

« Episode: *AirTalk for February 18, 2011*

# Wisconsin Dems walk out over controversial budget bill



Mark Hirsch/Getty Images

Protesters fill the Rotunda at the State Capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin.

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Newly elected Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker is, like so many governors across the country, faced with a massive budget shortfall. So, Walker proposed a "budget-repair" bill that he says is all about the "math." Walker's bill would eliminate state employee's collective bargaining power and require public workers to pay more for their health insurance and pensions. But Walker's calculations have not added up with state employees. The outrage over the proposal brought crowds ranging from 25,000- 30,000 into the streets surrounding the capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin. Schools were forced to close because so many teachers called in sick to join the protests. Then, Democratic State Senators opted to skip out of work Thursday, forcing Republicans to delay a vote on the bill for lack of a quorum. Police are on orders to round up the absentee lawmakers, but a number are rumored to have left the state. The dramatic action by lawmakers prompted the governor to call for their return "out of respect for the institution of the Legislature and the democratic process. Their actions by leaving the state and hiding from voting are disrespectful to the hundreds of thousands of public employees who showed up to work today and the millions of taxpayers they represent." Will lawmakers return and cast their ballots? Or will the governor revise the proposal that has the entire nation watching? Is Walker doing what he has to do? Or is this dangerous union-busting?

## Guests:

Fred Risser Democratic State Senator from Wisconsin, Representing the 26th District, which includes most of the city of Madison

Jon Erpenbach, Democratic State Senator from Wisconsin, Representing the 27th District

Spencer Coggs, Democratic State Senator from Wisconsin, Representing the 6th District

Chris Edwards, director of tax policy studies, editor of downsizing government dot org. for the Cato Institute

Stephanie Bloomingdale, secretary treasurer, Wisconsin state AFL-CIO

## Also on this episode

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- Wisconsin Dems walk out over controversial budget bill
  - The sexual assault of CBS reporter Lara Logan – will it hurt women journalists' ability to do their jobs?
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## Comments

Lou  
3 days, 21 hours ago  
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Gov Walker prob looked out West to CA and saw WI's future: over \$500 billion of unfunded pension liabilities.

Hasn't this financial mess shown that we should be proactive and not reactive?

Brennen

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

What doesnt the public understand about money owed being greater then income? Something has to give.

Gov. Walker should fire all state employee's and then they can choose to reapply for their job or go find another job. Worked w/ air traffic controllers.

Lou

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Isn't comparing Gov Walker to Mubarak and chanting "kill the bill" using violent imagery and rhetoric? "Kill" is a violent word.

Aren't these people afraid of causing Jared Loughner to shoot people againg?

Erin

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I think it is an outrageous abuse of power on behalf of Governor Walker in Wisconsin. I am a public school teacher here in California and I am actually moving to Madison, WI next week. It sickens me what the Republicans in charge are trying to do. Workers have fought hard for decades to have the right to bargain in good faith and the Governor wants to dismantle a 100 year progressive tradition. They want to balance the budget, yet they are leaving salary out of this equation. What they want to do is bust up the unions because apparently the Teachers' Unions are the root of all evil. And to create a dragnet to recall all legislators to the chamber to make them vote on this ridiculous power play? What a waste of taxpayers' money. Good for the senators who took a "legislative vacation" to Illinois. It sickens me that the state that led the way in workers rights over a century ago now seems poised to lead the way in dismantling those rights in the name of "balancing" the budget. I am going to think long and hard about entering the teaching profession in Wisconsin. Way to scare away qualified teacher candidates, Der Fuhrer.

Fred

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I find it ironic that Republicans think government should be run more like business and at the same time want prevent public employees from exercising their rights to organize which is available in the private sector.

Can we say HYPORCRITES

Robert

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Before more hooraw starts, I just wanted to say two things--the first of which is that I've worked for managers like this silly governor twice before.

One used to saw the legs off the couch in her office, so everybody'd feel smaller. Both approached discussion and negotiation the same way--I summon you, scream incoherently for a while, and you go do whatever it was that came into my head you should do.

And if you don't, it's because you're lazy, greedy and standing in the way of, "progress." Or "unAmerican," or whatever. Oh, and anything you might say about the Contract and the law is just red tape, which I'm here to cut.

The second thing I find astonishing is this: these are the very guys who get into office and start yelling that businesses and corporations ship jobs out of state and won't hire people because of the "uncertainty," that all the red tape, and all the unions, and Obama, create. They constantly yell that a contract's a contract, that businesses need to be able to plan, that they can't grow if they can't depend.

