



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on August 8, 2011

## Wisconsin Recall Elections Attract National Attention, Funds

Analysts are touting the looming showdown as everything from a “referendum” on the policies of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker to an “indicator” of President Obama’s chances of victory in 2012. Control of the Senate could go to Democrats if they manage to unseat three or more of the Republican Senators being targeted.



On August 9, all six Republicans will face their Democratic challengers at the polls. One of the Democrats facing a recall, state Sen. Dave Hansen, already won his race in July. The elections for the other two incumbent Democrats will take place on August 16.

The recall efforts represent the culmination of months of political division over reining in government-employee unions and budget deficits that rocked Wisconsin. Activists on both sides of the debate organized [mass protests and campaigns](#) to support or oppose the plan.

The Republicans facing recall elections were targeted by unions for supporting Gov. Walker’s “[budget-repair bill](#),” which diminished the collective-bargaining privileges of tax-funded workers and required higher contributions for health and pension plans. The Democrats being challenged, on the other hand, are facing the voters for opposing the legislation and fleeing the state for weeks to delay the vote.

There’s a good reason for the national attention. If Democrats succeed in taking control of the state Senate, unions will use the victory to bludgeon other state legislators across America into maintaining the status quo. Gov. Walker would likely become the next target of a recall.

But if Democrats and their tax-funded unions fail, legislatures and Governors nationwide could be emboldened to tackle soaring deficits by reducing the tax-funded perks of government employees — perks that are far [better than in the private sector](#) virtually everywhere in America. Dozens of states are considering it, and more than a few have already done it.

“The stakes are high,” Republican state Sen. Alberta Darling, being challenged in a recall, told the *Los Angeles Times*. She continued,

This is about the 2012 election. It is about Obama. And most of all, it is about the future of our country.

Are we going to grow in the United States? Are we going to have entrepreneurs? Are we going to have freedom of opportunity? Or, are we going to have a socialistic state?

Nearly everyone agrees that the repercussions of the races will be far-reaching. That’s why money and activists from both sides are pouring into the state like never before.

According to the campaign-finance monitoring organization Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, more than



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\$30 million has already been spent on the recall elections — much of it from out of state. Unions such as the AFL-CIO have been stuffing Democrat coffers, while conservative and pro-market groups such as Americans for Prosperity have been helping Republicans.

The recall elections — the largest number in American history — have already broken records in terms of the amount of money being spent, according to [news reports](#). And that figure is projected to continue rising in the coming days, possibly topping \$40 million by the time the races are all over.

"It is beyond amazing, astounding, stupefying, incredible, jaw-dropping, it is beyond all of that," government-affairs professor and former Democrat legislator Mordecai Lee of Wisconsin told Reuters, speaking about the amount of money and organizations involved in the elections. "It's all that, cubed."

The effort to [scale back some privileges of state workers earlier this year](#) led to [weeks of massive protests](#) as union bosses and the politicians they finance fought bitterly to squash the reforms. The legislation eventually passed in March, but the battle is still not over, as lawsuits and the anti-GOP recall campaigns aim to undo the changes.

Gov. Walker and Republicans, who took over both houses and the Governor's mansion in November, insisted that the [reforms were necessary to solve the budget crisis](#). Meanwhile government employees and their allies nationwide tried to portray the measures as an attack on the "middle class" and the "American Dream."

Both sides are claiming that they will be vindicated after the recall elections. But amid [allegations of bribery and fraud](#) on both sides, as well as bitter attack ads aired by dozens of organizations, experts say it's still too early to tell.



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