



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 10, 2011

Wisconsin Senate Passes Union Reform Bill

The Wisconsin Senate caused an uproar after splitting its budget-repair legislation into two parts to be able to pass government-union reform provisions even without the Democratic state senators, all of whom fled to Illinois weeks ago in an effort to block the proposal by preventing the super-majority quorum required for fiscal votes.

The move prompted outrage by labor bosses, national leftist groups, and Democrats who vowed to step up the [fight](#) against Republicans and the reforms after erupting in furious demonstrations. [Conservatives, Tea Party activists, and pro-reform forces](#) praised the step, however, promising to continue their support of Gov. Scott Walker and GOP legislators.



The full budget-repair proposal — [approved](#) in the state Assembly in late February — [mandated](#) increased contributions from government employees toward health and pension benefits. The portion of the legislation that deals with fiscal matters, however, will require at least a 20-senator quorum for approval. Republicans have 19.

The other part of the [reform package](#), approved by the state Senate on March 9 with only one dissenter, affects some of the collective bargaining [privileges](#) of most unionized government employees. In a nutshell, the provisions would end forced government-union dues while allowing state and local worker unions to negotiate only on salary-related matters. The provisions also require a yearly vote regarding whether employees want the unions to continue representing them.

After the state Senate approved the measure, hundreds of protestors in Madison, many of whom have been [demonstrating for more than three weeks](#), immediately erupted in furious condemnation. [Video footage](#) of the scene shows some unruly and sometimes crazed-looking activists storming the Capitol past overwhelmed [police](#). Another [video](#) shows an angry crowd inside the building shouting the typical “shame, shame, shame,” chant over and over again:

Gov. Walker, however, [applauded](#) the Senate’s bold action to rein in a [multi-billion dollar budget deficit](#) and help local governments sort out their own budget crises. “Senate Democrats have had three weeks to debate this bill and were offered repeated opportunities to come home, which they refused,” he said in a statement. “In order to move the state forward, I applaud the legislature’s action today to stand up to the status quo and take a step in the right direction to balance the budget and reform government.”

But national leftist group MoveOn.org — heavily funded by companies like Google and billionaire financiers like George Soros, but considered radical and extremist by critics — vowed to step up its efforts to oust eligible Republican state senators through [recall campaigns](#). “Progressives in Wisconsin have already gathered thousands of signatures to do just that, but they need our help to get the job



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done,” it said in an e-mail to supporters trying to raise \$500,000 for the efforts. “Let’s send a clear message that trying to destroy the American Dream is a surefire way to get booted from office.”

Union bosses, sensing that their grip on power and compulsory union dues could be slipping away in Wisconsin and across the nation, were also enraged by the move. “Senate Republicans have exercised the nuclear option to ram through their bill attacking Wisconsin’s working families in the dark of night,” [fumed](#) Wisconsin State AFL-CIO boss Phil Neuenfeldt, who tried to claim that the move was illegal.

“Losing badly in the court of public opinion and failing to break the Democratic Senators’ principled stand, Scott Walker and the GOP have eviscerated both the letter and the spirit of the law and our democratic process to ram through their payback to their deep-pocketed friends,” he claimed. “In the most deplorable manner possible, Republicans rigged a vote that stripped hundreds of thousands of hardworking teachers, nurses, EMTs and others of their rights.”

And of course, Democrat politicians, whose campaigns are heavily funded by the forced union dues paid by government workers, were furious, too. “The vote does nothing to create jobs, does nothing to strengthen our state, and shows finally and utterly that this was never about anything but raw political power,” [alleged](#) state Democratic Party chairman Mike Tate.

The Democratic state senators’ ringleader, Mark Miller, also [condemned](#) the move. “In 30 minutes, 18 state senators undid 50 years of civil rights in Wisconsin,” he claimed. “Their disrespect for the people of Wisconsin and their rights is an outrage that will never be forgotten.” Polls do show that most people don’t support ending the “rights” of government workers, when asked in that manner. But the bill does not eliminate any rights in the true sense of the term — it merely curtails state-issued privileges.

The union-related provisions of the bill are now back in the state Assembly and are expected to be approved soon. Senate Democrats were [reportedly](#) planning to return to Wisconsin in the near future anyway, but now there doesn’t appear to be any reason to remain out of state. Some reform opponents are still [threatening](#) to take the measure to court. But for the moment at least, analysts predict that the reforms will eventually become law.

The battle over government unions in Wisconsin has [attracted](#) national and international attention and [protests](#) because the [stakes are so high](#). Other states facing budget calamities are already working on reining in the powerful public-sector unions. And with the apparent move toward victory in Wisconsin, the pressure will only continue to mount. Government unions and their allies, however, have promised to keep the fight going.

Photo: Rep. Cory Mason (D-Racine) clenches fist while addressing protestors in the rotunda of the state Capitol in Madison, Wis., March 9, 2011, after demonstrators retook the Capitol building: AP Images

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