Unless of course it's a union contract. Unless, of course, it's a matter of workers and teachers and such needing to be able to plan before they run out and spend. Unless of course a deal's a deal for everybody.

Darndest thing. I look forward to future news about the other minor technical detail that's always true of these guys: the more they yell about union extravagance, the more they got their own schnozzola in the trough. Fortunately, these types pretty much always explode themselves.

ON, WISCONSIN!

michael from Orange

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

When are the these public employees going to get a clue ? If Jerry has the guts he will do the same as Gov. Walker. Mr. Edwards point about collective bargaining is totally right on track. With collective bargaining public employees & their unions have an unfair advantage, privilege position and inside track over the rest of the working population in their control over government outlays and expenses. I am sick of public employees crying out that they represent the



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By Alex Schaffert & David Callaghan | Art? | Highland Park



When she first encountered him 30 years ago perched atop a restaurant downtown, Amy Inouye had little idea that she would become the eventual owner of the 22-foot-tall fiberglass

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labor rights for the rest of us. They are purely motivated by self interest not the rest of us in the labor market.

Can't these public employees see the craziness in Greece ?

Jane

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Yeah, to the Wisconsin Democratic Senators and the Wisconsin citizens protesting the governor's outrageous budget cutting bill !

I hope this kind of protest spreads to other states with other governors who propose similar bills.

Stop cutting from the poor but tax the rich - increase their Social Security contributions and increase their Medicare costs.

Norm

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Larry,

I love your show and listen to it when doing complicated work. Sometimes I have to turn it off in order to concentrate. Hearing someone from Cato or AEI is always a good opportunity to sign off for a bit, as they just seem to be stand ins for "the other side." If conservatives care about their point of view, they should show up for a discussion and not outsource it to Cato or AEI. I concede that certain liberal advocacy groups regularly appear on the talk circuit, but they are not the constant go to for the conservative view point.

Gary

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I am in a union and I support collective bargaining. However, I also lost my pension to the PBGC. My company is now successful and we are participating in that success. Our public pensions need triage now and it will be painful. Additionally, I do not like my taxes going to excessive public pensions when many of those pensioners did not deliver very good customer service during their employment as a civil servant.

Dante

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

balancing the books on the backs of workers is not the way to settle a state's debt. it reminds me of all those tea-baggers mad about the new healthcare laws, but upset when they have to wait 28 days for their own coverage to kick in.

do none of these republicans realize that public sector jobs are still jobs and that real people work them? oh, wait--speaker boehner doesn't care if cutting deficits means fewer jobs so long as he scores political points. are you right-wingers happy about last november now?

Stephen

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Without collective bargaining or a viable threat to strike, unions have no teeth. The American middle class was built on union labor in the 20th century, including safe working conditions, overtime rules, and a five-day work week. Gov Walker made this problem by giving tax breaks to corporations, and is attempting to pay for it on the backs of workers at the lower end of the pay scale.

As for your Cato guest, the only "right" right-wing free marketers believe in is the "right" of corporations to profit, plunder, and pollute without regard to the social fabric of the country in which they are based.

Lou

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Paying back the political buddies?

You mean like the \$500 billion in unfunded pension liabilities in CA?

Brennen

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

the people of WI aren't speaking, union members and their families are speaking o.O of course they are, they are directly effected.

joan

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Larry: first you said the people voted the governor in; then you say the unions put elected officials in unfairly. You

can't have it both ways.

michael from Orange

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Thank you Larry. Why do public employees keep paying this game that they represent the rest of working people of America. What a load of garbage. Their outrageous demands for pay and benefits does nothing to change my "t will employment" that my company operates under.

Catherine

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Look at Texas if you want to see a state with a huge budget mess!

Token Republican Ed

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Seems to me that someone could argue that Stephanie Bloomingdale is being just as greedy as those evil fascists who are trying to bust her union?

Joan

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Public employees pensions are averaged at 28,000 per year. Get real, we are not getting rich. We are paid less and work more, so we get the benefit of a pension. And as for the "studies" you quote, they are comparing laboreres to executives. Compare apples to apples and you will see public employees make less.

Bruce

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

The so-called 'Right-to-Work' movement or idea is NOTHING more than a ruse to break unions. The idea and the phrase 'Right-to-Work' has been around since the 1930s. It sounds like an appeal to individual rights: what it's REALLY ABOUT is to weaken workers and their right to act as a counterweight to the GREED of the owners and big capital. IT'S A SCAMMMMMMMMM!

