



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 7, 2011

Wisconsin Recall Efforts Gain Traction on Both Sides

Recall efforts first started after all 14 Democrat state Senators [fled](#) Wisconsin on February 17 to prevent the 20-senator quorum necessary for voting on fiscal matters. Republicans and Tea Party activists almost immediately started circulating petitions to unseat as many of the runaway lawmakers as possible. And they're making progress.



Likely in response to recall efforts against the missing Democrats, a coalition of socialists, unions, and other leftists recently started its own campaign to target Republican state Senators. All weekend long, [according](#) to the *New York Times*, anti-reform activists worked to gather signatures against the GOP lawmakers. But the process is hard and complicated.

To be eligible for a recall election, state Senators and other elected officials in Wisconsin must have served for at least one year. That means Gov. Walker — the primary target of socialist and government-union rage — cannot be recalled until next year. But at least eight Republicans and eight Democrats in the state Senate are eligible — almost half of that body's membership. And all of them are now in crosshairs.

Depending on how many people voted in the last gubernatorial election, those seeking to recall the state Senators will have to gather between around 10,000 and over 20,000 signatures in each district — 25 percent of the total number of votes cast in the most recent election. On top of that, they have only 60 days to do it.

And while the requirements are considered an extremely high barrier — recalls are supposed to be rare — analysts and party bosses on both sides [expect](#) that, at least in some cases, the campaigns will succeed. If they do, the targeted officials will have to face reelection before their terms officially end, assuming enough signatures are deemed valid.

"A lot of effort is going to be expended by both sides. You'll see national money. It's going to generate a lot of passion on both sides," Wisconsin GOP executive director Mark Jefferson [told](#) the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. "We're having a serious debate in this state about some very serious issues."

And some of the people leading the recall agree — there are very serious issues and the stakes are high. "This is an egregious act by 14 senators in the government who have chosen to leave and not do the business of the state," spokesman Dan Hunt of the campaign to recall Democrat state Senator Robert Wirch [told](#) *The Badger Herald*, noting that thousands of signatures had already been collected. "I would never be leading this recall effort if he wouldn't have left the state."

Some out-of-state groups have been involved in the recall campaigns against state Senators from both



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parties. The Utah-based American Recall Coalition, for example, has [started](#) the process to help unseat a number of Democratic lawmakers in Wisconsin.

The Republican State Leadership Committee also vowed to spend "whatever it takes to protect our incumbents," *The Hill* [quoted](#) the group's president as saying. Meanwhile, the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee said it would support the targeted Democrats.

Prominent labor unions such as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) are already [assembling](#) their troops to canvass the state against Republicans, too. The labor group [said](#) in a statement seeking petition signatures that its coalition wanted to recall the eight eligible GOP lawmakers who were supposedly "leading the charge to take away the rights and voices of working families in Wisconsin" — despite [the fact that no rights or voices of working families were actually being threatened](#). The group has also been bussing in protesters from other states for weeks.

The leftist group People for the American Way is another one of the national organizations working to recall Republicans backing the reforms — especially the most vulnerable ones. In an e-mail to supporters, the organization suggested signing a petition in favor of recalling eligible Republican state Senators, sharing the petition with friends, and more. It also urged those who live "in or near" Wisconsin to volunteer to gather signatures. For people farther away, the e-mail suggested contacting anyone they may know in the state and encouraging them to support the effort.

The recall campaigns — unprecedented in American history, especially since most states do not even allow recalls — also have some analysts wondering whether they're appropriate. "To prevent civic life from descending into the exhaustion of never-ending campaigns and elections, the key is making the triggering of the recall option difficult, to discourage recalls from becoming part of the standard tool-kit of political conflict," University of Wisconsin-Madison political science chair John Coleman [told](#) the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

"Once this story became such a national flash point and the first recall effort was launched, it increased the incentive for further recall efforts to be launched — neither side wants to be outpaced by the other," he told the paper. "That kind of perceptions battle can feed off itself and multiply, and the recall efforts themselves become part of the battle for public opinion, along with ad campaigns [and] rallies."

In addition to the dueling recall efforts being pursued by both sides, big money is also being poured into advertisements supporting and opposing the proposed reforms — much of it from out of state, too.

One of the main reasons the Wisconsin battle has [attracted](#) so much [national attention](#) is that both sides realize how [much](#) is [at stake](#). If Gov. Walker succeeds, other states might try to pursue similar reforms. However, if government unions and their allies win, it could result in taxpayers around the country remaining beholden to those unions for the foreseeable future — especially since labor unions are among the largest contributors to Democratic political coffers.

Few signs of progress were evident after weeks of demonstrations. All 14 Democrats remained out of state by March 7 as Republicans [tried](#) every trick in the book to get them back, including fines, holding the Democrats in contempt, and even authorizing law enforcement to bring them back, by force if necessary. If the impasse continues, however, layoffs of state employees — possibly more than 10,000 — are imminent, [according](#) to Gov. Walker.

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