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Workers would go unheard without collective bargaining

In his March 18 Washington Forum commentary, [“Wisconsin’s bargain budget,”](#) Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (R) justified taking away collective-bargaining rights for government workers in his state by arguing that his plan is a better deal than the law grants federal employees.

But what Mr. Walker also took away was their voice at work, i.e., the opportunity to have a say on issues such as scheduling, health and safety, overtime policies, and access to training, as well as career development and promotion opportunities. Those issues are the heart and soul of collective bargaining. Economic issues are important, but the most important thing is the voice. When that voice is silenced, so is the voice of the middle class. That’s why collective-bargaining rights are so precious, and that’s the source of Wisconsin residents’ outrage.

Don’t let Scott Walker’s comments fool you. Stripping Wisconsin’s employees of their basic worker rights isn’t about balancing budgets or reducing deficits. It’s about taking away the fundamental right of employees to have a voice in the workplace, and there’s nothing right about that.

John Gage, Washington

The writer is president of the American Federation of Government Employees.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker made no mention of the massive \$117 million in tax breaks he provided for wealthy corporations before he launched his power grab to silence the voices of working men and women. Mr. Walker was more interested in stripping nurses, teachers, corrections officers, bus drivers and emergency medical technicians of their hard-won rights than pulling together to find real solutions to meet the problems in his state.

Now, he has used The Post to paint a decidedly false picture of his record. The battle in Wisconsin was not about balancing the budget. The right of collective bargaining has no impact on any budget. What led more than 100,000 dedicated people to rally outside the state Capitol was the governor’s reckless attempt to destroy the ability of middle-class workers to have a voice.

Public employees fought long and hard for the right to collective bargaining. Forty-three years ago next month, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. died defending the right of collective bargaining for sanitation workers in Memphis. We will not forget his sacrifice. Nor will we forget the treachery of politicians who run for office claiming jobs are their top priority but then spend their first months in office taking away the rights of workers. America’s working families know the difference between right and wrong.

Gerald W. McEntee, Washington

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http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/workers-would-go-unheard-without-collective-bargaining/2011/03/18/ABMRRL3_story.html