 2011

Wisconsin Assembly Passes Budget Repair Bill

The vote took place after three excruciating days of debate in the Assembly. The climate leading up to the bill's passage in the Assembly chamber was highly contentious, as Democrats opposed to the bill launched a filibuster, put forth a barrage of amendments, delivered long speeches, and often walked out during proceedings. Debate lasted more than 60 hours, with 15 Democrats still waiting to speak at the time that the voting began on Friday, approximately 1 a.m.



Republican Speaker Pro Tem Bill Kramer opened up the roll and closed it within seconds, leaving the Democrats confused in its wake. Just 13 of the 38 Democrats were able to vote in time. When the vote ended, Republicans immediately marched out of the chamber, as they were taunted by cries of "Shame!" and "Cowards!" from Democrats.

Democratic Representative Jon Richards of Milwaukee said of the vote, "What a terrible, terrible day for Wisconsin. I am incensed. I am shocked."

Though Democrats feel slighted, it was imperative for the bill to pass by Friday, according to Governor Walker, or Wisconsin would have missed out on the opportunity to refinance \$165 million of its debt and would have been forced to begin layoffs.

The vote now moves to the Wisconsin Senate, but the Senate Democrats have fled to Illinois in order to prevent a vote on the bill (their absence denies a quorum). Senate Republicans went so far as to send out state troopers in search of the Democrats at their homes for the purpose of bringing them to the Senate chamber, but to no avail.

Democratic Senator Jon Erpenbach has stated that he will not return until Governor Walker proves willing to compromise, and that all 14 Democratic Senators remain outside of Wisconsin.

"It's not so much the Democrats holding things up," Erpenbach, despite the Senate Democrats' attempt to stop a vote by not showing up. "It's really a matter of Governor Walker holding things up." Wisconsin's Assembly Speaker Jeff Fitzgerald, who is a Republican, said in response to the Senate Dems' actions, "I applaud the Democrats in the Assembly for earnestly debating this bill and urge their counterparts in the state Senate to return to work and do the same."

If passed by both legislative chambers and enacted into law, the bill would reduce the state's \$137 million deficit, as well as the projected \$3.6 billion shortfall in the upcoming 2011-2013 budget. Much of the opposition to the measure is against language requiring public workers to contribute more to their pension and healthcare benefits as well as restricting union collective bargaining.



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The Blaze explains the opposition. “Democrats and unions see the measure as an attack on workers’ rights and an attempt to cripple union support for Democrats. Union leaders say they would make pension and health care concessions if they can keep their bargaining rights, but Walker has refused to compromise.” Proponents of the bill, however, recognize its [cost-saving](#) benefits and applaud that the measure will help to loosen the [monopolistic grip](#) of public-employee unions.

Photo of Wisconsin state capitol building: AP Images

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