I am NOT afraid to say this publicly: Right wingers are the scum of the Earth. They are ther SCUM of the Earth. They need to be GOTTEN RID OF. They are whores for the wealthy. WHORES.

Eric

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I think it's fair to say we needs concessions from the unions on their benefits right now given the current fiscal situation, but getting rid of collection bargaining has nothing to do with that. Collective bargaining is akin to basic human rights.

thanks

Eric

West L.A.

jan

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I would like to know what the benefits are for the Governor and legislators. Do they get health care? Pensions after they leave office? Cut those first!

robert

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Let's see if I got this straight.

For one thing, I don't need to bother with the fact that the unions have very clearly said that they're more than willing to cut a deal, and will probably have to accept some salary freezes/cutbacks and some increased pension costs. They just want to bargain fairly.

For another, the pension costs are all the union's fault. They bargained in good faith, the other side cut a deal, and it's all the unions' fault that they did what they were spozed to do.

Moreover, the real reason that pensions are in trouble right now lies in the decline of dividends--caused, it just so happens, by the very cuts in regulation and freebooting capitalism that tea party types are ballyhooing--and this is ALSO the unions' fault alone.

But most of all, perish forbid that teachers and other lowlifes should have decent pay, working conditions, and

retirement. These demands are the darn unions' fault too--after all, ordinary workers and business owners are screwed, so why shouldn't teachers and such be screwed too?

It's the politics of fear: a shame that the very people whose natural interests should put them right out in the streets behind the unions don't get it...because, all too often, they've bought the fearmongering sold by people who wouldn't slow the limo after they drove over their kids.

That's what you get, when you take the likes of Dick Armeigh seriously as a friend of the little guy.

Ryan (La Verne)

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Isn't there some way to reduce the most debateable items (i.e., pension spiking, etc.) without taking away all the bargaining powers of unions? We know -- from our own history -- what happens when unions don't have enough power to stand up to corporations: people get terribly abused.

I'm not a union member and don't agree with everything unions seem to get away with. But still...they will get trampled by big business and big government.

Hector

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Larry,

Please try to keep your bias out. I understand the necessity of addressing the budget but collective bargaining is needed to protect workers rights. I think this is a way to distract people from the cause of this downturn. If this was attempted against the private sector it would be deemed illegal.

Dan

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Can someone explain to me why DMV workers are unionized? What vital service do they provide?

Liz

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Everyone who works for a living should be represented by a union. Until that happens, the working person will continue to be disregarded in spite of constituting the nation's economic engine. Go Wisconsin Protesters!!!!

TINA

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

THERE IS A BIG PICTURE THAT YOU ARE MISSING.  
THIS IS ABOUT UNION BARGAINING RIGHTS IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. BY REMOVING THE UNION RIGHTS, CORPORATIONS HAVE THE LOUDEST VOICE IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEQIM2h23bE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YU6Vhl-D0Z8>

Larry

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I am a retired public employee and I agree that public employees should not have union representation and should not have to right to strike. There is no constitutional right to collective bargaining. Collective bargaining in California did not exist until the early 1970's when the Meyers-Milias-Brown Act was passed.

Now that we have term limits and our politicians are all amateurs the primary controlling group in government is the employees and their unions. This is truly a case of the tail wagging the dog.

We need to repeal MMB and get the unions out of the business of running the state and municipal governments.

Carolyn

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

If everyone had the same benefits (dare I say -- public benefits), the disproportionate benefits unions receive would not be an issue. As a non-unionized public employee, I have watched as our unionized employees have received COLAs and the non-unionized folks were furloughed and had a wage freeze. If we all have the same benefits, I would not resent the unions. I might add that my dad is a union member and growing up we had benefits solely from the union. So I am pro-union, I just wish we all had the same benefits.

Gail

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

No one is going to stay in thankless public sector jobs for 30+ years without a decent pension and a living wage.

Do you want a constant turn over of twenty somethings who have 6 months experience "helping" you when you go to do business at public offices or someone who actually knows what they are doing?

That's what the public gets in exchange for paying pensions and living wages.... a stable work force.

EJ

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Sorry i joined late Larry. But can you clarify if Wisconsin employees pay for their own pension or do taxpayers pay their contribution?

