

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32497>

Radio, web

Blog mentions: <http://www.aolnews.com/2011/02/25/wisconsin-protests-set-neighbor-against-neighbor>

Stand up with Pete Dominic, on Sirius Radio, 2/25:
<http://standupwithpetedominick.com/blog/friday-charles-ellison-guest-hosts>

Appearance on “The Takeaway,” 2/25:
<http://www.thetakeaway.org/2011/feb/25/wisconsins-battle-continues-over-collective-bargaining/>

Ian Masters, KPFK in Los Angeles Feb. 24, 2011
http://archive.kpfk.org/parchive/mp3/kpfk_110224_170004bbriefing.MP3

Wisconsin Public Radio appearance Feb. 18, 2011:
<http://wpr.org/wcast/download-mp3-request.cfm?mp3file=jca110218c.mp3&iNoteID=95608>

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All: [Bill Lueders](#)

Capitol protest Articles

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32236>

[Protests won't stop Walker's assault on Wisconsin's public employee unions](#)
on 02/13/11 at 8:12 pm

My editor called me a short while ago to discuss how *Isthmus* can cover the coming [days of protests](#) over Gov. Scott Walker's effort to break the back of the state's public employee unions. Of course we have to do so, as these are major news events; but my feeling is that these rallies are a colossal waste of everybody's time, and exactly the reaction Gov. Walker hopes to inspire.

There's a Valentine's Day delivery of cutesy messages (“I ♥ UW: Governor Walker, Don't Break my ♥”) on Monday, and larger protests on Tuesday and Wednesday. They are expected to draw thousands of people to the state Capitol, for rallies, speeches and words of bitter dissent. And they will give the governor the dramatic and momentary

confrontation he craves, to buff up his national image as a formidable dude, one who's willing to stand up to workers who have had it too good for too long.

On Friday, Walker announced that instead of negotiating with the state's unions he will unilaterally extract major changes in the benefits of the workers they represent, forcing them to pay half their pensions and more than doubling their share of health care costs. More importantly, his plan would take away the right of state and local unions, including those representing teachers, to collectively bargain for anything other than salaries. And it would set the stage for the eradication of public employee unions, by allowing any member who doesn't feel like it to avoid paying union dues and requiring annual secret-ballot recertification votes.

And, if all goes as planned, these sweeping changes could be passed by both houses of the state Legislature by the end of this week. The plan is to have one public hearing and virtually no debate. We might as well have elected Hosni Mubarak.

The scope and severity of Walker's assault on public employees is breathtaking. And while Walker has contemptuously dismissed people's shocked reactions, saying anyone who didn't see this coming must have been in a "coma," in fact even some members of his own party were surprised.

"The concept is pretty radical," remarked state Sen. Luther Olsen says of the Walker proposal, a Republican from Ripon, the birthplace of the Republican Party. "It affects a lot of good working people."

Of course, that doesn't mean Olsen, or any other member of the state GOP, will vote against the plan. The Republicans are nothing if not disciplined, and will likely vote lockstep with their new leader, as they have so far. The minority Democrats are powerless to stop them; and so are the protesters -- no matter how many there are, or how angry they might be.

Protests are exactly what Walker wants, because they can only lead to two outcomes: Either they are peaceful and accomplish nothing; or they turn violent and create a massive backlash against the unions and their members. Either way, Walker wins.

He knows this. That's why he's announced plans to bring in the Wisconsin National Guard to staff the prisons if guards strike, and presumably also to quell whatever disturbances might erupt.

The governor also knows exactly what kind of reaction -- sustained, militant, disciplined -- might put the kibosh on his power grab. That's why he's exempted law enforcement and firefighters from his union-busting scheme. He can always come after them later, when the destruction of other public employee unions makes them targets of popular resentment. Why should law enforcement have rights that no one else does?

It's not clear whether police and sheriffs deputies will sit out this attack on their union brethren, or perhaps even be available to crack a few heads if passions run high and clashes can be successfully instigated. But clearly Walker knows he can't get away with doing to cops what he plans to do to teachers, at least not yet.

The cops and deputies have cohesion, and resolve. Teachers and other public employees, on the other hand, are perfect victims. They aren't used to conflict, and they aren't very good at it. They will hoist their signs and chant their chants and lose their benefits and then their unions.

Could they fight back and win? Absolutely. But it would take a lot more resolve than Scott Walker and the Republicans give them credit for. It would take all-out campaigns of nonviolent civil disobedience, including a willingness to risk physical abuse and mass arrest, again and again.

Instead of converging on the Capitol to hear speeches and shout slogans, maybe the public employees of Wisconsin should show their solidarity with each other by forming a human chain around it, to prevent anyone from coming and going.

The scene Walker wants to see is chanting crowds and, ideally, tear gas canisters being fired after stones get tossed. What if instead the unionized law enforcement officers were sent to use their muscles and clubs to break a human chain that just kept reforming, as row after row of resolutely nonviolent resisters were dragged off to jail? And what if actions like this went on not just for a few hours of a sunny February day but for weeks and months?

I'm not advocating this course of action. It may be too uncomfortable a role to foist on people like teachers and clerks who have worked hard and played by the rules all their lives. The truth is, people in this country are not taught to fight for our rights; we are taught to praise others for having done so.

Maybe, too, this is not a good idea. Maybe the protections and benefits that have come to public employees and their families -- and by extension, other union and nonunion workers throughout the state -- are simply not worth fighting for. That's a decision each worker has to make.

But one thing's for certain: Coming to a rally, or two or three, and chanting chants is not going to stop the governor's plan. If that's all unionists and their supporters are willing to do, they might as well skip these protests.

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32261>

[Packed throng at Wisconsin Capitol answers Walker's declaration of war](#)
on 02/15/11 at 3:16 pm

What if the governor declared war on working people and everybody came? That's how it felt today at the state Capitol rally against Gov. Scott Walker's jihad on public employee unions.

There were thousands upon thousands of people -- pressed onto the steps on the Capitol's State Street entrance, spilling off to the sides in three-foot-deep snow drifts, extending all the way to the 100 block of State Street and onto the sidewalks on either side. And all of them were united in their shock and anger at what the governor and state Legislature are poised to do.

As the crowd thickened, I made my way up the Capitol steps, talking to as many people as I could.

A.J. Moll, however, couldn't make it up the steps. He was sitting on a planter down by the sidewalk, a portable oxygen tank beside him. For more than four decades, until his retirement a few years ago, the Madison resident was a proud union member, an electrician with Local 159.

"What do I feel about Walker?" he said, posing a question I hadn't asked. "He's like all Republicans. They want everybody working for minimum wage." Except, of course, themselves.

Ramona Tenosorio was on the steps with her two oldest children, carrying a sign branding Walker "Bad for Education." A grad student at the UW-Milwaukee who belongs to the teaching assistants union there, she said the changes Walker wants to unilaterally impose -- doubling her health care costs -- threaten her ability to survive.

"I make less than \$20,000 a year supporting a family of six," she says. "These cuts would cause devastation for my family."

But Tenosorio feels the "real tragedy" is Walker's determination to strip public employee unions of their right to collective bargaining, and ultimately their ability to survive. She noted that even the remaining ability of public employee unions to collectively bargain for salaries is a farce, as any increases above the rate of inflation would have to go to a voter referendum.

Also on hand from Milwaukee was Ike Edwards, who works for a private sector union, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1473. His union is not affected by Walker's changes, but like many others in the crowd, he was there in solidarity with those who are.

"We're pretty much united in terms of our position that this bill is ridiculous and goes way too far," said Edwards. He called it "a power grab."

Sue Cameron, an employee of WEAC who came to the event from Waterford, in northern Racine County, had a similar take: "We're looking at this bill as killing a flea with a

sledgehammer. I don't know what gutting collective bargaining rights has to do with balancing a budget. It's one thing to [ask for] sacrifice. It's another to bash."

Dave Carrid of Madison is a retired employee of University Hospital, where he was a member of AFSCME for 25 years. He has worked one other union job and some that were nonunion.

"The jobs that were nonunion that I held in Madison were terrible compared to the union jobs," Carrid told me. "Unions made my life better. They make every worker's life better."

I spoke to several people who work as prison guards at Oshkosh Correctional Institution, members of AFSCME Local 18. They told me that about 50 members of their 275-member unit -- everyone who had off or was able to take off by using vacation pay -- was at the event.

The guards were aghast at the idea of losing the right to collectively bargain for workplace issues, like how grievances are handled. "Working in prison, there's a lot of ways you can get in trouble," said one guard, Scott Kinnard, as when "inmates make accusations." He says Walker's plan will leave guards with "no protections."

"Our employer is going to be able to do whatever they want and we'll have convicted felons to worry about, too," he said. "We're going to get it from both ends."

I asked the guards if they thought the Wisconsin National Guard might be able to do their jobs, as Walker has suggested, should they strike in protest. "They'd be able to come in and lock the place down," said Kinnard. "But to do our daily jobs, not a chance." He said inmates would immediately recognize and exploit inexperience.

Another guard chimed in on what would happen should inmates find themselves guarded by the National Guard: "They're going to riot."

I spoke to two men who had especially "out there" signs, both the brainchild of one of them, Charles Simonsen, a member of the International Workers of the World in Milwaukee. One sign had the beaming image of Justin Bieber, declaring "Hell No!" The other used a *South Park* caricature of Walker with the words, "Scott, He's a Dick!"

"I'm going for the youth demographic," Simonsen said.

Just then the loudspeakers played "Living on a Prayer," and the crowd enthusiastically joined in. "Could Bon Jovi have ever imagined this?" I wrote in my notes. A moment later, a man with a thick foreign accent asked me if I knew the name of the song that had just played and had me write it down for him, presumably so he can obtain it for his own collection. I imagined him cranking up the Victrola, fist thrusting in air.

I spoke with a couple from Stoughton -- Mike Hansen and Linda LaPorte. Hansen, a member of United Steel Workers Local 904, in Sun Prairie, was especially irate.

"This is just the beginning," he said of Walker. "He's going to go after everybody." LaPorte was appalled that Walker launched his attack without ever attempting negotiations with the union: "He could have gone to the bargaining table."

It was a sentiment shared by Patty Fuhrman of Reedsburg, a school secretary who belongs to an arm of the Wisconsin Federation of Teachers. "Scott Walker needs to come to the table," she scolded. "This is not the way to handle this. We would have made concessions if we were asked, but we weren't."

Making my way back down the steps, I spoke to Art Hackett, formerly of Wisconsin Public Television, who was there as an observer. He made an interesting observation: "This is easily the most broad-based demonstration of its kind I've ever seen." All unionists were represented, and all were united.

That point was also driven home by an off-the-record conversation I had with some of the law enforcement officers policing the event. They made it known their sympathies were with the protesters and not the governor.

Indeed, they noted proudly, some of their colleagues were in attendance.

I've written [some discouraging words](#) about the limitations of protests. And of course, if that's all there is -- people gathered to publicly reinforce what they collectively believe, with signs and chants -- Walker and the Republicans have nothing to fear.

But it was impossible to be at Tuesday's rally and think that was all there is, or all there will be. It wasn't an event so much as an omen, resonant with the enmity that Scott Walker has caused. And that absolutely is something he and the Republicans should fear.

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32325>

[Eyewitness to history: Democrats shut down the Wisconsin Senate](#)
on 02/17/11 at 2:00 pm

What I just witnessed at the Wisconsin State Capitol was either the end of democracy as we know it, or the beginning.

As tens of thousands of demonstrators surrounded the building, a small orange card handed to me by Steve Walters, dean of the Capitol press corps, allowed me access to the extraordinary events taking place behind the scenes.

I was there among the protesters, packed so thickly into the building's corridors that it took me more than a half hour to get my press pass and make it back to the Senate, which was set to vote on Gov. Scott Walker's "budget repair bill," which would impose unilateral changes on state workers, strip most state and local public employees of their collective bargaining rights, and impose rules changes that could likely spell the demise of the unions altogether.

The meeting was supposed to have begun at 11 a.m. but the Senate's 14 Democratic members were nowhere to be found, and indeed, were rumored to have fled the city.

The stratagem denied the Senate the 20-member quorum it needed to proceed. The buzz among the press corps was that state troopers might be sent in pursuit, to round them up and bring them back, in handcuffs if necessary.

At about 11:20, Senate President Mike Ellis announced that the meeting was about to begin, and his Republican colleagues filed into the room. The meeting was called to order, if that's the right word for it.

A roll call was taken. "There are 17 members present," Ellis announced. "A quorum is present." (Seventeen is enough for a regular meeting, but not a budget vote.) Ellis said he would hold the roll open for the missing senators: "We will show them that courtesy."

Business began, as usual, with a prayer, delivered by a black minister. He actually concluded by saying, "We thank you for this time together, in Jesus' name."

Then the GOP senators in the room recited the Pledge of Allegiance, putting conspicuous emphasis on the words "with liberty and justice for all!"

