

## Wisconsin: What's NOT at Stake

Posted By [admin](#) On March 8, 2011 @ 3:45 pm In [On The Record](#) | [17 Comments](#)

**By Clark S. Judge**

**Texas Insider Report: Washington, D.C.** – Let's look for a moment at what the standoff in Wisconsin is NOT about. The truth is that by wrapping their indefensible demands in the cloak of the labor movement as a whole, the public employee unions are discrediting all unionization, including in the eyes of current & prospective union members.

### **The standoff is NOT about whether state employees may engage in collective bargaining:**

With some success, the unions have characterized the battle as an up or down vote on the right to bargain collectively. They have agreed, they tell us, to Governor Scott Walker's demands that members contribute more to their pensions and health benefits, something the rest of us started doing years ago. So now, they say, all that is left is whether collective bargaining rights are retained. Wrong.

As columnist Michael A. Walsh notes in this morning's *New York Post*, the remaining issues are these:

***"[L]imit collective bargaining for most public unions (exempting cops and firefighters) to wages only – excluding pensions, benefits and work rules... [G]et the state out of the union-dues collection business and force the unions to be re-certified by a vote of their membership each year."***

If the governor wins, it is likely that benefit plans will move from the unpayable defined benefit packages of today to defined contribution plans that state employees control themselves – a bow to the impossibility of current arithmetic. But even as these changes will increase the security and self-sufficiency of public employees themselves, they will severely reduce the power of union leaders, for whom benefit packages have been a major goodie to deliver in negotiations.

The same is true of the dues collection and annual recertification: they will make life for the unions' professional apparatus more difficult. This is why various public employee union leaderships – including that of the increasingly infamous Service Employees International Union and (get this) of the New York City Transport Workers Union – are becoming personally involved.

Collective bargaining will remain in Wisconsin, no matter what the outcome. But if Walker wins, power will flow to the legislature and the people. If he loses, public employee unions will run the state for years to come.

### **It is NOT about the future of the union movement in America:**

Over the Presidents Day holiday, public employee union spokespeople were making the following disjointed case to every media outlet that would give them time: Unions brought American workers the "weekend" and the 40-hour week. Without the movement that won these gains, Wisconsin classroom size would shoot to untold numbers of students per teacher and who knows what other exploitation of downtrodden civil servants would follow. So this standoff is about the future of the entire union movement in America.

Now, it is true that much is at stake in the Wisconsin showdown. The future of the American union movement is not part of it.

The movement that helped change the American manufacturing workplace – and then overreached, contributing to the sorry state of heavy manufacturing in the U.S. today – organized the private, not the public, sector. Its signature gains were made primarily in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, though some had come decades earlier.

But it was not until the 1960s that public employee unionization started to take hold.

Democratic office holders saw opening the door to organizing the civil service as a means of securing the votes of a group that already enjoyed job protection and retirement packages far beyond those of workers in industry.

It didn't matter that the workplaces of these social workers, clerks, lower-level administrators, and, yes, teachers bore little resemblance to those of the men and women who had organized after the infamous Triangle Fire in the New York garment industry in 1911 or at other defining moments in American labor history. "Labor" was to be one.

Today, according to the Cato Institute, if state employees were paid at the same rates as their private sector equivalents, no state in the nation would be running a deficit. From their own reduced means, middle income Americans put up most of the funds for those outside compensation packages. As a result, funds are denied for smaller class sizes, better roads and bridges, and lower taxes.

The truth is that by wrapping their indefensible demands in the cloak of the labor movement as a whole, the public employee unions are discrediting all unionization, including in the eyes of current and prospective union members.

Private sector unions have been declining in numbers for decades. Disgust at what is happening in Wisconsin is likely to rub off on them at a time they badly need better public acceptance.

### **Finally, Wisconsin is NOT about Egypt:**

As they say, you can't make this stuff up. One AWOL Wisconsin Democratic state senator (speaking from "an undisclosed location") announced on television yesterday that messages of encouragement for her and her colleagues had come from Egypt. Let me spring to the defense of the unions and the Democrats here.

I, for one, refuse to believe that either would accept or encourage the support of the Muslim Brotherhood.

**Polls are showing that** tolerating factions opposed to the public interest is not in the American people's DNA. The public employee unions have overplayed their hand and riveted state and national attention on something they would have better left in the shadows.

Former pollster to both Democratic president Bill Clinton and (of late) numerous Republicans, Dick Morris, has [reported similar results among Wisconsin voters](#).

On Thursday, Morris posted on his blog results from a survey taken in the prior two nights:

"By 74-18, [Wisconsin voters] back making state employees pay more for their health insurance. By 79-16, they support asking state workers contribute more toward their pensions. By 54-34, [they] support ending the automatic deduction of union dues from state paychecks and support making unions collect dues from each member. By 66-30, they back limiting state workers' pay increases to the rate of inflation unless voters approve a higher raise by a public referendum."

He continued: "[If the collective bargaining issue is] related to giving schools flexibility to modify tenure, pay teachers based on merit, discharge bad teachers and promote good ones, [Wisconsin voters] support such limits on collective bargaining by 58-38."

Morris concludes:

"[If Governor Walker] emphasizes the positive intent that lies behind the proposal (i.e. giving schools the flexibility and freedom to implement education reforms), he will find a solid public majority behind him."

If Governor Walker connects his collective bargaining proposals to plans for improving public services (including the quality of schools), that political pollster will surely prove right.

Walker will win. Hands down.

***Clark S. Judge is managing director of White House Writers Group and chairman of [Pacific Research Institute](#).***

Article printed from Texas Insider: <http://www.texasinsider.org>

URL to article: <http://www.texasinsider.org/?p=43591>

Copyright © 2009 Texas Insider. All rights reserved.