

## It's union-busting, not budgeting

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**Here's all you need to know about Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker's plan to attack his state's projected \$3.6 billion budget deficit over the next two years in part by stripping public sector workers of their collective bargaining rights on everything but salary: When the unions agreed to Walker's demand that they contribute nearly 6 percent of their pay for pension benefits (as opposed to almost nothing) and double their payments for health insurance, but insisted on preserving their collective bargaining rights, Walker said nothing doing. Non-negotiable.**

**This is exactly what this power play is about. Forget about shared sacrifice. What's going on in Wisconsin and several other Midwestern states is nothing less than a Republican effort to squash the power of public unions with the ultimate goal of eliminating them — which makes it an assault on middle-class Americans.**

**The governor stiffened his resistance to any kind of negotiation on his bill when he went on TV Tuesday and said failure to pass his bill exactly as he wants it would cost 1,500 state workers and 5,000 municipal workers their jobs by the summer. Nothing like threatening people's jobs to resolve a tense situation.**

**Not everyone is buying Walker's threats and bluster. When Democrats in the Wisconsin Senate left the state to prevent a quorum being present to vote on the bill, tens of thousands of protesters descended on Madison, the state capital, to oppose the bill and support union rights. Union members from around the country began arriving to show their support.**

**And while Walker and other conservative politicians like to demonize the unions for much of the country's fiscal problems, Americans on the whole apparently do not share their views. A USA Today/Gallup poll taken this week revealed that Americans overwhelmingly oppose laws that would eliminate collective bargaining powers of public employee unions. The poll found 61 percent would**

**oppose a law in their state similar to the Wisconsin proposal, while 33 percent would favor such a law.**

**As political power plays go, this one is fairly transparent. Unions, both public and private, are a voice, sometimes a powerful one, for working-class Americans and have historically supported Democratic candidates in this country. Conservative Republicans have historically tried to weaken their power. Walker's bill tellingly exempts police and firefighters, who tend to be more conservative, from the loss of collective bargaining rights. (Ironically, those two groups in Wisconsin said they'd be willing to give back some benefits if the bargaining rights of the other public unions were preserved.)**

**Wealthy conservatives have contributed millions of dollars to the campaigns of candidates, like Walker, who share their views. In Wisconsin, billionaires Charles and David Koch, tea party financiers and longtime foes of unions, were among Walker's biggest contributors. The Koches also planned to run anti-union ads in Wisconsin. This is big money vs. middle America.**

**Do some public sector unions have benefits and contracts that are too generous? No question. Do these need to be renegotiated in light of current circumstances and with the idea of shared sacrifice? Absolutely. And unions must be more willing to do so in tough economic times. But eliminating their voice at the table is not the way to go about it.**