Just as the Senate began its consideration of the budget repair bill, several of the citizens in the upper gallery began shouting, "Freedom! Democracy! Union!" again and again. It was loud and insistent enough that the meeting could not proceed, and the senators left the chamber at 11:36.

While they were out of the room, the people shouting were removed.

The throng of reporters present – about two dozen in all – filed into a conference room, where Sen. Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald spun the absence of his Democratic colleagues as a profound affront to the spirit of democracy embraced by his party.

"I'm not sure why they didn't show up," he stated, as though it were just the latest in a series of Democratic affronts. "The rest of the process, the Democrats didn't participate. And today they just checked out.

"That's not democracy," Fitzgerald clucked. "This is the ultimate shutdown – not showing up for work."

Apparently, by this time, the Republicans had cottoned to the realization that 17 members were not enough to proceed. Said Fitzgerald to reporters, “We need one Democrat to show up.” (Where’s Russ Decker when you really need him?)

In the conference room at the time was Sen. Glenn Grothman, in a genial mood. I asked him, as chants of “Kill the bill!” resonated from the packed Rotunda, if he still thought Gov. Walker’s budget repair bill “didn’t go far enough,” as he’s said.

Absolutely, Grothman replied. “It’s a compromise,” he said of Walker’s proposal. “What are you going to do? If it were up to me, it would have included police and firefighters. In fact, I don’t know why we need collective bargaining [for public employees] at all.”

I mentioned to Grothman that I had interviewed some prison guards for Oshkosh Correctional at one of the protests this week. They told me they were worried about losing the ability to collectively bargain for workplace rules, in an environment where any inmate can make accusations.

Grothman pooh-poohed this, saying his party stood foursquare with prison guards against inmates: “I’m sure the Republican majority will do whatever they can do to protect the guards.”

Everything, that is, except allow them to collectively bargain for anything other than salaries, with even that being a “compromise” he profoundly disagrees with.

I asked if Grothman supported the use of state troopers to seek out and forcibly retrieve the missing senators. Absolutely: “If we can find any Democrats, we will bring them in. [That’s] up to law enforcement.”

It was announced that the Senate Sergeant At Arms, Ted Blazel, was going to make the rounds to the offices of the missing Democratic senators. This he did, with about a dozen reporters in tow.

We wound our way through the packed hallways and up and down multiple stairways to the offices of all 14 Democratic senators, from Mark Miller to Bob Jauch. Blazel entered each and looked around to see if anyone could be found. Then he would exit and shake his head.

Blazel would in each case ask whatever staff were present if they knew where their senators were. I wasn’t able to hear any of these exchanges, but Blazel told reporters, “Mostly the answer is they’re not sure.” The last office was visited at 12:15 p.m., and Blazel headed back to tell the Senate’s leaders that the missing Democrats could not be found.

From the perspective of the tens of thousands of people who are still at the Capitol, their shouts resounding in my office across the street, the Democrats may be missing, but the democracy isn’t.

<http://www.thedailyreport.com/daily/article.php?article=32337>

[Walker to Dem senators, unions: No negotiation, no compromise](#)
on 02/17/11 at 6:05 pm

If anyone thought Gov. Scott Walker -- in his frantic push to extract unilateral concessions from state employees and break the back of public employee unions throughout the state -- could not possibly be more arrogant, they were wrong. Walker took this aspect of his character to a whole new level late this afternoon, in a press conference in his office.

In an appearance that lasted all of 10 minutes, including questions, Walker insulted the Democratic members of the state Senate who fled the state today to prevent passage of these measures, belittled the tens of thousands of citizens who've flocked to the Capitol in protest, and unaccountably claimed the mantle of overwhelming public support for his agenda.

"These are bold political moves, but these are modest, modest requests," Walker asserted, of proposals that would completely strip public employees of their right to collectively bargain for anything except salaries (and to severely limit their ability to do even this), along with sweeping new rules that will make it difficult for their unions to survive. He said his office has gotten "over 8,000 emails" over the last few days and "the majority are telling us to stay firm, stay strong, to stand with the taxpayers."

In what he obviously thought was an effort to be diplomatic, Walker said the teeming masses of protesters, who, even as he spoke, packed the Capitol inside and out, had "a right to be heard." But, he added, they don't have the right to "drown out" the millions of state residents he claims support his moves.

Walker called on the Democratic members of the state Senate to return to work to do the job "they were elected to do." Again, he insisted this is what the state's residents want, overlooking that the Democrats' decision to not show up for work today was drawing audible cheers from many thousands of people.

One reporter suggested a possible compromise: just hike the amount workers pay toward their benefits without gutting their rights to collective bargaining. Walker rejected this, saying it was too essential to his plan.

So what impact might Democrats have if they return? Walker said they had the right to propose amendments, but he had no intention of doing "anything that's going to cost state and local governments the ability to balance their budgets."

The Senate Democrats, predicted Walker, would "do their stunt for a day or two," adding that their action today "is more about theater than anything else."

He also alleged that the unions couldn't be believed when they now say they want to negotiate because, back in December, after he was elected and before he took office, they tried to "ram through" state employee contracts in the dying days of the last session, even though he had already been elected governor. [Note: An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that Walker was accusing legislative Democrats of doing the ramming through.]

I asked if he thought his proposal -- which called on the Legislature to act six days after it was introduced -- did not amount to ramming things through. He denied it absolutely, and chided me for editorializing.

Walker reiterated that it should have been obvious to everyone what he had in mind before he announced it, saying, "If anyone doesn't know what's coming, they've been asleep for the last two years."

He also restated his talking point about how the average state employee contract takes 15 months to negotiate, time the state simply does not have.

Curiously, as he spoke, the Madison Common Council was about to hold a special meeting to pass city employee contracts that have been negotiated over just the last two days, in anticipation of the changes sought by Walker. Turns out contract negotiations can be done even more quickly than Walker and the GOP can rob workers of their rights.

But there was no time for anyone to make that point. Gov. Walker exited the room, through a back door.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/search/searchAuthor.php?authorID=25>

[A tale of three teachers: Checking in with protesters inside the Wisconsin Capitol](#)
on 02/18/11 at 2:33 pm

There are as many stories to tell about the ongoing protests at the state Capitol as there are protesters – tens of thousands. This is a story about three protesters I spoke to today. I noticed them because of their sign: "Sauk Prairie teachers." On the back was another message: "Stop GOP Class War."

All three teach at Sauk Prairie High School. This is the second day in a row that they've come to Madison to protest Scott Walker's move to strip them of their collective bargaining rights and undercut their unions. It probably won't be the last.

Their names are Betty Koehl, Alison Turner and Lynn Frick. Betty has taught at Sauk Prairie High for nearly 30 years; she's a Sauk Prairie native and a graduate of that school. Alison has taught for eight years. It is her second career. From 1993, she worked "in this building as a legislative aide," for state Reps. Mark Meyer and Gwen Moore. Lynn has been a teacher for 26 years, 21 of them at Sauk Prairie.

I ask each of them why they are here, and what they hope to accomplish.

Responds Betty, "I taught social studies for 30 years and, as a citizen and worker, I have to stand up for my rights and show my students that it's important to stand up for what you believe in."

Alison says, "I teach government, and one of my big objectives is teaching about what a good and effective citizen can do and what it means to have a democracy. We talk about these things every day. A good and effective citizen is able to speak out in a democracy." She feels she's modeling good citizenship.

And finally, Lynn: "I've known I wanted to be a teacher since I was 8 years old. I've always believed there is dignity and honor in the profession. This [Walker's initiative] is the height of disrespect, and I can't abide by it.

"I love my students," she continues. "I love being in the classroom. I feel the governor is trying to take that away. I want to be able to go back to my school and my community and hold my head up high."

What is at stake for these teachers is much more than money, or even workplace rights. As they see it, what Walker and the Republicans are trying to do is personal. Relates Lynn, "The saddest thing I saw was a college student with a sign that said, 'I hope I'm not making a mistake in becoming a teacher.'"

It's not a trifling concern. The supporters of Walker's proposal, scarce though they might be, are very explicitly trying to single out teachers for ridicule and recrimination. There are letters to the editor about how well teachers are paid for working just nine months of the year, and how they enjoy such luxurious benefits. Many allege that teachers are flocking to the Capitol on the taxpayers' dime to demand that this undeserved largess continues.

This morning, I was on [Wisconsin Public Radio](#), paired against Steve Prestegard, the editor of a publication called Marketplace Magazine. He openly attacked the teaching profession, talking about their generous salaries and commenting about how everyone knows bad teachers, protected by their unions. He even charged that teachers are using this occasion to pump impressionable young minds full of lies, like by claiming that their pay and benefits really aren't so good.

Now, at the Capitol, the three teachers assure me that compensation is not their main concern. "We're willing to compromise on money," says Betty. Elaborates Lynn, "We

want to have a say on schedules, class sizes, working conditions, sick days" - all things that are now part of collective bargaining agreements.

What about the charge that they are ripping off the taxpayers by protesting instead of teaching? Betty has a response to that.

"I have not missed a single day of work all year. I have 120 sick days accumulated. I go to school every day. I work hard. I pay my taxes. I don't think I caused this financial problem."

Yesterday, the three teachers took a personal day, essentially vacation. Today, per the Sauk Prairie School District's edict, they are working without pay. The district has also told them that the names of any teachers who missed work today will be published in the local paper. "I think some teachers saw it as a threat," says Betty, who appears undaunted.

Suddenly a huge cheer goes up from the crowd as a group of students from the UW School of Education parade through the Rotunda. Lynn watches them from the balcony, wiping tears from her eyes.

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32356>

[Scott Walker stays the course at Day 5 press conference](#)
on 02/18/11 at 6:36 pm

Gov. Scott Walker gave a press conference at 5 p.m. this afternoon that was notable for its extraordinary lack of news. He made the exact same points he made at [his press conference yesterday](#) (held at the exact same time), in many cases using the exact same words. He even appeared to be wearing the same clothes.

Walker bashed the Democratic members of the Wisconsin Senate who have fled the state to block a vote on a "budget repair bill" that would extract unilateral concessions from state workers and end the collective bargaining rights of all public employees in Wisconsin. He said he was pursuing these changes out of absolute necessity, because of the budget deficit he inherited from fiscally reckless Democrats.

The governor allowed that this is a "bold" political move but insisted he was making only "a very modest request" of workers, saying most of the state's blue-collar employees would be thrilled to have the deal they've have, even after the budget bill. And he granted that the tens of thousands of people who have gathered at the state Capitol for days have "a right to be heard" but not to "drown out the voices" of the state's 5.5 million residents.

Walker asserted that "many" of the people whose chants could be heard from inside his conference room were from out-of-state. He said his office has now gotten 19,000 emails

from state residents, the "majority in favor" of his plan. Yesterday, he placed the number at 8,000, again with most urging him on.

Apparently, the tens of thousands of people in the streets are just not that into email. (The address is govgeneral@wisconsin.gov.)

The governor even suggested the bill has received an exhaustive level of scrutiny and input, noting that the one hearing held on it dragged on for 17 hours. "I served in the Legislature," he noted. "I don't ever recall a 17-hour hearing."

Walker did offer a fuller rationale for his insistence on stripping public employees of their collective bargaining rights. "You're going to see major cuts in local government," he said of his upcoming budget, now set to be unveiled March 1. He argued that the only way he can ensure these cuts do not lead to "massive layoffs" is to give local governments and school boards the ability to make unilateral adjustments to pensions and other benefits.

"To protect our schools, to protect our local governments, we need to give them the tools they've been asking for, not just for years but for decades."

I asked him how removing the collective bargaining rights of every public employee union in the state constituted "a very modest request." He responded that collective bargaining rights were really no big whoop, since Wisconsin has such strong civil service protections, which "don't expire with collective bargaining."

Walker then went back into his talking points about how many private sector workers in Wisconsin don't have it as good as public employees. I asked if he wasn't just trying to focus the resentment of one group of workers against another, but his handlers insisted he move on to other questions.

I thought it was an pretty good question. I hope some day to hear his answer.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32365>

[Tea Party crowd shows its support for Walker at Madison's Capitol Square](#)
on 02/19/11 at 3:14 pm

Gov. Scott Walker's shock troops came to the state Capitol today to rally in support of his budget repair bill, which would extract unilateral concessions from state workers while stripping almost all public employees in Wisconsin of their collective bargaining rights.

The rally, organized by the Tea Party-affiliated Americans for Prosperity, was a bit underwhelming compared to the anti-Walker rallies this week, today included. (Police estimated the total turnout at about 50,000, of which less than 10% were at the counter

rally.) But the participants I spoke with before speakers took the stage were remarkably united in purpose: to back their governor and rebuke the union supporters and Senate Democrats giving him a hard time. [Note: The Madison Police Department's actual crowd estimate, released after this story was filed, was 68,000.]

Like the many anti-Walker protesters who've packed the Capitol this week, the pro-Walker forces were angry. But it was anger slathered with resentment – of union workers who they feel have it so much better than they do.