DSmith

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Public employees get stronger pensions than private sector employees because they're not entitled to Social Security benefits when they retire. Unlike private sector employees (myself included) who have retirement options through work and Social Security, public employees only have pension programs like STRS and PERS.

Spencer

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I challenge any one of the callers who continue to harp on the talking points of "platinum benefits" and "overblown salaries" to cite examples among the everyday, working class state and federal employees that make up the bulk of these unions.

My mother worked was a Federal employee for 25 years and I can tell you from direct, personal experience that her income and benefits, as well as those of her co-workers, managers and the state and county employees that she interacted with, were typically on par or less than the rest of the community. She recently retired, and wouldn't have been able to do so without Social Security to supplement her supposedly outrageous pension.

Remember, we're not talking about the Bell city council here, people. If you want to root out waste in government budgets, let's start with corruption and cronyism.

Kevin

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Union supporters love to use their class-warfare slogans to fool us into believing that this truly is a "rich vs poor" issue. But most people realize that the public employee unions are bankrupting the state. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker has the people behind him - I hope he's successful.

daniel

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I dont think we should get rid of their pensions or any other benefits that public workers recieve, lets face it they have earned it and most of them deserve it. However I do believe that we do spend quite abit of funds on them and we should reduce them or just come to a point where everyone can be happy, now lets face it thats not going to happend but everyone can make an effort to make it work.

Frances

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I disagree with you Larry when you say there is a lot of pent of resentment against government workers. The crowds who have assembled by the thousands in Madison and throughout the state of Wisconsin would indicate you are dead wrong about that. Governor Walker has a reason for doing this that is beyond the need to reign in expenses. He has a reason for being in such a hurry to pass it. He has a reason for including the language about collective bargaining in legislation that is supposed to be about budget. I think in your effort to be fair to the governor, you are missing some harsh realities.

Scott

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

This is the start of the Republicans' national plan to break the unions and we're seeing it begin right before our eyes! I'm glad to see the people of Wisconsin stand up to this unreasonable plan. What happened to the art of negotiation?

Fewer people than ever are represented by unions and if they succeed in Wisconsin, who's next?

BTW, this governor also rejected money for high speed rail. He's not interested in big picture progress for our future. Just destroy things as quick as you can while in power to further wreck our country and keep the upper class protected.

daniel

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

O and i forgot to mention we need to start holding our politians accountable for their actions, is the only reason why most of these old Fa.t. get away with most of these crazy ideas that only hurt those who work hard and still manage to put their hopes on their government.

Penny

3 days, 21 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Really? Envy of people who chose to work for the government? They have something I don't have, so let's get together and take it away? Workers fought for these things. They should be supported.

Mario

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I think you are missing the point. Of course, there will be people who take a broad view of the situation during these tough economic times and decide from an angry and resentful perspective that it is offensive that anyone should be receiving a generous and reliable pension that they ultimately have to pay for through the taxes they pay. This is a short term view, and ignores the longer term impact of denying workers the right to collective bargaining. The fact that this right has been all but destroyed in the private sector has most Americans comfortable and accustomed to life without strong unions, which ultimately are essential institutions that allow the middle class to have a powerful and consistent political voice to properly engage in national debates. Without these institutions, we run the danger of an capitalist economy run further amok.

Rick Watts

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

While I concede that workers should not have the right to strike against public safety, contrary to your Cato Institute guest's assertions, workers should not have the right to freeloader off their fellow employees' bargaining efforts.

The right of workers to collectively bargain exists in order to balance the otherwise-inherent power imbalance of the single employee versus the employer. The only reason that public employees DO have often-better compensation packages than in the private sector is that private sector union representation has been eviscerated over the past 40 years.

Let's not forget that unions are not some alien organization: They are formed--of, by and for largely-working class employees. And at least their leadership is elected. It is ONLY thanks to unions (workers acting collectively) that we have a 40-hour work week, the weekend, paid holidays, minimum wage, safe workplaces...and a middle class. Workers in NON-unionized workplaces benefit from the efforts of those who do.

The pending measure in Wisconsin is nothing less than a template to break once-and-for-all the political and economic power of ordinary Americans and the Democratic Party vis-a-vis the GOP and their wealthy patrons.

robert

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Again, it's kinda horrible fun to see people kissing the hands of the people who stuck it to them...especially when they're retirees and union members who only have the benefits they have because of the hard work from all the leftist/liberal America-haters.

The question you should ask is this: why am I p.o.'d at unions, when it's the scummy likes of Donald trump who took and took and took from me?

