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Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and His Allies Drop All Pretenses

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There's a sports saying that comes up whenever a player signs a huge, multimillion dollar megadeal: *When they say it's not about the money, it's about the money.* A similar principle holds true in politics. *When a politician says that something is just about the budget and not about grinding ideological axes, it's really grinding ideological axes.* Wisconsin Gov. [Scott Walker](#) and his allies on the right made that abundantly clear on Wednesday when the state legislature passed Walker's "budget-repair bill" stripped of its budgetary pretenses leaving only its union-busting ideological nub.

[[See photos of the Wisconsin protests.](#)]

To review: Walker--having created a [budget](#) crisis by enacting a huge tax cut--proposed a bill to "fix" the "crisis" by not only sharply cutting the compensation of public employees, but also by stripping public unions of their collective bargaining rights. This was, Walker claimed, what he campaigned on, a declaration which *PolitiFact* termed "[false](#)." It was not, Walker insisted, about breaking Wisconsin's public unions but rather about fixing the budget. This lie was made transparent when the public unions' offer to accept the compensation cuts in exchange for keeping their collective bargaining rights and Walker refused to budge. And a stalemate descended upon Madison as all the state senate [Democrats](#) fled to Illinois, leaving the legislature's upper chamber without the minimum number of members required to pass a budget-related bill. [[See political cartoons about the budget and deficit.](#)]

How to break the impasse? Simple: Drop the pretense that this was about the budget. They stripped out all the actual fiscal items from the law and hastily [passed a bill](#) that simply went after the unions.

This was just the final step in removing any doubt about the true nature of this fight. There was the announcement that Crossroads GPS, an independent campaign group founded by former George W. Bush political guru Karl Rove, among others, launched a \$750,000 cable television ad buy blistering President Obama and public sector unions, with the Wisconsin battle as the hook and clearly painting it as being about breaking the unions. (As a side note, the ad contained assertions about union pay that even their ostensible source—a libertarian Cato Institute—said were misleading.)

Then there was Scott Fitzgerald, the state senate [GOP](#) leader, admitting to Fox News that the battle was about crippling the unions. He said:

If we win this battle, and the money is not there under the auspices of the unions, certainly what you're going to find is President Obama is going to have a much difficult, much more difficult time getting elected and winning the state of Wisconsin.

Presumably that relates to fixing the state budget somehow. (And as an aside: Really? A great American drama is being played out before us and one of the characters is named Scott Fitzgerald? Awesome.)

It's been fascinating to watch this political striptease, as prevarication after prevarication is stripped away, laying bare a naked political power grab. [Poll](#) after [poll](#) after [poll](#) showed Americans in general and Wisconsites in particular opposed Walker's plan—and most especially his union-busting proposal. It was almost as if these polls focused and distilled the issue to its core. [[Read: Wisconsin Gov.](#)

[Scott Walker Is the New Face of GOP Overreach](#)]

Where to go from here? The state house Democratic leader loudly proclaimed that the passage of the law was illegal because it violated the state's open meeting laws. The courts will decide that, but even if it so, it seems like a process issue--the GOP can presumably run the same play but correctly dot the I's and cross the T's. [[Read the U.S. News debate: Should public sector workers have collective bargaining rights?](#)]

There was some speculation in Wisconsin that this was a political hidden ball trick: The GOP passed the stripped down bill in a way they knew to be illegal in the hopes of drawing the wayward Democratic senators back to Madison to protest. Once back they could be forced to provide a quorum for the whole bill. "We're not going to go back because there are still a lot of games they can play," State Sen. Jon Erpenbach told MSNBC's Rachel Maddow. "We're going to sit tight here for a while."

There is talk in Madison of a general strike to protest the bill. And more broadly, the *Huffington Post's* Howard Fineman warned on Lawrence O'Donnell's *Last Word* that this could be a broader ploy to try to incite an overreaction among progressives that could be used against Democrats in swing states in 2012. Stay tuned.

- [Take the U.S. News poll: Is Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker right about the unions?](#)
- [See photos of the protests in Wisconsin.](#)
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