"The reason I'm here is my husband has a small business," Sharon Duginske of Wausau told me. "We have to pay 100% of everything" – health insurance and the like. So does their business' lone employee.

Duginske doesn't think union workers ought to complain about the loss of collective bargaining, since they can always get this back "after this governor is gone." She's angry that government agencies now collect union dues, another thing Walker's budget repair bill will do away with. And she's cool to the argument that unions have raised standards for other workers, through things like the 40-hour workweek and worker's comp. "Why should I pay for them to have 40 hours when I have to work 60?"

But Duginske reserved her deepest ire for educators, whom she accuses of "teaching what to think, not how to think." In Wausau and elsewhere, she said, "kids are taught political correctness in school. They are taught to go against the values I have, to be anti-Republican, anti-conservative."

What's more, "bad teachers can't be fired," which means "new teachers can't find jobs because other teachers are taking up space." She was just getting warmed up: "They don't even have to work a full year."

Gregory, of Milwaukee (he declined to give his last name), took a somewhat broader analysis. "I'm for people, not the government," he said. "I think people should solve their own problems."

What does this mean in the context of a dispute over union rights? "I think they should be treated like the private sector," Gregory explained. "The state is broke. We can't pay for pensions when the state is broke – the same thing Scott Walker says."

Gregory added something about his fundamental beliefs: "I consider the Ten Commandments the definition and the responsibility of liberty," saying any great leader must take his direction from these. And, in a criticism inspired by Obama's health care reform bill, he offered a critique of legislation in general: "No law should have more words than the U.S. Constitution."

I thanked Gregory and moved on. Later, it occurred to me to look something up. Ah, yes, here we go: According to an online resource, the un-amended U.S. Constitution has 4,543

words, including signatures. According to my computer's word count of a cut-and-paste file, Senate Bill 11, Walker's budget repair bill, has 48,966.

I spoke next to Dwight Eich of Wausau, who said, "I'm here because I'm concerned about the direction this country is going." He was especially angered by the Senate Democrats who left the state Thursday to block a vote of the bill. He said the state's voters elected Republicans "to do the will of the people, and it's unfair that Democrats are trying to hijack the democratic process."

The same theme was ably sounded by James Carlock of Kenosha, who carried a bright lime-green sign saying "Teachers Get Back to Work" on one side and "Sen. Wirch Get Back to Work" on the other. Carlock, who is represented in the state Senate by Robert Wirch, one of the 14 Democrats who fled the state and remain in hiding, feels "they are abdicating what the people of [their] districts were electing them to do."

As shouts of "Go, Scott, Go!" filled the air, Carlock continued, "In a democracy, you will not always win, but you have the ability to discuss and debate." He can't think of any issue where skipping out to avoid a vote is justified: "I believe living in the United States and Wisconsin is enjoying the fruits of democracy and accepting the majority rule, even if I disagree."

Laura Gorichanaz of Greenfield came to rally on an AFP bus from Milwaukee to support Walker and represent the state's conservatives. Her father, who accompanied her, said there were "a lot more people than buses," and many folks ending up having to carpool. (If only it were possible to just hop on a train!)

"Not every student at the UW and across the state is a liberal, and some of what Walker is doing will benefit us," said Gorichanaz, who carried a sign saying "UWM [heart]'s Governor Walker." She's upset that her classes Thursday were canceled because her instructors headed off to protest. "I figure it costs me \$62 a day to be in school," she told me. "If they're going to do that, I deserve my money back."

Similar sentiments were sounded by Kelly Gilbert and Jim Poulsen, both of Milwaukee. They carried signs bearing the photos of the 14 missing Senate Democrats asking, "Have You Seen Us?"

Poulsen, an engineer, said he voted for Walker and feels he "proposed many of the things he's doing now before he was elected." He thinks it's a matter of fairness to the electorate: "They voted him in, they want to see him do exactly what he's doing."

Gilbert, a teacher in a Milwaukee-area "voucher school," said a lot of her friends are public school teachers but feels they should have "reported for work" over the last several days. I asked her if there was anything that might justify a teacher walkout – like, for instance, if the administrators at her school began firing people based on the ranking system of "Eeny Meeny Miney Mo."

Gilbert didn't miss a beat: "Considering how the job market is right now, I would stay until my number was called."

This need to conform to modern economic realities also instructed the perspective of Bob Clark, a real estate agent from Brookfield, and his friend Dan Petrie, newly hired after a workless spell by a sheet metal manufacturer.

"I'm going to support the governor who's trying to do the right thing for the state of Wisconsin," said Clark. He pays his own health insurance, funds his own pension, and does not get paid sick vacation or sick days. So naturally it rubs him the wrong way that state workers would object to having to pay more toward their health care and pensions.

But unions representing almost all of these workers have agreed to accept these benefit reductions. What does Clark say about that?

"I'd say that's nothing," said Clark, echoing Gov. Walker's position. The real issue for the unions, and Clark (and Walker) is the part of the proposal that strips collective bargaining rights and the ability to collect union dues. Clark feels this is why the unions are fighting the proposal, and why he wants it to pass.

"[They] don't want to lose power," he said. "It's the head of the unions who are getting paid more than the governor."

Petrie of Wauwatosa, who said his son and Walker's son "played baseball together," couldn't agree more. The main issue isn't "the pittance" that Walker wants state workers to pay toward their pensions and health care. It's collective bargaining, which should be done away with.

"Collective bargaining is not a right, it's a privilege," Petrie argued. "A right is something that's necessary to the human condition, and they don't have the right to demand more and more from the taxpayers who are paying their salaries."

He also agreed the main thing driving the unions was the threat to their ability to collect dues, which they can then use to "bankroll these politicians who are going to kick it right back to them."

I was starting to feel as though I had enough perspective, but the rather rotund pair gave me some more. Said Petrie, "I'd love to have a state job." Agreed Clark, "If I think my job is so hard and I'm treated horribly, there's the door, I'm free to leave."

It was this kind of freedom that Saturday's rally was meant to protect.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32371>

[With Capitol demonstrations, Wisconsin State Journal takes sides, belittles state workers](#)
on 02/20/11 at 1:20 pm

I don't expect people to have noticed, but the truth is I've undergone something of a personal evolution in my attitude toward the *Wisconsin State Journal*, from critic to fan. Yes, I still take an occasional shot at Madison's sole remaining city daily print paper. But I've also supported and defended it with some regularity, as when I stood up for city government reporter Dean Mosiman when Mayor Dave Cieslewicz attacked him, as the paper itself [acknowledged](#).

I've also stated repeatedly in interviews and public appearances regarding my [new book](#) that I believe the paper is doing good and vital journalism, for instance in reporter David Wahlberg's [stunning series](#) last year on rural health care.

Some of my best friends are *State Journal* reporters and editors. Really.

But as a longtime reader and as a person who cares about the quality of journalism and the fairness of commentary, I am deeply affronted by what I've seen in the paper's pages this week. Worst of all is Sunday's edition, which seems determined to obfuscate if not distort facts while going the extra mile to heap derision on the hundreds of thousands of teachers, nurses, social workers, prison guards, streets workers, police officers and fire fighters who have taken to the streets this week in protest of Gov. Scott Walker's assault against public employee unions in Wisconsin.

First, let's consider the paper's editorials, day by day.

On **Friday, Feb. 11**, the day Walker unveiled his budget-repair bill (details of which had been leaked in advance), the paper's lead editorial, "[The city's unsettling settlement](#)," chided the Madison Police Department for taking too long to fire a police officer and then allowing her to collect pay even afterward. It fell to the paper's former lead editorial page writer, Sunny Schubert, to point out in a [letter to the editor](#) a few days later that this criticism was misplaced; the fault was not the police but a bill passed by the state Legislature in the early '90s, affording extraordinary protections to police and firefighters.

Sunday, Feb. 13: The *State Journal* editorialized in favor of the newly announced willingness of state teachers unions to accept major changes in teacher pay and oversight ("[Finally, some real reform for Wisconsin public schools](#)"). But this concession had by that time already been rendered moot by Walker's announcement that he intended to extract even greater changes from teachers without making even an effort to negotiate.

Monday, Feb. 14: As thousands of state residents began mobilizing in opposition to Walker's bill, the *State Journal* ran an editorial in favor of reducing the size of the Dane County Board, as Marathon County is doing ("[Which board will be most obese?](#)").

Tuesday, Feb. 15: The paper ran an editorial encouraging people to go out and vote, as it was primary election day.

Wednesday, Feb. 16: The *State Journal's* editorial brain trust finally cottons to the controversy swirling around it, just a few miles from its offices on Fish Hatchery Road. It runs an editorial, "[Governor's wise to secure prisons](#)," applauding Walker for having said he was willing to call out the National Guard, if necessary, to counter any walk-out by state prison guards.

Thursday, Feb. 17: In its first editorial to comment directly on the governor's budget bill, scheduled for a vote in the state Senate that day, the *State Journal* said Walker was moving "too far, too fast" but otherwise supported his goal of securing changes in the state's relationships with its unions ("[Right direction, dangerous speed](#)"). The paper did allow that "eliminating virtually all collective bargaining rights while making it harder for unions to collect dues and stay certified aren't justified. And some parts of Walker's budget repair plan — such as an increase in political appointees — seem to have little to do with saving money."

Friday, Feb. 18: This was the day after all 14 Democratic members of the state Senate fled to Illinois to avoid being arrested and dragged back to the Capitol in handcuffs, if necessary, so that Republicans can pass the budget bill. And by now, the *State Journal's* patience for all this protest stuff had been stretched to the limit. Its finger-wagging editorial skewered state teachers for taking off of work to attend protests in Madison ("[It's time to get back to class](#)").

While the *State Journal* "[doesn't] begrudge the teachers for speaking up and getting involved in government decisions that affect them," it noted that "the school day ends around 3:30 p.m. That leaves teachers in Madison and surrounding communities plenty of time after work to drive Downtown if they wish to have their say at the Capitol." The paper did not note that tens of thousands of teachers and other workers did just that, as evidenced by the fact that the crowds at the Capitol swelled each night in the early evening hours.

Which brings us to Sunday, **Sunday, Feb. 20** (the *State Journal* does not usually run editorials on Saturdays and saw no reason to make an exception now). The paper tried to play the role of mediator, in an editorial entitled "[Fix budget, then bring bargaining back](#)." Two days after saying that moves to strip the collective bargaining rights of almost all public employees "aren't justified," it now urged that this be done, albeit just for the next two years, until June 2013. It also opined, "The chaos we're experiencing in Wisconsin is simply the extreme manifestation of politics as usual," suggesting that all sides are equally to blame for their inability to let go of excessive partisanship.

These editorials are fully compatible with the paper's other commentary this week. Leading the charge has been columnist Chris Rickert, who has cranked out several columns belittling the protesters who have packed the state Capitol day after day.

There was his column on Tuesday, Feb. 15, "[More of the same old hysterics, hyperbole,](#)" urging both sides to embrace his common-sense solution: Give the governor the pension and health care payments he wants but don't take an ax to collective bargaining.

Walker press secretary Cullen Werwie is quoted as refusing to comment on "hypothetical proposals" like Rickert's proposal. Rickert has yet to comment on the fact that the unions representing public employees have all agreed to accept the pension and health care payments Walker seeks – making this no longer a "hypothetical" -- and that this has been soundly rejected by the governor and GOP leaders.

Rickert followed with a column on Thursday, Feb. 17, entitled "[Budget pain hits beyond vocal crowd at Capitol.](#)" This column chided protesters for "accusing Republican Gov. Scott Walker of something close to putting all public workers in shackles and making them work for Chiclets."

In this column, Rickert highlighted a particular group of unionized state workers – home health-care providers – who don't have it as good as other state workers. His point was to lambaste these other state workers -- the "teachers, firefighters, engineers and other fairly well-compensated union government employees" now asserting their "loudness" at the Capitol -- for being such crybabies.

For Saturday, as the paper's editorial writers took a well-deserved day off, Rickert was back with another column attacking the protesters. "[Look past political theater to judge Walker's proposal](#)" focused on a tiny minority of signs at the Capitol which linked the actions of Gov. Walker to those of deposed Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarek. Rickert said these workers must be a "coddled" bunch to compare their situation to "living under emergency law for 30 years" -- blithely overlooking, among other things, that until a few weeks ago Mubarek was a trusted and respected U.S. ally backed by billions of dollars in U.S. aid and drawing not the slightest rebuke from commentators like Chris Rickert.

On this same day, *State Journal* reporters Clay Barbour and Mary Spicuzza took essentially the same tack, in their "On the Capitol" column, which ran under the headline "Hitler? Mubarek? Come on." "Let's be honest," the reporters urged. "Trying to weaken unions and forcing state workers to pay more for health insurance and pensions is not the same thing as ruling a country with an iron fist for 30 years and stealing billions."

We await their column decrying the guy who showed up on Saturday to support Walker by carrying a "Stop Socialism" sign and shouting about how Barack Obama is not a U.S. citizen, as evidenced by his lack of a birth certificate.