Similarly, I find it innaresting that many are on the Gov's side against the professional politicians and campaigners and lobbying groups...given that the Gov seems to have spent a big two years working in the private sector, before working for the Red Cross and becoming a professional politician heavily funded by the likes of the Koch brothers. Who were his second biggest direct contributors, and who helped the Republicans' governors org spend over three mil in attack ads aimed at his opponent.

Huh.

By the way--the way this stuff works? First off, pensions get spent in the local economy. And the transferred money from pensions to tax breaks for corporations (look at the Gov's recent record)...hey, guess what? It leaves the community and goes to wealthy people from other states and overseas.

I can understand biting the hand that feeds you. I'm a little confused by licking the hand that smacks you inna face, and jumping the guy from the ASPCA who tries to help.

michael from Orange

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Thank you Larry for defending the views of the rest of us working stiffs against most of these rabid public employees and their supporters commenting here and on air who think they are operating for the benefit of the rest of us in the labor market. They DON'T - despite their delusions of grandeur.

Unfortunately people like Allison and many other public employees just don't get it. We are running out of money to



pay their generous benefits OR those of their managers and other administrators. The rest of us taxpayers don't get what they get and are sick of being forced to pay ever higher taxes so they can live comfortably in or out of retirement while the rest of us have to deal with the "real world" private employment market. I would like to see so many of them claiming public employees get less generous pay than they could in private sector just try and go out and get such claimed private sector compensation. Good Luck.

Bill McNeal

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Public employees refuse to be accountable to "we" the taxpayers. Whatever happen to taking pride in being a public servant without any fancy benefits? California can no longer a union-driven state. Last time I checked professionals didn't need unions. Shoot, look at the teachers union.

Joan

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Larry: you mentioned fire and police get to retire earlier than normal folks. Yes, that's because we DIE within five years of retirement. This is a statistical fact.

Liz

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Can I just say that a tear almost popped out of my eye seeing the photos of these folks standing in the hallways of the state capital? Way to go guys & gals!

Larry, I always appreciate your ability to gently spar with those whole call up and are quite emotional about this being class warfare. You make some great points.

But let's go back to 2008 when AIG was about to go down in flames. In a matter of hours our government wrote checks in excess of 700 BILLION big ones to these fat cats, who then get to keep their exorbitant year end bonuses, because "it's in the contract." Obama's administration has been rife with these folks rolling in and out of his cabinet. These folks are supposed to help ordinary people with their new policies? How would they know? They're not ordinary.

When you see stuff like that happen, and then you see some new punk like Gov. Walker try to tear down collective bargaining (but not going after the holy of hollies, firefighters and police officers), it does not pass the smell test.

Class warfare at it's best. I support the Wisconsin protesters!

Dana

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I think Gov. Walker's attack on unions in his state is part of the right-wing's plan to force working people around the country to work for less & less. I think it's wrong, and that we should all stand up for working people to stop it now!

For those people who complain that public workers get more than private sector workers.....if that's true -- and I'm not sure it is since the average wage of public employees is reportedly less than that of private sector employees -- then private sector workers need to fight for higher wages & benefits for themselves, rather than try to bring others down to their levels. All working class folks - and I'm a private sector worker myself -should be fighting & supporting one another.

And for those who complain that state budgets cannot afford to pay decent wages & benefits to public employees.....if this is true, then we should all look at why. Gov. Walker just gave \$140M in tax breaks to large businesses and the wealthy in Wisconsin, and now he claims he must take away the rights of working people to close the budget gap! Say what??? Again, this is part of conservative efforts to funnel tax-payer money into the hands of the rich, and to deprive working people of needed resources.

It's happening all over the country, and if we don't wake up & do something about it now, working people are going to continue getting poorer & poorer.

Dee

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I am angry that the term "unfunded liability" should even apply to pensions. Why aren't pensions properly funded? What has been done with the money that should be funding pensions? This issue is similar to the malarky Republicans are feeding us about Social Security being "broke," when it's fully funded until 2037 and with minor tweaks would be in the future. (A huge portion of the baby boomer bubble will die off in the next 20 years, which nobody ever mentions.) The fact is that governments can't stand to see a pot of money they can't use as their pet project piggy bank, and the money for SS and pensions was too tempting. So they spent it, or at least a good portion of it. Then they say, "Too bad, so sad, no pensions for you. Yeah, you worked 45 years at lower wages than you could have had in the private sector, expecting not to live in your children's basement eating Pork 'n' Beans until you die. But we don't care. And oh, by the way, we legislators get to KEEP our big fat pensions."

