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Collective bargaining isn't helping Wisconsin's state debt

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Union activists are claiming that elimination of collective bargaining would be a disaster for Wisconsin, but the numbers tell us a different story. Chris Edwards at the Cato Institute compares Wisconsin to Virginia, where collective bargaining by public employees was banned by Democratic Gov. Doug Wilder in the 1990s, and finds an interesting contrast.

Wisconsin

- Collective bargaining (monopoly unionism) in place for government workers, with about 52 percent of state/local workers in unions (Source: Table 1 here)
- State debt as a share of income: 4.6% (Source: Moody's)
- State unfunded pension obligations as a share of GDP: 32% (Source: Andrew Biggs)
- Score on quality of state government management: B- (Source: Pew Center)
- Score on Pew's subcategory for "people" management: B-

Virginia

- Collective bargaining in state and local government banned by a 1993 statute signed into law by Democratic Governor Douglas Wilder
- State debt as a share of income: 2.1%
- State unfunded pension obligations as a share of GDP: 17%
- Score on quality of state government management: A-
- Score on Pew's subcategory for "people" management: A

If eliminating collective bargaining is such a disastrous measure, it's worth asking why Virginia has seemed to do so well -- better, in fact, than Wisconsin.

Beltway Confidential Big Labor Cato Institute Chris Edwards Doug Wilder public-sector unions Virginia wisconsin

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