Sunday, Feb. 20, brought another Rickert column in which he purports to be seeking middle ground -- at least at first. "[It hasn't been the best week for liberalism](#)" starts by mocking the protesters for suggesting that the loss of their collective bargaining rights "is a union-busting attack on working people everywhere," as well as the Walker supporters who paint opponents of his proposal as "selfish members of a new class of 'haves' bent solely on protecting their own interests."

Rickert, who has pretty much taken this latter approach all along, comes down squarely on the side of Scott Walker, saying he's been disappointed at the lack of thoughtfulness of those who are coming to the Capitol to "lobby for one of the best-compensated public work forces in the country as though they were something akin to the first black entrants to the University of Mississippi."

The paper's editorials and other commentary, of course, are distinct from its news coverage, which has certainly been more balanced and fair. But it's probably worth noting, as I'm sure others will, the extraordinary lengths the *State Journal* went to in today's paper to suggest that Saturday's rallies at the Capitol brought parity to the issue, in terms of the public's reaction.

"Great Debate" screams the front-page headline, in a story about how supporters of Gov. Walker stood "nose to nose" with pro-union protesters, without a single arrest or violent incident. The main article noted that Madison police estimated the total crowd at 68,000 but never gets around to mentioning their relative proportions. An inside story says the pro-Walker forces estimated their turnout at 8,000 to 10,000, while others say it was more like 2,500 to 3,000. The paper also ran a huge photograph of protesters filling the entire length of State Street, with the caption, "Demonstrators pack State Street on Saturday afternoon for rallies for and against Gov. Scott Walker's budget repair bill."

The State Street side of yesterday's rally was the site of the anti-Walker rally, as were the Wisconsin Avenue and Martin Luther King sides. The pro-Walker forces converged on the opposite side of the Capitol, facing King Street, extending only as far back as the sidewalk on the Capitol side of the Square, with the street also being filled almost entirely with anti-Walker protesters.

But by far the most outrageous insult heaped by the *Wisconsin State Journal* on the teachers, nurses, social workers, police officers and firefighters who have flocked to the Capitol this week was [Sunday's editorial cartoon](#) by Phil Hands. The cartoon shows a man with a huge ponytail sitting in a barber's chair getting a tiny lock clipped by the "barber," Scott Walker, while screaming "HE'S GONNA CHOP OFF MY HEAD!"

Hands is the paper's in-house cartoonist and his work is produced in cooperation with the paper's editorial overseers. So perhaps it's not surprising that his creation reflects the almost constant message coming from the paper's editorials and commentators: That those who object to Walker's agenda are whining brats dramatically overreacting to a modest reduction of pay and benefits for state workers who have had it too good for too long.

What makes this even more remarkable is that the *Wisconsin State Journal* has on its website a video of an interview it conducted with Walker late last week. Walker was asked, by one of the paper's reporters, whether the measures he was seeking "in more ways than one, if not killing the unions now, would lead to their ultimate irrelevance and

probable [demise]’ -- because the role unions would play after losing their collective bargaining rights would be so limited that employees would stop paying dues, as Walker's bill allows.

Walker, in response, essentially conceded the point, saying that's why his plan is getting so much blowback from national union leaders.

But the *State Journal* hasn't written about that.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32393>

[Firefighter answers the call of Wisconsin Capitol protests](#)
on 02/21/11 at 4:30

Adam Wunsch is a third-generation firefighter and proud of it. His grandfather, Lloyd, was for many years the fire chief in Haven, near Sheboygan; his uncle Brian holds that position today. His father, Steve Wunsch, is a member of the Fitchburg fire department and the chief of EMS at Middleton EMS.

A good-looking young man of 18, Adam Wunsch is an intern with the Fitchburg Fire Department, and he hopes to make a career of it. He's not a union member but would become one, as a full member of the department.

He serves on a crew of four firefighters that includes a mix of "public career guys" - members of Firefighters Local 311 - and interns and on-call workers. He works a 24-hour shift every third day. Overall, the department has about 80 firefighters at a time.

Wunsch feels a sense of responsibility to all of them, and to firefighters across the state.

"I'm here to support my brothers, to [protect] their right to keep their union and to keep things fair," he says. Like many other firefighters, he is not consoled by Gov. Scott Walker's decision to exempt firefighters and law enforcement from his benefits squeeze and eradication of collective bargaining.

"The whole thing right here is setting a precedent for us," he says. "It's not a question of if [the governor will go after these workers], it's a question of when."

Wunsch came to the state Capitol late Friday afternoon, "with the intention of staying 20 minutes." He ended up staying until 4 a.m. Saturday; he worked a shift that day starting at 7 a.m.

At 8 a.m. Sunday, an hour after this shift ended, Wunsch was back at the Capitol, where he's been since, heading into his 32nd straight hour as we talked just past 3 p.m. He's thinking about sleeping there again today, "just to keep up a presence."

The Capitol Rotunda was packed again today, although, with ice on the ground and a cold wind blowing, there were not nearly as many people outside today as in recent days.

To my eye, the presence of law enforcement seemed thicker than in past days, although the officers I spoke with thought it was about the same. Some of the officers are getting paid overtime; some are getting straight time. This is costing somebody a fortune.

Ironically, part of why the police are here is to protect Gov. Walker from agitators like Adam Wunsch. But many more people are here to protect them from him.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32395>

[Walker, on Day 8, digs in his heels even deeper](#)

on 02/21/11 at 7:50 pm

For the third straight working day in a row, Gov. Scott Walker held a press conference in his state Capitol office, making the same points he's made at the other two, last [Thursday](#) and [Friday](#), wearing what appeared to be the same clothes and allowing only a few questions, which he addressed with long-winded answers, providing an illusion of access more than access itself.

But some things were different. The entrance to the governor's office was packed with protesters, to the point where I had a hard time even getting in; a large contingent of law enforcement – more than a dozen officers – stood uneasily outside his door. The conference room itself was nearly packed, as national media outlets joined state reporters in greater numbers than before. There was almost a sense that the story is being taken out of our hands, to be served to a larger audience.

Walker, as before, framed each component of the issue in a divisive way. He said the divide in the state Senate was between "those who are ready to work and those who are not."

He suggested that the public employees who have flocked to the Capitol in huge numbers day after day were all somehow shirking their duties, comparing them to the 300,000 workers who actually went to work, ignoring that many employees came on their days off, which is why the largest crowds of all arrived Saturday. (Walker gave a nod to this event, at which anti-Walker protesters outnumbered supporters by more than ten to one, saying there was "a lot of passion, as we saw this weekend, on either side of this issue.")

Walker said the choice before him and the state was between the people whose chants could be heard louder than ever from outside his office and "the millions of hardworking taxpayers of Wisconsin," as though the two categories did not overlap.

And finally, as before, he expressed disdain for the unions who have responded to his refusal to negotiate with a promise to fully accept his terms with regard to pension and health care contributions, saying it showed that they were changing their position "day to day."

There was a new accusation, directed at the Legislature's Democratic leaders, in which Walker contested the notion that his push to strip public employee unions in the state of their ability to collectively bargain was some sort of a surprise. Why, he said, "I briefed Sen. [Mark] Miller and Rep. [Peter] Barca the morning of the announcement."

These people had literally minutes of advance notice. So *there*.

Walker, ripping the Senate Democrats for "hiding out in other states," noted that Wisconsin was facing some pretty serious deadlines regarding his budget repair bill. He said the state had only until "the end of this week" to approve the part of the bill that calls for refinancing state debt to save some \$165 million, by far the largest share of savings. (A veteran Capitol reporter told me the do-or-die deadline is actually early next week.)

That raised an interesting prospect: Will Wisconsin lose an opportunity to painlessly save \$165 million because Walker and the GOP want it all, and if so, who would get the blame?

The question on many reporters' minds was whether, as has been rumored all day, the state Senate might split off the part of the budget bill that Walker seems to care most about and his opponents find most onerous – ending most collective bargaining and eroding the ability of unions to survive – and introducing it as a non-fiscal bill, which can be passed in the Senate with a quorum of just 17. (The budget bill itself needs a quorum of 20, one more body than the GOP has senators.)

This question never got asked, because Walker allowed so few questions. But Walker did get quizzed about the belief, shared almost universally by those protesting him, that he is interested in busting unions. "Can you not see their point?" the reporter asked.

Walker, in response, said he "campaigns on this all throughout the election," meaning the changes he's seeking. He asserted that if he wanted to kill public employee unions, "we would have completely eliminated collective bargaining." As it is, the affected unions will still be able to collectively bargain over salary, to a limited extent.

Also, said Walker, if he wanted to bust unions, he would be going after unions in the private sector, as his powers are apparently that vast.

But, he hastened to assure, "I don't have any interest in doing anything to the private unions. I think the private unions are too important to getting the state's economy going. I welcome working with them."

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32402>

[Wisconsin Republican Assembly leaders say they won't give an inch](#)

on 02/22/11 at 12:23 pm

Republican members of the state Assembly (and one independent) held a press conference Tuesday morning at which they vowed to stand firm in their support of Gov. Scott Walker's budget repair bill, and especially the provisions that would gut the collective bargaining rights of public employees.

"This bill is about solving a budget deficit," said Assembly Speaker Jeff Fitzgerald (R-Horicon), arguing that the changes to collective bargaining are essential to managing the cuts he says will be coming for public schools.

Fitzgerald, like Walker, also claimed that support for these changes in his district and throughout the state, almost nowhere in evidence at the state Capitol this week, was massive and overwhelming. "The people," he asserted, "are on our side."

Rep. Dean Knudson (R-Hudson) agreed, saying the people of Wisconsin have sounded a "desperate cry" for the changes sought by the governor, which he called "painful but necessary."

According to Knudson, "collective bargaining is a failed process," and largely getting rid of the need to engage in it will "set Wisconsin on a course to a firm and sound financial future."

Rep. Joe Knilans (R-Janesville) took this point further: "Union rights are a privilege, not a civil right," he asserted. "Collective bargaining in Wisconsin is 'you can't make me.'"

While this was exactly a pretty good explanation for why tens of thousands of state teachers, prison guards and other workers are reluctant to have this right stripped away, the Republicans were not inclined to cry them a river.

Neither was Rep. Bob Ziegelbauer of Manitowoc, the Legislature's lone independent. He heaped opprobrium on union leaders, saying "The most disheartening aspect [of the current situation] is the attitude that comes from headquarters, which says, 'Lay them off.'"

How dare these union masters have such little regard for their members?

In the question and answer portion, the Assembly members were asked whether they might agree to the stripping of collective bargaining rights for just the next two years, as some have suggested (after which, presumably, the unions will be in a strong enough position to pick up from there and magically undue any losses they've accrued). Speaker

Fitzgerald rejected this, saying the people of Wisconsin “sent us here” to achieve a more permanent solution.

The representatives were also asked whether there was *any* part of the budget bill they were willing to amend – like, for instance, to exempt transit workers since the stripping of their collective bargaining rights could mean the loss of tens of millions of dollars in federal aid.

Replied Rep. Robin Vos (R-Burlington), “we still believe it is not clear” that the changes would have this effect. Better sorry than safe.

Speaker Fitzgerald capped off the proceedings by noting that Wisconsin’s constitution requires a balanced budget, turning even this into a partisan issue: “The president can just print money ... which he’s been doing since he took office.” Wisconsin can’t.

Then Fitzgerald turned it back on his Democratic colleagues, who were not in the room: “Why don’t you ask the Democrats what’s their option [for fixing the deficit]?” He didn’t wait for the question to be asked, before deciding to answer it himself: “It’s to raise taxes.”

And just imagine the commotion *that* would cause.

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32414>

[A punked Scott Walker tells 'David Koch' Wisconsin is at forefront of national crusade](#)
on 02/23/11 at 10:55 am

A [secretly recorded phone conversation](#) between Gov. Scott Walker and an investigative reporter pretending to be David Koch, the New York City right-wing oil billionaire and Walker backer, captures Walker clearly outlining his strategy for making Wisconsin the lead player in a national conservative movement to undercut the power of public employee unions.

The reporter who made the call is Ian Murphy, editor of the *Beast*, a online publication based in Buffalo. The conversation -- here is a [transcript](#) Walker going down what he calls "the list" of Republican governors who have or may be about to launch attacks on public employee unions in their states.

Interjects Murphy: "You're the first domino."

Responds Walker: "Yep, this is our moment."

The recording of this exchange, posted in two parts on YouTube [here](#) and [here](#), begins after the conversation has started. It captures Walker agreeing with the caller when he

refers to the staff at MSNBC as "bastards" and presidential advisor David Axelrod as "that son-of-a-bitch."

Walker's office affirmed the authenticity of the call this morning, saying in a [statement](#) (PDF): "The governor takes many calls every day. Throughout this call the governor maintained his appreciation for and commitment to civil discourse. He continued to say that the budget repair bill is about the budget. The phone call shows that the governor says the same thing in private as he does in public and the lengths that others will go to disrupt the civil debate Wisconsin is having."