Lou

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)



I love how these people think that if you don't like unions, you're a Wall St lover.

No most of us realize that Wall St=Union because they are both groups that get priviledge on the backs of taxpayers. We know our politicians are paid for, both Reps and Dems.

Mike H

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Taxpayers shouldn't be paying for someone else salary keeping up with COLA! How can any have any sympathy to state employees? seriously, they get benefits, salary, COLA at the hard working backs of taxpayers. When taxpayer can't afford it no more, then they have the nerve to protest, and nobody sees this as greedy. I've been a union member, but boy am I disgusted by how they took advantage of the newcomers.

TMT

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

In response to those that are understandably upset with public workers because the workers have benefits that the commentors do not have:

The public workers have the benefits BECAUSE they have unions. Union membership has drastically declined in the private sector. It is important that workers present a united front to balance the power that management has.

Dan

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

So why do DMV employees need to be unionized again?

bill Halpin

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I'm upper middle class democrat. I could and should pay more taxes....so should the ppl making \$1million who don't.

that said - - many govt. employees have pensions that are out of line. in CA fire capt's, senior police retire w/\$200k PLUS pensions. Congress reps and senators get unconsonably high retirement benefits. How about prison guard situation in CA?

in private sector...a corp. looks at its profits and usually bases pay upon profits...(less corp. stocks paybacks - etc.)

With govt...who worries about where money for benefits comes from?

I worked govt job early in my life. used to be that w/a govt job one was assured of job security and early retirement...but a minimal pay.

20/30 year retirement plans should be abandoned. one retires at age similar to private employment.

Jen

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (and the voters who put him in office) have become my new hero. The disingenuous class-warfare slogans don't work anymore. The state is on the brink and we need to get serious about dealing with union thugs and their tactics - the Wisconsin gov. owes this to the citizens.

robert

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Speaking as one of those, "rabid public employees," I'd kinda sorta suggest that an occasional wave in the direction of reality might kinda sorts be nice.

In Wisconsin, all the unions are saying is: "let's sit down and work out a deal we can all live with. We'll likely have to accept some cuts and pension cost increases; let's sit down and see if we can't figure out how to make this work."

Oooh, horrors.

As for California, where I work as a teacher, it'd sure be nice if a couple folks'd pull their head out of Glen Beck, and pay some attention to reality.

The last four years have seen cuts and freezes throughout the education budget. They've seen layoffs, and are about to see more. They've seen semi-forced retirements...and as I read a lot of union Contracts, I can tell you for a fact that there've been a lot of concessions on money, benefits, and working conditions.

And Jerry Brown's budget plans, supported by both major teachers' unions, will mean more of the same. It's not great news, but it's likely a deal we have to cut.

Speaking personally, I got a PhD and 30 years' varied teaching experience. I have a great job and solid bennies-- and my salary's something like a lot below what I'd be making at fair market value (or even California averages for collitch profs) and I kick in something like \$800 a month to pay for retirement as well as another \$300 or so for Medicare. And more for SDI, and other insurances. Oh, and more and more we all run our tails off to compensate for

cutbacks. I consider myself lucky...not that I don't work hard, but then so do others who get less around the world.

Sorry. I'll 'pologize to my hundred-plus students right after the holiday.

Of course, reality IS inconvenient. Much easier to listen to Ann Coulter, and then show up at the school board meeting and demand to know why your little Johnny isn't getting that special program, or help with college prep, or his sports team, or whatever.

Wisconsin isn't about unions grabbing more. It's about unions defending bargaining rights against a lousy manager who's backed up by wealthy greedheads.

Andrea Morris

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

If the pensions are underfunded it is not the fault of the unions that the state and local governments managed their finances by never properly funding these benefits. Another point is that these state workers who are in unions are also tax payers. They are not separate from the rest of the population and favored with exclusion from paying taxes. As Larry pointed out the unions and the state executive can in bad times bargain and come to mutually beneficial arrangements. It is not necessary to take away workers' rights.

I work in private industry in a non-unionized company and am always amazed to hear fellow workers express anti-union points of view. They are afraid of their money lining the pockets of union officials. Yet noone where I work feels that we are paid fairly, treated fairly, or given fair benefits. It seems to me that the railing against the so-called over privileged union workers, that this resentment from the rest of us is about anger we feel for what has been taken away from us.

