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Scott Walker dares to mention ending a 50-year experiment

By [Patrick McIlheran](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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Though when [Governor-elect Scott Walker warns](#) that union resistance could be met with “modifications of the current laws,” he isn’t telling the unions anything they don’t know, [I write in Thursday’s Journal Sentinel](#).

Unions already know Walker is willing to push hard to get them to at least begin permitting some of the cost-sharing that is standard in the private sector. Walker spent eight years in Milwaukee County pushing hard at unions and cutting staff. Surely they know he’s serious, [which is why they and allies are saying](#) it’s war.

It isn’t.

Rather, Walker’s really telling the incoming Republican majority just how far he’s willing to go. Public sector employees have been able to unionize in Wisconsin since 1959, and since then we’ve had Republican governors and periods of Republican control in the Legislature. Still, our labor picture remains biased toward ever higher costs to taxpayers. Walker was telling his own allies exactly how serious he is about changing things.

What’s interesting is [just how recent public sector unions are](#) on the scene. Gov. Gaylord Nelson [first granted the power to unionize to municipal employees in 1959](#), and collective bargaining was extended to some state employees in 1965. Thus, a unionized public sector is about as old as the Zoo Interchange.

And about as outdated: Daniel Disalvo lays out the costs of public sector unionization in [this fall’s National Affairs](#), and it’s worth a read. It isn’t just that unions raise costs and, thus, mean limited tax

dollars are less available for necessary government services.

What's just as bad is the degree to which unions distort public policy, becoming among the largest special interests, steering elections, changing the ways governments behave. One small example here: [Unions fiercely opposed virtual public charter schools](#) -- online learning that was offered by public school districts with unionized staff. Why? They claimed it was over quality, though such schools' results showed this was nonsense. Rather, it was because they feared that in virtual schools, each teacher could handle more students, thus reducing overall staffing levels.

Walker has changed the boundaries of what can be discussed simply by saying what scarcely anyone else in public office has previously said -- that 50 years of what amounts to economic experimentation might have been a mistake. The numbers, such as [these from Cato Institute's Chris Edwards](#), suggest as much. Expect more calls like the one from [MacIver Institute's Brian Fraley](#) to simply call off the experiment and end the unionization of the public sector -- meaning we all could get the government we need at a more reasonable price.

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