Early in the exchange, which took place Tuesday afternoon, Walker brags about how "in the last couple of days I've been going after Obama because he stuck his nose in here." He talks up how he has been making the rounds of national news shows, including *Hannity* and Greta Van Susteren's *On the Record* on Fox and Joe Scarborough's *Morning Joe* on MSNBC.

Murphy makes reference "the liberal bastards on MSNBC." Responds Walker, "Oh yeah, but who watches them?" He elaborates, "They're off the deep end."

Similarly, after Walker tells a story about running into presidential advisor Axelrod, Murphy remarks, "That son of a bitch." Walker's reply: "No kidding, huh?"

But perhaps the most pertinent exchange occurs over the role that Walker sees Wisconsin playing in a much larger movement.

"The response around the country has been phenomenal," Walker relates. "Brian [Sandoval], the new governor of Nevada, called me the other night ... That's all they want to talk about is: 'What are you doing to help the governor in Wisconsin?'"

Walker continues: "I talk to [Ohio Gov. John] Kasich every day; John's got to stand firm in Ohio. I think we could do the same thing with Rick Scott in Florida. I think [Gov. Rick] Snyder if he got a little more support probably could do that in Michigan. You start going down the list. There's a lot of new governors who got elected to do something big."

Says Murphy: "You're the first domino."

"Yep. This is our moment."

Walker goes on to explain his belief that the protests at the Capitol will peter out, allowing him to prevail. This is what he says:

"The other day there were 70,000 -- probably two-thirds were against the bill, one-third were for it -- 70,000 people at the Capitol. All week there's been 15,000 to 30,000 a day. But I remind all of our lawmakers that there's five and a half million people in this state and just because a bunch of guys who can jump off of work because their union rules doesn't mean that the rest of the people in your district are with them."

Murphy offers to help Walker out by "planting some troublemakers" among the demonstrators. Walker's reply:

"We thought about that.... My only gut reaction to that would be, right now, the lawmakers I've talked to have just completely had it with them. The public is not really fond of this. The teachers union did some polling and focus groups, I think, and found out the public turned on them the minute they closed schools for a couple of days. The guys we got left are largely from out of state and I keep dismissing it in all of my press comments, [saying] 'Er, they're mostly from out of state.'

"My only fear would be if there was a ruckus caused, is that that would scare the public into thinking maybe the governor's got to settle to avoid all these problems. Whereas I'm saying, 'Hey, we can handle this, people can protest. This is Madison, full of all these '60s liberals. Let them protest. It's not going to affect us. And as long as we go back to our homes and the majority of people are telling us to do the right thing, let them protest all they want.

"Um, so that's my gut reaction. I think it's actually good if they're constant, they're noisy, but they're quiet, nothing happens, because sooner or later the media stops finding them interesting."

At the end of the call, "Koch" says: "Well, I tell you what, Scott. Once you crush these bastards, I'll fly you out to Cali and show you a good time."

Responds Walker: "All right, that would be outstanding. Thanks for all the support. It's about getting our freedoms back."

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32420>

[Actors Equity head Mary McColl comes to Wisconsin to show solidarity on 02/23/11 at 2:15 pm](#)

Mary McColl seems harmless enough. I'm tempted to call her unimimidating, although spell-check tells me that's not a word. Let's just say she's not big, and she's not scary. But she's precisely the sort of person Gov. Scott Walker wants to present as a threat to the people of his state.

As Walker [told a man](#) he thought was New York City oil billionaire David Koch in a secretly recorded phone conversation yesterday (after admitting he "thought about" planting troublemakers in the crowd to instigate disruptions), "The guys we got left are largely from out of state, and I keep dismissing it in all of my press comments, [saying] 'Er, they're mostly from out of state.'"

In nine days of covering Capitol protests, I've spoken to at least 100 demonstrators, on either side of the divide that Walker has created. McColl, whom I interviewed just after noon today, is the first one who's been from out of state. (I know some are here, but they haven't been a major presence, which makes Walker's claim a wee bit less than truthful.) And so I leaped at the chance to interview her.

McColl is the new executive director of the Actors Equity Association, which represents "upwards of 48,000 members, actors and stage managers" from around the country. McColl, like Koch, lives in New York City. But unlike Koch, who's given tens of thousand of dollars to Walker's campaign and bankrolled the group that staged a pro-Walker rally last Saturday, she is not someone who can just call up and get a few minutes of Walker's time.

And so she's come to Wisconsin, to show her support for the hundreds of actors and stage managers her group represents here: "I'm here to represent Equity members who work across the state of Wisconsin," she told me. "Our position is we are trying to show solidarity with the workers."

As for having this happen so soon after she became her union's head, McColl says, "I am so honored to have this be my baptism by fire because this is a historic moment."

She appeared sincere to me, but maybe it was just acting.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32426>

[Scott Walker hangs tough in Day 10 press conference, media get tougher](#)
on 02/23/11 at 3:14 pm

Gov. Scott Walker held another press conference this afternoon, his fourth since last Thursday. For this one, he changed his shirt and tie (from the standard blue and red to a refreshing white and blue), but not his mind.

The mood of today's press conference was also different, as the questions asked of Walker seemed to get tougher and evince a greater degree of skepticism than in days past.

Walker reiterated his usual talking points about how his plan is essential to plug Wisconsin's gaping fiscal gap. He now claims that the bill will provide local governments with \$1.5 billion in savings, if only some or all of the 14 missing Democratic senators return to Madison to allow this to happen. He matched this carrot with a stick, saying that if his bill does not pass, 1,500 state workers will have to be laid off by June 30, something he said the state "can't afford."

The governor now claims to have gotten 100,000 emails, up from 8,000 last [Thursday](#) and 19,000 on [Friday](#). But this time he made no claim, as he has earlier, that the majority

of those sending him emails supported him. He now said of these emails, "obviously some for, some against."

There was one old point to which Walker gave new emphasis: that under his bill, union members will no longer be compelled to pay dues, and thus can put these savings -- which he said in some cases run to \$1,000 a year -- toward offsetting the cost of paying half their pensions and a much larger share of their health insurance.

Many of the questions centered on Walker's [secretly recorded conversation](#) with a journalist in Buffalo, posing as New York oil billionaire and Walker backer David Koch.

In this exchange, Walker displayed more than his usual amount of cockiness as well as remarkable tolerance for vulgar attacks on protesters, the liberal media and President Obama's senior adviser, David Axelrod. He also told "Koch" that he was confident the protests would peter out, saying "let them protest all they want" because "sooner or later the media stops finding them interesting."

The media at today's press conference seemed as interested as ever.

"Did you talk to the real Koch?" was one shouted-out question that didn't get answered. But Walker did take a stab at answering whether he could still make the case that he was acting in good faith when he admitted during this call that he considered planting troublemakers among the protesters to discredit them.

"People have brought up all sorts of different options," said Walker, noting that in his conversation with "Koch," he rejected this particular option.

Another reporter noted that Walker had evoked President Ronald Reagan's handling of air traffic controllers as a positive precedent for what was happening in Wisconsin. "Does that not sound like union busting, or is it budget balancing?" the reporter asked.

"No," responded Walker. "It's about balancing the budget."

After several such questions, Walker seemed a bit put-out. "I take phone calls all the time," he said, as though the access he afforded "David Koch" was the same as he'd do for *anybody*. "I'm not going to allow one prank phone call to be a distraction."

Throughout the press conference, state Rep. Brett Hulsey (D-Madison) stood toward the back with his hand in the air, hoping he'd be called on. He wasn't. After Walker exited, less than 20 minutes after the press conference began, Hulsey strode through the thicket of cameras and reporters to take the podium.

The governor's staff responded by turning off the microphone and opening the conference room doors, so that Hulsey was drowned out by the din of the protest echoing through the Capitol. The irony of the moment was exquisite, given Walker's constant references to not wanting the protesters to "drown out" the much larger group of state residents he claims are on his side.

"Close the door," shouted some of the reporters. The reporters, unlike Walker, wanted to hear what he had to say. A correspondent from a national news network standing next to me called these steps to make it hard to hear Hulsey "childish."

I couldn't hear a word that Hulsey was saying until I worked my way through the knot of reporters. Then I could catch only snippets, including: "We've got to sit down and talk."

Maybe Hulsey should consider pretending to be David Koch.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/isthmus/article.php?article=32445>

[Scott Walker's War](#)
[on 02/24/11 at 9:00 am](#)

For me and other journalists, the past two weeks have been riveting. I've [interviewed](#) dozens of protesters at the state Capitol, from schoolteachers to prison guards. I [was there](#) in the Senate chamber when it became clear that its 14 Democrats had left the state to prevent a vote on Gov. Scott Walker's "budget repair bill." I got to follow the Senate Sergeant at Arms on an office-by-office search, to see if any could be found. None were.

I've been at Walker's [press conferences](#), hearing him tersely reiterate that he's taken the only possible path to balancing the budget, as the chants and jeers of thousands of demonstrators intrude into his conference room, begging to differ. I chatted it up with Tea Party activists who staged a relatively tiny [pro-Walker rally](#) last Saturday — 3,000 to 5,000 people out of a crowd Madison police estimated at 68,000.

Historic and thrilling events are happening here. Even as I type these words I'm hearing music and cheers from the omnipresent throng gathered at the Capitol, across the street from my office.

But as a lifelong resident of Wisconsin, I'm saddened — truly and deeply saddened — by what Walker has set in motion. It will change the state forever, causing profound and lasting damage, no matter how the budget stalemate plays out.

Scott Walker's declaration of war against Wisconsin's teachers, nurses, social workers, 911 operators, prison guards, park rangers, sanitation workers, snowplow operators, engineers, police officers and firefighters — and their inevitable decision to join the battle — could be for Wisconsin what the attacks of 9/11 were for the nation. It will create a deep before-and-after divide, between a time of relative innocence and a time of perpetual conflict and insecurity.

The difference is that the attacks of 9/11 were external, and stirred a sense of national unity. What has been fomented in Wisconsin is a rupture among ourselves, one that will ensure acrimony and contention for many years, perhaps decades. The dispute will be not just between Walker and his tens of thousands of newly impassioned enemies, but between the state's citizens — worker against worker, neighbor against neighbor, family member against family member. (Personally, I think a colonoscopy without anesthesia might be less painful than the next get-together of my extended family.)

"Our state is ripped apart right now," fugitive Democratic state Sen. Jon Erpenbach told MSNBC's Rachel Maddow from his "undisclosed location" last week. Get used to it. The animosity that has been unleashed here will not go away when some uneasy stasis is reached; it will become part of the fabric of life in Wisconsin.

None of this was necessary, none of it is justified, and none of it can ever be forgiven or forgotten.

Walker claims the state's budget crisis is so gaping and horrific he had no choice but to unilaterally extract benefit concessions from some public employees and minimize the collective bargaining rights of nearly all of them, at the state and local level. But Wisconsin's fiscal situation is not as grave as that of other states, nor is its current budget deficit as large as what Walker's predecessor was able to plug two years ago, without drastic measures.

Moreover, Walker's sense of urgency over reining in employee benefits has not prompted him to be otherwise tightfisted. In just the last several weeks, Walker and the GOP have passed \$140 million in new tax breaks for businesses, with more to come. (As a candidate, he promised more than a billion dollars of givebacks to corporations and the state's wealthiest residents.)

And, as the *Wisconsin State Journal* [reported](#), the largest share of savings in Walker's budget repair bill for the current fiscal year (\$165 million) will come from refinancing state debt, not new payments from public employees (\$30 million). And the elimination of most collective bargaining — which allows employee unions to negotiate everything from benefit levels to sick days — has no direct impact on the state's bottom line.

Walker says neutering collective bargaining is absolutely necessary because of the changes he'll announce next Tuesday in his first biennial budget. It will include "major cuts" in state funding to local governments and reportedly calls for slashing state aid to schools by \$900 million over the next two years.

The only way to ensure these cuts do not lead to "massive layoffs," says Walker, is to give local governments and school boards the authority they've long sought to make unilateral adjustments to pensions and other benefits. "To protect our schools, to protect our local governments, we need to give them the tools they've been asking for, not just for years but for decades."

But as *Isthmus* has [reported](#), this statewide and decades-long clamor from local officials has somehow escaped the attention of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Wisconsin League of Municipalities and even the conservative-leaning Wisconsin Counties Association.

All of these groups say that while they've sought changes in the collective bargaining process, they have not asked for the elimination of collective bargaining rights; many of their members don't think doing so is a good idea. Muses Dan Thompson, executive

director of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, "The governor gave us a great deal more flexibility than we asked for."

As has been said many thousands of times since Walker unveiled it on Feb. 11, the budget repair bill is not about balancing the budget, it's about busting unions.