John

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Why are the Republicans vilifying public employees?

To say the state is in an economic mess because of them ridiculous. We'd be in a bigger mess if we didn't have them! They are tax payers too, and a big important part of our economy. If they don't have jobs with disposable income, they don't spend money at private business. If they don't have a job, they don't pay taxes.

How many times have I heard conservatives crying "class warfare!" if a wealthy person is criticized for being rich. But god forbid a public employee makes \$60 K a year! They seem to think it is perfectly ok to vilify them for making a decent income. According to the critics of public employees, class warfare seems to be perfectly ok as long as the people being attacked are middle class state employees.

For many jobs we except the difference in pay and benefits. Why is it we are ok with a doctor making six figures? Why are we ok with a small business owner making six figures? How about a CEO getting millions?

In a high cost-of-living state like CA, no public employee is getting rich. Public employees make a good salary - and what is wrong with that?

robert

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Pssst...union workers are taxpayers, last I checked.

Also last time I checked? The administrators and police captains who spike their pensions, and the senators and such and governors, ain't exactly your rank-and-file union members.

Oh, and another hot tip--just got my Social Security review inna mail. If I retire at 70 after 32 years of paying into the fund, I get a big, big \$1, 348 a month to finance those trips to Brazil.

Oh wait...because of a little number called the WEP and the GPO that got put in to save social security benefits for everybody else, I don't get that.

This little document says that my benefit gets "reduced by an amount equal to two-thirds of your government pension, and could be reduced to zero."

This happens, of course, to help protect YOUR full benefits, O avatars of the private sector.

So please...lecture some more about unions and all the rotten stuff they do, like help set up a Social security system that's doin' just fine until 2037.

Dan

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

So why do DMV employees need to be unionized again?

Joan

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Larry, you missed the big picture. The purpose is to take away the unions ability to fund a voice in political campaigns, after the high courts decision to give corporations an unlimited ability to fund political views.

I was also surprised to hear you put in your own view point on Unions, instead of asking good questions.

Dee

3 days, 20 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Someone mentioned COLA. Why shouldn't the cost of living and, even more, the inflation of a dollar need to be included in pensions and SS. I know I couldn't still live on the same salary I received 20 years ago.

I think we all need to remember that state employees also pay state income, property and sales taxes, just like the rest of us "hardworking taxpayers."

Alex

3 days, 19 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

I'm of two minds about this issue. My support goes to the union if it can make the legislature restrict its behavior and reduce its pay and benefits too. The union and the legislature should live within the means of a private sector worker.

Mark of Fullerton

3 days, 19 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

"The Union" There is more than one state union.

The people responsible for state union pay are working for the state. It's your fault for voting for people who don't know how to do their job(s).

Some people know how to game the system, double dipping.

To many people aren't paying their fair share of taxes.

Death taxes? Don't be dumb, I want to pay all my taxes after I die. This all ties together.

Mark of Fullerton

3 days, 19 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Dan:

So why do DMV employees need to be unionized again?

Answer: To bargain. So as not to be dictated to.

Sol

3 days, 19 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

The large transnational corporations are currently running our Government, not by our citizens.

The objective of a corporation is solely to make a profit. That is the way we designed them. Our Government representative's job is to provide reasonable regulations to assure fair and reasonable benefit to our citizens.

Corporations strive to minimize employment, minimize worker salaries, and maximize working hours, provide minimum benefits, minimize expensive pollutant control, etc. These all provide significant increases of corporate profit.

Unions were formed with great difficulty by the working class to place reasonable limits on corporate practices by enacting reasonable Government regulations for the workplace and for tariffs to equalize export/import balance of trade.

In the last 30 years the corporations have gained significant power to implement deregulation or defunding of most of our citizen protection laws.

Today, unions represent less than 10% of the private sector employment and have virtually no power.

Corporate funding of political activities is a million times greater than the total of middle class political donations plus funds available from union organizations.

Most middle class private sector and self-employed workers who are jealous of middle class government worker benefits do not understand that salaries and benefits have gone down because of the corporate multi-prong effort to increase profits and reduce costs. Middle class benefits for government workers have not gone down as much as the private sector because of union influence and since many government representatives have still recognized their duties to the citizens.

Citizen's United is the recent breakthrough giving Corporations enormous power. Corporations are now in substantial control of our elected officials with 30,000 smart, knowledgeable lobbyists and any amount of money necessary to control who gets elected and who gets defeated.

