



The Reason Why Rauner Left Unions Out Of His Budget Speech

By Connor D. Wolf
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Despite making public sector unions a central point of his policy thus far, Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner left them out of his otherwise detailed budget speech on Wednesday.

“For far too long we have been living beyond our means—spending money that Illinois taxpayers could not afford,” Rauner declared during his speech. “This budget is honest with the people of Illinois, and it presents an honest path forward.”

Rauner called out the previous administrations for not addressing serious budget problems, while he promoted a fiscally responsible approach for the state going forward. One area Rauner didn’t touch was government unions, which have been a central point of his policy since taking office in January.

Diana Rickert, the director of media relations for Illinois Policy Institute, noted that there is a simple reason Rauner didn’t discuss public sector unions during his speech.

“Gov. Rauner is negotiation a new contract with AFSCME,” Rickert told The Daily Caller News Foundation. “He has to negotiate with them, he can’t do it unilaterally.”

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees is one of the more powerful unions in the country. It represents public sector employees and retirees and has been known to be very active during political campaigns, primarily in support of Democratic candidates.

“Negotiations are only in the beginning,” Rickert noted. “He’s taking a hard line approach with them.”

Rickert explained that if Rauner were to give any details on public sector unions during his budget speech, it would make it more difficult to negotiate with AFSCME, and since nothing is finalized yet, it would be impractical to discuss. However, it is an issue Rauner has taken very seriously because of how much power public sector unions have.

Rickert notes that there are still several important issues that must be worked out between Rauner and AFSCME. This includes healthcare benefits for state workers, staffing levels, overtime pay, pensions and salaries.

Last week, Rauner issued an executive order making union dues optional for government workers. The order was met with opposition from unions and other left leaning organizations which were already hostile towards the governor for promising to rein in union power.

Rauner believes public sector unions are responsible for much of the state's problems and must be reformed. Prior to his budget speech, Rauner pointed toward prevailing wage laws and project labor agreements as some of the few examples of how labor unions are hurting the state through unfair laws which increase the costs of public projects.

Project Labor Agreements are deals between owners of construction projects and construction unions in which firms must enter into collective bargaining with a union, hire workers through the union and pay union wages and benefits. In government contracting, a prevailing wage is the hourly wage, benefits and overtime that must be paid to the majority of workers within a particular area.

According to a report by the libertarian Cato Institute, Project Labor Agreements alone can add 12 to 18 percent to the cost of public projects.

Rauner hopes that reforming labor policy and unions will allow the state to overcome some of the major economic obstacles that have hindered progress in recent years. According to a report by The Illinois Policy Institute, the state is struggling in jobs and education, two areas vital to economic growth and stability.