You don't have to take my word for it. You can take Scott Walker's. Last week he was [asked by](#) the *Wisconsin State Journal* whether the measures he's seeking "in more ways than one, if not killing the unions now, would lead to their ultimate irrelevance and probable [demise]" — because without collective bargaining their role would be so limited that employees would stop paying dues, as Walker's bill allows. The governor conceded the point, saying, "Presumably, that's why there's so many national union leaders here because, politically, they want the money."

It's an admission that substantiates accusations from many quarters that Walker's real goal is to rob unions of their ability to operate politically. They are a major source of campaign contributions and volunteers to Democratic candidates, against the now-unlimited ability of corporations to pour money into elections. Get rid of unions and you can start thinking seriously about getting rid of Democrats.

That's why the outcome of Walker's war has enormous stakes for the entire nation. He's part of a trio of GOP glory governors — along with Chris Christie of New Jersey and John Kasich of Ohio — at the vanguard of a movement to crush public employee unions.

But make no mistake: Walker has gone further than any of these other governors in his pursuit of this agenda. (A similar attack on collective bargaining in Indiana is being waged by GOP lawmakers but opposed by that state's Republican governor.) As I heard a reporter from Duluth tell a reporter from the *Washington Times*, before the start of Walker's press conference last Friday, "Christie is mostly just talk. He didn't do anything like *this*."

Walker's kneecapping of public employee unions in Wisconsin would elevate his status among national Republican conservatives — people who couldn't care less about workers in Wisconsin or what's best for the state, but who just want a model for how other states can enhance their party's electoral fortunes.

A secretly recorded phone conversation Tuesday between Walker and a Buffalo-based weekly newspaper reporter pretending to be David Koch, the New York City right-wing oil billionaire and Walker backer, shows Walker relishing his role within this group. After Walker goes through what he says is "the list" of Republican governors who have launched or may be preparing attacks on public employee unions in their states, the reporter pretending to be Koch interjects, "You're the first domino."

Responds Walker: "Yep, this is our moment."

The only sticking point is that this is still a democracy, meaning Walker and the GOP cannot implement their agenda and get away with it without a modicum of public support. And there's just one way they can get it: by focusing resentment on public employees, to encourage other workers to see them as conniving, capricious and in need of a sharp yank of the chain. That's exactly what Walker has set out to do, and it's why his war will devastate Wisconsin.

At every turn, Walker has sought to frame the issues of the moment in divisive ways. He says the rift in the Senate Dems is between "those who are ready to work and those who are not." He says the choice before him is whether to side with protesters or "the millions of hardworking taxpayers of Wisconsin," as though the two categories do not overlap.

Walker rages at the gall the unions showed last December, after he was elected but before he took office, when they tried to "cram through" overdue contracts. Meanwhile, he bristles at the suggestion that there was anything the least bit hasty about his wanting to pass his sweeping budget repair bill — which also includes restricting Medicaid eligibility and deepening his control over state agencies — within a week of its unveiling.

According to Walker, the unions are devious and untrustworthy, which is why he's made no effort to negotiate and why he's flatly rejected their offer to accept his pension and health care demands if only they can keep their ability to bargain collectively. He paints this across-the-board concession by every public employee union in the state as "a few people...suggesting they might be willing to come to the table...at the 11th hour."

In fact, other Wisconsin governors have successfully negotiated with the state's public employee unions, who've time and again made sacrifices to help the state balance its budget. (The proposed contracts killed prior to Walker taking office, for instance, included \$100 million in union concessions.) But Walker won't admit these unions can be worked with because he wants them dead.

In other ways, Walker is deeply invested in milking resentment toward public employees, to channel people's frustration over economic hard times into a backlash against anyone who is doing better than they are — except, of course, the actually wealthy.

Here's Walker from his press conference last Friday:

"For those outside of government, who overwhelmingly — overwhelmingly — are paying more than double what we're asking for in this measure, they look at this and say, 'Where do I sign up for this?'... Every factory worker I talked to this last week, who is paying 25 to 50 percent for their health care premium, who doesn't have a pension, who has to pay into a 401(k) and in some cases had that suspended, every one of them looks at this and says, 'You know what? Not only do I not get that, [I have] to pay for it.' That guy has to pay the difference.... He has to [foot] the bill for everyone else."

This was a common theme at last Saturday's Tea Party rally in support of Walker's plan, organized by a Virginia-based right-wing advocacy group funded by David Koch. The demonstrators I [spoke to](#) stressed how hard they must work and what a lousy deal they've got compared to teachers and other public employees. When I asked one protester about the gains, like worker's compensation and the 40-hour work week, that Wisconsin unions have gotten even for nonunion folks, she shot back, "Why should I pay for them to have 40 hours when I have to work 60?"

Such reactions are being applauded by backers of Walker's agenda. "The 85% of Wisconsin employees who do not get a paycheck from the government have little sympathy for the 15% who do," writes Steve Prestegard, the editor of *Marketplace Magazine* and an [occasional guest](#) on Wisconsin Public Radio.

Prestegard has [bashed](#) schoolteachers and other public workers, and urged Walker to get tough: "People employed by government who don't like the employment conditions should seek employment elsewhere, voluntarily or not." He's even [attacked](#) members of the Green Bay Packers who've expressed their support for the state's public employees — i.e., fellow union members.

How ugly can it get? It's almost hard to believe.

The other day Rush Limbaugh played a clip of a Wisconsin schoolteacher explaining why she's protesting Walker's anti-union agenda: "I think we've lost the sense of democracy. I feel like what people in Egypt are fighting for right now, that's exactly what I feel like I'm fighting for right now."

This is [what Limbaugh said](#) in response: "What an absolute idiot. It's a crying shame that this glittering jewel of colossal ignorance is teaching students. Comparing this to Egypt? ...Most of us have more class, most of us have more understanding, most of us are more mature than to run around whining [mock sobbing], 'This is what we want! [more sobbing] I want my dignity! I want my respect, and I want my benefits [sniffle], I want my health care!' Well, go earn it! It's not about what you want. In your case, it's about what can be afforded. They're trying to make themselves out to be oppressed. You're not in Egypt. You're a bunch of people who feel entitled to be freeloaders."

Forget for a moment the offensiveness of a drug addict who makes more than \$30 million a year lambasting schoolteachers and other public employees as "freeloaders." Just consider what it says about Scott Walker — [who appeared](#) as a guest on Limbaugh's show this same day and undoubtedly is aware of his well-publicized rant — that he would let one of his state's teachers, or any public employee, be denigrated like this, without offering the slightest murmur of dissent.

Now consider *why* Walker does not object; it's because he *wants* such sentiments to take root, and spread. That's also why people who have spent years of their lives serving Wisconsin, and who feel they deserve some respect, will fight him to their dying breath.

In a sense, the greatest casualty of Walker's war will almost certainly be Scott Walker himself.

Obviously, Walker knew his budget bill would prompt protests, and probably thought these would add luster to his image among the national GOP leaders he's trying to please. But there is no way he could have anticipated what has actually occurred — crowds of more than 60,000 people and Democratic lawmakers on the lam. There's also no sign he's grasped what these historic developments will mean for his future.

The opportunity Walker inherited from Republican predecessors Warren Knowles, Lee Dreyfus and Tommy Thompson — to be a governor who has the grudging admiration even of people who disagree with him politically — is forever lost. The actions he's taken and the reactions they've sparked ensure that, for the rest of his term, Walker will be regarded with bitter enmity by hundreds of thousands of resourceful people who hold positions of influence within their communities.

From now on, the overriding issue of Gov. Scott Walker's tenure will not be the state's business climate, or balanced budgets, or education, or public safety. It will be Scott Walker. The effort to recall him will be launched Jan. 3, 2012, the first day this becomes an option. (All it takes is 540,208 signatures; people have already crunched the numbers.) That Walker was not more mindful of this possibility is perplexing, given that he was elected Milwaukee County executive on the heels of a successful recall effort there.

Of course it is possible for Walker to survive. But the only way that can happen is if he succeeds in his vile politics of division, turning citizen against citizen, neighbor against neighbor, worker against worker. He must continue to encourage people to resent the teachers who teach their children, the nurses who care for their loved ones, the social workers who offer them help in times of need, the prosecutors who seek justice when they become victims of crime, the police who protect their communities and the firefighters who are prepared to die to save their lives.

It is a war that will have no winners.

[Click here](#) for a timeline of the last week.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32469&sid=351d98a2a28c0d8cc53972515f85d4b3>

[Wisconsin Assembly Democrats wage futile effort to tweak Walker's 'budget repair bill' on 02/24/11 at 3:48 pm](#)

If there was belief in any quarter that Wisconsin Republicans are willing to adopt even the most sensible suggestions from Democrats on how to improve Gov. Scott Walker's "budget repair bill," it died today, before my very eyes. It was a display that established the hollowness of Walker's admonition to the state's 14 missing Senate Democrats to "come back and debate."

Today in the state Assembly, there were many great issues, but absolutely no debate. It was farce without humor.

At issue were Republican motions to table each and every one of the more than 120 amendments offered by Democrats to Walker's bill. The Democrats were the only ones who spoke. Many of the Republicans were not even present -- their votes on each amendment were cast by colleagues in adjacent seats. And the ones who were there seemed to be hardly paying attention.

This slap-down of amendments has been going on for the last several days. As of this morning, 57 amendments had been tabled, in over 45 hours of session so far this week.

Early this morning, the Republicans announced they were prohibiting their colleagues from introducing any additional amendments and would limit discussion on each amendment that had already been introduced to 10 minutes. That means the "debate" over amendments would conclude by this afternoon, and the Assembly would take up debate on the budget bill as a whole.

Today's session began at 6 a.m.; I got there just after 10 and stayed until after noon. It was more than enough time to see what's been happening.

There were amendments to protect Medicaid from the governor's demand that he be given vast new powers to restrict eligibility. Rep. Chris Danou (D-Trempealeau), a former police officer, spoke in favor of an amendment that would limit the amount that employees who live below the poverty line would have to pay toward their health insurance to 6%, about what it is now.

Danou said the changes could make health care unaffordable for this presumably small number of families: "We're punishing people and are going to make things worse."

Rep. Brett Hulsey (D-Madison) weighed in on the same amendment, urging his GOP colleagues, "This is a chance to show your faith, show your Christian charity."

That left 20 seconds for Rep. Cory Mason (D-Racine), who commented that he thought the budget bill imposed "lots of austerity for the poor and working class," even as the governor and the Legislature were delivering new tax breaks -- \$140 million in just the last few weeks -- to "the governor's special-interest friends."

The motion to table the amendment passed on a 58-38 party-line vote.

Amendment 115 would alter the part of the bill that allows the governor to make sweeping changes to the Medicaid eligibility by gubernatorial fiat under his emergency powers rule. This would be accomplished by striking down the stipulation that these powers be invoked only if "necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health, safety or welfare."

The Dems said this would allow the governor to assume these powers any time, for any reason, for any agency. "I find that an incredible power grab," said Rep. Sandy Pasch (D-Whitefish Bay).

Rep. Penny Bernard Schaber (D-Appleton) agreed this provision created a dangerous precedent, which she illustrated by spinning a nightmare scenario: What if some future governor wanted to cite this vast new power to declare an emergency and direct the Department of Revenue to end all the tax breaks for corporations and wealthy residents that are so near and dear to Republican hearts?

"We can take this bill and flip it on its head," said Schaber.

The Republicans were unfazed. The amendment was tabled on a 58-38 vote.

The next amendment would have required the state to conduct an audit before selling off power plants to private interests like the Koch brothers. The Democrats said doing so was simply sound business practice. But even as they made their case, they knew it was hopeless.

"We have become the American equivalent of the British House of Lords," charged Rep. Gary Hebl (D-Sun Prairie). "We have now become a ceremonial body. It is such a travesty that we've relegated all our power to a benevolent dictator."

Hebl urged his GOP colleagues to be more mindful of the tremendous powers they were carving out for the executive branch. "You've got to be concerned about what you wish for," Hebl said. "Gov. Walker is not going to be governor forever. Frankly, if he's governor all four years I'll be surprised."

Rep. Hulsey, who spoke next, took issue with Hebl's characterization: "We have not seen in the last week evidence of the benevolence of this dictator."

Rep. Peter Barca, the Assembly minority leader, closed out the 10 minutes allotted for this amendment with what in other times might seem like a sensible plea. He said that if the state really was going to allow such business deals, "can't we at least make sure the taxpayers are going to get a good deal?"

Such arguments were so sound they brought about a crack in the GOP's resolve. The amendment was tabled on a vote of 56 to 40.

Amendment 117 concerned the new world of state employee relationships that Walker envisions, governed only by civil service protections. Rep. Fred Kessler (D-Milwaukee) says this would leave these employees without a just-cause standard, meaning "you can be disciplined for the color of your hair," without rights or recourse. The proposed amendment would have afforded these workers some rights through labor arbitrators.

"I think we can't leave these workers without these protections," Kessler said.

The GOP's answer: Yes we can. The amendment was tabled on a vote of 59 to 37.