Currently, the newly elected Republican Governors are merely following corporate decisions to get rid of all Government unions.

robert

3 days, 19 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Please, folks, do the math.

You think this is all a matter of unions? Please read: [http://voices.washingtonpost.com/ezra-klein/2011/02/unions\\_arent\\_to\\_blame\\_for\\_wisc.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/ezra-klein/2011/02/unions_arent_to_blame_for_wisc.html)

Among other things, the deficit comes from Wisconsin's having borrowed from its medicare liability fund and being court-ordered to pay back \$200 mil. And it comes from the Gov's having just given away \$100-200 mil in brand new

tax breaks to his corporate contributors. Oh, and incidentally? This projected deficit is due to unemployment, and it's an estimate for the next two years, not one.

Will the unions have to do some give-backs? Probably--which is what they're saying they want to negotiate.

You want us fatcats to live off what, \$20 an hour? No benefits? Good luck...that works out to oh, \$3500/month. Before taxes. Before average health insurance costs of, oh, \$1400 a month.

You believe that public sector types and especially teachers make too much? really? Look at salaries in South Korea and Finland, the countries that lead the world in student learning outcomes. Look at the other bennies teachers there get...including gov support for their educations.

Oh, and look at teachers (and the rest of the middle class') actual incomes over the last happy decade. Look at the transfer of wealth to the wealthy, the decline in incomes, the exponential growth of part-time and adjunct faculty.

Then ask yourself why, exactly, you're licking the hands of the wealthy and their wealthy apologists on TV.

Or is it just easier to blame the Caliphate of Liberals?

db

3 days, 18 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Walker's reasoning is all based on misinformation. Milwaukee doesn't have a huge deficit and what it does was brought on by his giving out tax breaks and larding up the budget with his own pork.

Mark in Irvine

3 days, 18 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

You can smell the fear in these union members' comments. That's good. Maybe we won't be able to reverse collective bargaining by public employees in California, but maybe other states will thereby placing tremendous pressure on our public employee unions to accept lower salaries and benefits.

robert

3 days, 17 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

No, Mark. You can smell an exasperation with people who don't know the facts and who can't be bothered to look them up, as well as some regret about people who work hard for a living and who (for whatever reason) kowtow to the wealthy and attack those who are on the side of working people.

I'd recommend some homework...but what's the point? I mean, you'd only find out that nobody in California education's been getting COLA, that there've been endless layoffs and cuts, that so on and so forth. Hell, you might even find out that around the world, there's a direct connection between good strong government support and pay for teachers, and how well students do.

This stuff, I admit, is inimical to the old world-view....so hang on to that faith in crumb-snatching from your betters' tables out there in the private sector.

No doubt when you get dumped, you'll want every bit of those benefits and chances that taxpayers like me fund, and that union members like me fought to get for you.

And I'm sure that next time you hit the school board screaming because they haven't got the staff or the money or the equipment to offer the programs your kids deserve, it'll all be the unions' fault.

Joan

3 days, 13 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

So a 61-year old firefighter, with 38 years in, died today in the line of duty. If I were some of the people on this board who diss firefighters and police, I'd be ashamed to ever dial 911. Oh, we'll come and save you, of course, because that's what we do day in and day out. But you should be ashamed all the same.

dg

2 days, 19 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Dear Erin. It sickens many of us that Democrats want to disregard the outcome of the last election in Wisconsin! This kind of parliamentary trick makes a mockery of our system. Of course it is used by both sides in different ways....so it's hard to find higher ground.

robert

1 day, 22 hours ago

[Link to this comment](#)

Oh, we're not disregarding it at all.

Unlike some, we know that the Wisconsin Gov's second biggest campaign contributor was the Koch brothers.

We recall that the Republican Gov's Association (again, funded lavishly by the Kochs) dumped over \$3 million into attack ads.

And we sure as heck noted that the Gov has exempted from most cuts, and all attacks on collective bargaining, the

unions that have mostly-Republican members.

All these union members are asking for is the right to keep their union, and to bargain away a reasonable amount of their salary and benefits, given the hard financial times.

Oooh. No wonder people are furious.

Oh, and one other thing? The Wisconsin Gov is a professional politician, who's been being groomed for office for well over a decade. He's been a worker for a big, big two years. Then he worked for a charity...but he's never run a business, and since the 90s he's got his salary from taxpayers like me.

Astonishing.

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