Amendment 118 would have included Capitol police and state firefighters in the governor's exemption of law enforcement from the loss of their collective bargaining rights. It was as near as could be imagined to an amendment that would benefit the governor, since the failure to exclude these workers is a major reason that other law enforcement officers and firefighters have sided against Walker's bill.

"I would hope we could fix this," said Rep. Danou. "I would hope that this [not excluding these workers] was an oversight on the governor's part."

But the Republicans in the Assembly were fine with it. The amendment was tabled on a vote of 58 to 38.

As happened all morning, the 10 minutes of discussion per amendment was periodically interrupted by an introduction, in which members of the public in attendance were acknowledged. The Democrats making these acknowledgements kept them brief, but worked in some comments that related to the issues at hand.

Here, Rep. Nick Milroy (D-Superior) gave a shout-out to a very ill-looking woman named Ruth, who he said had stage 4 colo-rectal cancer. Ruth was standing next to her husband Jeff, a paraplegic who uses a wheelchair. Milroy explained that Ruth was among those whose Medicaid benefits are at risk because of the bill's provisions. He told the Assembly that Ruth considers the 14 state senators who have left the state as having granted her "a stay of execution."

Milroy pointed to the couple and said: "Thank you for helping us put a face on what we are about to do here." This was greeted with applause, not just from the Democrats in the chamber but from the Republicans as well. One newly elected Republican, Howard Marklein of Spring Green, actually rose from his chair to give the couple a standing ovation, moments after he voted to table an amendment to protect them.

The next amendment, the last one I stayed for, was 119, which would require unions to pay the entire administrative costs of deducting union dues from employee paychecks, rather than ending the practice of having this occur. It would effectively address what proponents say is the entire reason for this change -- that government should not be on the hook for these costs.

The Democrats hardly even bothered to argue the merits of this amendment, which was tabled on a 58-38 vote. Instead they spoke about the process that was playing out in the Wisconsin State Assembly. They promised that the fight was not over; sure, their amendments could be tabled with dispatch, but they would still take as much time as was appropriate to speak out against the bill as a whole, when the floor was given over for that.

"You can table amendment after amendment after amendment," said Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Madison). "It's just another way to illustrate all the bad ideas in this bill." He disputed the claim that the Dems and GOP had struck a "deal" to limit debate: "This deal -- 'you do this or else' -- that's not a deal. That's a hostage situation."

Rep. Kelda Roys (D-Madison) spoke next, arguing that the bill as drafted contained many flaws that even those who support it should want to see corrected.

"This bill is a catastrophe," she said. "We have seen a total unwillingness of the other side even to acknowledge the deficiencies in the drafting of this bill.... I guarantee you that [a few months] down the road, the problems we've been able to identify, and even more importantly those we haven't, are going to begin haunting [the people who pushed it through]."

Roys also made mention of the crowds in the Capitol, which were being kept at some distance from the Assembly chamber by law enforcement personnel.

"Even as we employ the same Capitol police [whose rights will be reduced] to keep them away from our door," she reflected, "we can still hear them."

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32478>

[Scott Walker on Day 11: The Emperor has no shame](#)

on 02/24/11 at 8:26 pm

Before I get around to writing about what happened at Gov. Scott Walker's press conference this evening, let me pay him a compliment: Whereas the press approach of his predecessor, Jim Doyle, was summed up recently by a veteran state Capitol reporter in three words -- "fear, paranoia and retribution" -- Walker knows the tough questions are coming and he stands up there and takes them.

You'd think that, after being duped by a transparently fraudulent caller pretending to be oil and chemical magnate David Koch made Walker a national laughing stock, he'd want to lay low for a while. But he's done two press conferences in as many days in which this

phone call emerged as a focal point of the [media interest](#) he predicted to "Koch" would soon be petering out.

But at yesterday's news conference, one question I thought would surely be asked wasn't. Today, when the press corps was smaller -- maybe 50 people as opposed to 80 yesterday, with the most notable reduction being the national press -- I had a chance to ask it, when the governor called on me.

The question was this: "Governor, do you think you were wrong for you to have agreed with a caller who labeled David Axelrod a 'son-of-a-bitch' and to take no issue with him when he urged you to "crush the bastards"?"

"No," was Walker's reply. "When we talked about inciting and things of that nature, that was something that I get all the time, all across the state. And the bottom line is, for us, we want to continue to have a civil debate about this, we want a good discussion about this. And the fact that he suggested something otherwise, we didn't think that was a good idea."

Let's break this down. First of all, Walker didn't answer the question I asked. He answered the question he was [asked yesterday](#), about when he said "we thought about" planting troublemakers in the crowd to stir things up. (It's true, as Walker says, that he rejected this option, but only because he felt it wasn't necessary.)

My question wasn't about the planting of troublemakers. It was about how, when the reporter pretending to be Koch called Axelrod, the senior advisor to the president of the United States, "that son of a bitch," Walker replied: "No kidding, huh?"

And when "Koch" said, "Well, I'll tell you what, Scott, once you crush these bastards, I'll fly you out to Cali and really show you a good time," the governor replied, "All right, that would be outstanding. Thanks for all the support in helping us to move the cause forward."

Third, consider what it says about Walker that he refuses to concede that his responses in this conversation, or the conversation itself, was a mistake. A normal person would acknowledge that this was a situation that could and should have been handled differently. A normal person would maybe take a little responsibility for his or her behavior, and apologize -- to Axelrod, to the unions, to the people of Wisconsin.

That would, among other things, be the politically smart thing to do.

Yet how alike Walker's behavior here is with how he's handled the crisis he's caused in Wisconsin: Admit nothing, avoid fact-based reality, operate as if you can get away with anything.

The rest of the press conference could be analyzed through the same lens. Walker praised Assembly Democrats for coming back and "debating the bill," ignoring that what has

really been happening is that they are talking to themselves, [offering amendment after amendment](#) that the Republican majority shoots down, without even bothering to argue against it.

Walker has tweaked his message slightly. He now says he wants to give local governments "the tools they need" to deal with state budget cuts, which he indicated would be more than \$1 billion. Previously, he called these 'the tools they've been asking for, not just for years but for decades," which *Isthmus* helped [expose as a lie](#).

Walker also took a step back from a claim he made on Monday, that the state had only until "the end of this week" to approve a refinancing of state debt that will save the state \$165 million. Walker now admits that the state has longer than that, at least until early next week. Here's how he framed it: "We're not setting an arbitrary deadline. If we can squeeze another day in, I'm happy to do that."

It was his own firm deadline that he now pegs as arbitrary! Does Walker really think no one is going to find that a little disingenuous? Or does he really not care if they do?

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32512>

[Scott Walker, at Day 12 press conference, offers to sing kumbaya with Senate Dems](#)
on 02/25/11 at 6:37 pm

Gov. Scott Walker is today a happy man. At his 5 p.m. press conference, he thanked the state Assembly, Democrats in particular, for "doing what we hope the Senate Democrats will do: showing up and having a debate."

And the governor was right -- if, by "debate," he meant a humiliating ordeal in which every single one of the nearly 100 amendments they offered was shot down after a discussion in which Republicans did not participate, except to restrict debate, before holding a surprise vote at 1 a.m. Now he wants the Senate Dems to take their lumps as well, and the prospect of seeing this sort of democracy in action pleases him greatly.

Walker spoke again, too, of the inclusive nature of his relationship with Democrats, saying he shared details of his budget bill with Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca and Senate Minority Leader Mark Miller on the day he unveiled it. "They weren't necessarily supportive of all of the pieces," he deadpanned.

He described the events of the last two weeks as a sort of flowering of true democracy. He noted again that the Legislature heard 17 hours of testimony on the bill -- which the governor never tires of saying is longer than any hearing he can recall from his days as a lawmaker. He didn't mention that, afterward, the emphatically expressed opposition of almost all of the people who testified was summarily ignored.

Walker says even more celebration of democracy is in order, given just how much debate and discussion and scrutiny his bill has gotten in the extra week created when all 14 Democratic members of the Senate fled the state to avoid being arrested and dragged back in handcuffs so a quorum can be reached and a vote held.

"I don't know how anyone can say that the Senate Democrats haven't succeeded in giving everyone in the state the time they need to understand this bill," Walker said, waxing nostalgic for the early days of his administration, when "many of the things we've done [were] done in a bipartisan way."

He's right about that, too. Several of the dozen or so bills that have passed did receive Democratic support. That Democratic amendments to these bills stood about as much chance as a snowflake in hell ("I don't know that a single idea we put forth has gone anywhere," one aide to a Democratic lawmaker tells me) is no reason to be a Gloomy Gus about the process.

The fact is that Republicans in Wisconsin have proven they are willing to make common cause with Democrats -- so long as Democrats go along with everything they want in every particular.

It's that kind of bipartisan cooperation that the 14 missing Senate Democrats can expect should they come back to Wisconsin to have a debate. What are they waiting for?

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<http://www.thedaily page.com/daily/article.php?article=32522>

A visit to the Wisconsin Capitol, before the doors are barred
[Bill Lueders](#) on Saturday 02/26/2011 6:25 pm

I just left the Wisconsin state Capitol. It was 5:30 p.m. exactly when I walked out the door. A half hour later, no one who wasn't already here would be allowed to enter.

There was a long line coming in -- two of them actually, leading to doors on either side of the building. The lines were long because the 3 p.m. rally at the top of State Street had just ended. It was unclear if people knew they were among the last ones who would be allowed in. The people in the line around me didn't know. But the sheriff's deputy at the door confirmed it.

I spoke in line to a state employee who came for the afternoon rally, the third time he's been at the protests this week. He talked about his fear that Gov. Scott Walker might eliminate not just his position but his unit, which deals with workers' rights. (I am declining to be more specific, in case cutting these jobs is not something the governor has already "thought about." I imagine he's an avid reader of TheDailyPage.com.)

Just outside the entrances were garbage cans packed with protest signs, and other signs stacked against the Capitol wall by people who hope to later retrieve them. The officers at the door were making sure no signs with sticks were brought inside, as they have been

doing for some time, and no food. Is someone really thinking it may be necessary to starve them out?

Inside the building, I spoke with several police officers and sheriffs deputies and a state game warden. Most of them knew enough to [confirm](#) that the building will be shut off to new visitors at 6 p.m. and cleared at 4 p.m. tomorrow for cleaning. Anyone already inside -- and there thousands of people, throughout the building, including a surprisingly large number of families with children -- can stay as long as they want tonight.

No one seemed to know what the cleaning would entail. Would the signs that have been hung from every banister be taken down? What will happen to them? When the clerks of court in Wisconsin get rid of old files of court cases after the mandatory retention periods have passed, they make these available to the state Historical Society. Will someone allow the signs that are part of this moment in Wisconsin history to be destroyed?

All this week I've been talking to the law enforcement officers converged in and around the Capitol. The other night I had a ten-minute conversation with a sheriff's deputy moments after leaving one of Gov. Walker's press conferences, the notes from that encounter burning a hole in my pocket. Today I spoke at some length with the conservation warden, one of the quasi-law enforcement employees who will not be spared the loss of collective bargaining under Walker's divisive plan.

He praised the protesters for how kind and well-behaved they've been, as have the officers I've spoken to over the last week and a half. Something remarkable has happened here: The protesters and the law enforcement officers who have been sent here from every corner of the state to keep them in line have come to like each other, to see each other as being on the same side.

I think that means -- I hope that means -- that the building will be sealed off peacefully tonight and will vacate peacefully tomorrow, leaving the building as clean as they can. And then, Monday morning, everybody can come back.

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32545>

Lockdown at Wisconsin Capitol doesn't keep out public passion
[Bill Lueders](#) on Monday 02/28/2011 4:18 pm

I just got back from the state Capitol, now in lockdown mode. At least 1,000 people are gathered outside, not liking the exclusion. The chants included "Arrest Walker!" and "Whose house? Our house!"

I saw a man at one entrance, pleading to be let in: "Is it possible for me to speak with my assemblyperson, Sondy Pope-Roberts?" The answer was no.

State employees were being let in at one entrance, in groups of no more than eight at a time. Some lawmakers were also able to gain admission for small numbers of

constituents. I spoke to songwriter Lou Berryman, who said Rep. Brett Hulseby had gotten her in, but was not able to do the same for some others who hoped to follow.

Even for media, there were fresh obstacles. Each day the press corps covering these events have been given a brightly colored cardboard card that allows them admission to the building's otherwise forbidden areas, like the governor's office and Assembly chambers. I have one for each day since the protests closed off this access: orange, blue, pink, purple, green, red, light yellow, gold. But until today, these have not been needed to enter the building.

Without a gold card for today, I could not get into the building to get the gold card I needed for today. At one entrance, a Wisconsin Supreme Court justice agreed to try to help me get in; as it turned out, I helped the Supreme Court justice get in, telling the guard who was prepared to deny entrance who this person was. I myself was turned away.

I did manage to get into the building at the one entrance (West Washington Avenue) that media are allowed to enter by showing a business card. But once inside I was blocked from going to the Press Room on the second floor because I lacked the gold card I was going there to get. I called the office of Rep. Mark Pocan, which sent an aide to get me back through.

Outside of the Press Room, I spoke to Dick Wheeler, of the Wheeler Report news service, who knows more about the Legislature than any other journalist in Wisconsin. I asked him if it was true that the Legislature cannot legally conduct business if the building is closed to the public. He confirmed this, pointing me to Article 4, Section 10 of the state Constitution.

It reads: "SECTION 10. ... The doors of each house shall be kept open except when the public welfare shall require secrecy. Neither house shall, without consent of the other, adjourn for more than three days." The section apparently applies only to when business is being conducted.

In other words, Gov. Scott Walker can keep people out, but the Legislature can't accomplish anything so long as he does. Neat trick.

Inside the building at 1 p.m. were at least several hundred people. All were orderly. None of the signs posted all over the building appear to have been taken down, although I did speak with Madison attorney Deborah Mulligan, on hand as a "legal observer," who said she did see a small number of signs being removed. She also says the protesters were asked earlier today to remove any signs from the floor, as a potential fire hazard, and "they did what they were asked."

Mulligan feels the lockdown is a betrayal of sorts, in that the protesters were told last night, "if we stayed on the first floor and were peaceable that demonstrators would be

allowed back in at 8 a.m." It's not clear if the Capitol police changed their mind, or had it changed for them.

I spoke to some people who, like me, got into the building today, albeit with difficulty. The Beloit Firefighters Honor Guard came into town today, hoping to lend their voices to the debate.

One of these firefighters, Jeremy Flanagan, told me his department sent 14 firefighters to the event, all on their days off. Six of them were able to get in, thanks to Rep. Pope-Roberts. The rest were among the 200 or so firefighters outside of the Capitol, from all over Wisconsin as well as Chicago.

Once inside, the firefighters from Beloit did what they usually do for ceremonial occasions and parades -- "just posting colors." They had a U.S. flag, a Wisconsin flag, and the flag of the International Association of Firefighters. They stood on the second-floor balcony -- I'm not sure how they got past security -- and later walked down to the lower floors.

The firefighters are members of Local 583 in Beloit. They are here to show solidarity with fellow union members. While firefighters are exempt from the governor's benefit grabs and collective bargaining attacks, Flanagan says "we're supporting everybody who has anything to do with unions."

Flanagan understands perfectly well why people are fighting back. If the collective bargaining rights of firefighters were being curtailed, he'd be fighting back too.

"We've given up so many years of pay increases to just have what we have," he told me. "We just don't want to lose the ability to talk to people as a group, to stand together as a group."

Some firefighters have through their unions signaled a willingness to pay more toward their pensions and health-care costs, even though they have not been asked to do so, if only Walker leaves the collective bargaining rights of other unionists alone. Flanagan is on board with that.

"We would definitely give as much as it takes," he promised. "We would be willing to give whatever it takes to keep the right to bargain for others."

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32550>

Wisconsin State Journal reporting excellent, commentary still notably uninformed
[Bill Lueders](#) on Tuesday 03/01/2011 10:50 am, [\(2\) Comments](#), [\(2\) Likes](#)

Let me make one thing perfectly clear -- much clearer than the last time [I wrote about this topic](#): Madison's morning paper has, as much as anyone (except, of course, *Isthmus*),

risen to the challenge of the moment and done terrific reporting on the state Capitol crisis, day after day.

My earlier piece dealt almost entirely with the paper's editorials and commentary, and especially a cartoon that brutally mocked the public employees who object to Gov. Scott Walker's efforts to extract unilateral concessions and strip them of bargaining rights. But I also faulted the paper for its news coverage from the day before, which failed to make clear in its main story on the Tea Party rally that this pro-Walker crowd was dwarfed by the pro-worker one that swirled around it.

I stand by that criticism. John Smalley, the *State Journal's* editor, has admitted its validity ("We probably should've provided more perspective on the size of the pro vs. con crowd") in an excellent column he wrote last week about some of the blowback his paper has received. But I agree with him that this momentary lapse does not undo the mostly excellent around-the-clock reporting the paper has done.

It was a mistake on my part not to have made this clearer, and I have apologized to my friends at the *State Journal*. Moreover, I would like it known that I firmly and thoroughly dissent from anyone who would respond to dissatisfaction with the paper's editorials and other commentary, the main focus of my critique then and now, by canceling their subscription in a huff.

As I wrote in response to one of the readers who declared this intent in a comment posted to my earlier piece:

"The *Wisconsin State Journal* is about more than just its editorial page, whose content is decided by a small minority of its staff, and more than its commentators and cartoonists. It is a dedicated group of skilled and hardworking journalists, and a vital organ in the Madison community. The commentary that I and others found offensive and lacking should not overshadow the tremendously good work the paper has been doing in covering this story."

Time does not permit me to individually catalog and praise the paper's articles, especially since that was not then nor is it now the focus of my attention. I will note that today's *State Journal*, for instance, has excellent stories about the decision to close the Capitol on what is transparently a false pretext; the alternative solutions to the budget gap being advanced by Senate Democrats in hiding; and a public appearance in Dodgeville by state Sen. Dale Schultz, where an audience member's appeal to the Republican lawmaker from Richland Center to vote against Walker's plan drew a standing ovation.

Anyone wanting to stay informed about this historic clash between our rookie governor and the state's public employees should be buying and reading the *State Journal*, each and every day.

Now, having said all that, I'd like to return my attention to the paper's editorials and commentary. The key test here is not whether these take sides -- editorials are supposed to do that, and commentators are allowed to -- but whether they are reasonably fair and informed by the facts. In my opinion, the paper has improved on this front -- it's refrained this week from ridiculing the protesters -- but still seems notably lacking. At times I wonder whether the *State Journal's* editorial writers and columnist Chris Rickert even read the paper's news coverage.

A few particulars:

The *State Journal* has continued to insist, as the headline for its Feb. 21 editorial proclaims, that "Running away is irresponsible," in regard to the 14 Democratic senators who have left the state. It's fine for the paper to take this position, as have Gov. Walker and the Republicans, but note the insulting tone it takes in defense of it, as when it says: "So Wisconsin sits and waits. For how long? Until Walker apologizes for winning the last election?"

Really? That is the paper's idea of fair commentary? To ignore the senators' clearly stated position -- that they want the governor to negotiate and compromise -- and instead accuse them of wanting to undo the last election? If this point is fair, how come Scott Walker never once as a candidate or in the interim between winning the election and unveiling his budget bill on Feb. 11 said he would refuse to negotiate with unions, unilaterally extract major benefit concessions, and strip away collective bargaining rights from every public employee in the state?

What rot the *State Journal* is holding out to its readers and asking them to swallow!

The *State Journal*, in an effort to balance its opposition to most of what the hundreds of thousands of people who have flocked to the Capitol are asking for, has lately taken to praising their good behavior. Exhibit A is the paper's Feb. 22 edit ("[Civil debate shines on Square](#)"), which tries to stake out middle ground, insisting "Walker isn't a dictator" and the public unionists "aren't greedy."

Thanks for that. But in the course of trying to be fair to everyone, the editorial characterizes the concessions Walker is demanding as "a proposal to scale back their benefits and collective bargaining rights." Is this not a wee bit euphemistic for changes that will completely eliminate collective bargaining rights for most workers except, to a very limited extent, when it comes to salaries? Does it not fall a wee bit short of describing the other changes demanded by Walker, which everyone from AFSCME's Marty Beil to Fox News commentator Dick Morris agrees will weaken unions to where they will no longer be a meaningful force in political campaigns?

This Sunday's editorial ("[Rise above ugly stalemate](#)") again strove to take the middle road, with statements like: "Even the many protesters banging drums, chanting slogans and sleeping overnight in the halls of the Capitol building were well behaved, compared to their state leaders in both major political parties."

True enough. But the tonic the paper goes on to recommend seems like pretty weak tea, given the gravity of the issues and the enormity of the divide. It wants the Senate Democrats to come back and "allow democracy to proceed," and for Walker and the Republicans to "[keep] an open mind when the minority party and public offer ideas to improve legislation."

To quarrel with the latter advice would be to appear, well, querulous. But surely the paper's editorial brain trust, in the course of making it, should acknowledge that this has not happened so far and there is no reason to expect it will. Walker and the GOP have said time and again they will not budge, and when the budget repair bill came up in the Assembly, every single amendment introduced by Democrats -- no matter how sensible, like requiring an audit before the state sells off its power plants to the Koch brothers --

was shot down. (The editorial, to its credit, does note that this process ended when the Assembly Republicans sprang up to "speed a final vote in seconds, preventing most of the Democrats from even voting.")

Meanwhile, Chris Rickert's commentary has remained awful, even as he has taken pains to make it less insulting. On Feb. 24 ("[Some refreshing uncertainty amid intractable debate](#)"), he tried to get a bead on the real issues by going to "various locations in Madison and Monona, looking for the oldest people he could find and asking them if they agreed with "the protesters' characterization of Walker as a 'dictator.'" Most didn't. Stop the presses.

Today Rickert was back with a [column](#) that began: "I expect any Wisconsinite not marching on the Capitol or nodding in agreement to Gov. Scott Walker's latest Fox News appearance is pretty sick of the two major political parties by now."

Really? That's the dichotomy you want to present? Between those who are actively engaged in taking sides and the rest of the state (where is the rest of the state on this one, anyway?) who are just sick to death with all of this controversy?

Rickert elaborates: "[U]nless you're rabidly Republican or Democrat, or rabidly aligned with an interest group beholden to Republicans or Democrats, standoffs are more tiresome than titillating. Plus -- excuse the drama -- they have the unfortunate side effect of whittling away a citizen's faith in the democratic process as God's gift to political organization."

This is not just lazy thinking, it's bad writing. Rickert goes on to spout nonsense about some sort of \$100 threshold for campaign contributions to political candidates. He even has the temerity to complain that the state political parties "didn't have much to say in response to this particular plank of my sanity-maintaining approach to politics -- despite my repeated requests for comment." [The original version of this article conveyed and took further issue with what Rickert said was an incorrect synopsis of his point. While his actual point eluded me at the time and eludes me still, I am removing this reference.]

Back to the paper's editorial page and its relentless cheerleading for the so-called Schultz compromise that allows it to claim the middle ground. Today's editorial ("[Move forward to larger debate](#)") again argues in favor of this plan, which both the Republicans and unions have rejected. The plan is to strip public employee unions of their collective bargaining rights -- and presumably also impose the other anti-union measures demanded of Walker, like making payment of public employee union dues voluntary and requiring annual secret votes to see whether workers still want to be represented -- for just two years, until June 30, 2013.

Walker and the Republicans reject this because it undercuts their ability to permanently kneecap public employees. The public employee unions reject it because it would leave their members vulnerable to wholesale changes in their relationship with their employers that will be nearly impossible to undo. The *State Journal* backs it because it allows the paper to present itself as seeing both sides.

That's as unfair to its readers as it is to the partisans. The *State Journal* wants to have it both ways. But, on this issue, that isn't possible -- without the paper continuing to overlook inconvenient facts.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32555>

Dane County DA, sheriff weigh in on Capitol controversy

[Bill Lueders](#) on Tuesday 03/01/2011 1:02 pm , (1) Like

At a press conference today at noon, Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne and Sheriff Dave Mahoney gave dramatic testimony to the widening divide between some members of the law enforcement community and Gov. Scott Walker.

"My deputies will not be palace guards," Mahoney says he told state officials who asked for his help in denying protesters access to the state Capitol, in possible violation of a [court order](#) issued this morning. (The state, which intends to take up the issue in court this afternoon, may maintain that the building *is* open, just not to everyone.)

Ozanne said he had received calls from Walker's supporters urging him to bring criminal charges against the 14 Senate Democrats who have fled the state rather than allow Walker's "budget repair bill" to pass. Ozanne says he will not do so, as there was no violation of law.

Ozanne also said that, while he was troubled by the governor's remarks to a prank phone caller that "we thought about" planting troublemakers in the peaceful protests to create disturbances, this too did not in his view rise to the level of a crime. But he did wonder if the Justice Department's ethics unit needed to look into this.

But Ozanne did question the legality of the Capitol being closed even though the state Supreme Court is in session. He cited state statute 757.14, which holds: "The sittings of every court shall be public and every citizen may freely attend the same," except in particular circumstances that do not seem present here.

Madison Police Chief Noble Wray and Mayor Dave Cieslewicz have both asked Walker's office for [more information](#) about [Walker's "we though about it" remark](#), which suggests a willingness on his part to subject protesters and law enforcement officers to harm. Mayor Cieslewicz, who attended the press conference, told *Isthmus* afterward that the office has not responded to either inquiry.

Cieslewicz made it clear that he intends to keep asking: "I think we need to continue to demand answers from the governor as to what was proposed, who proposed it, and how seriously it was considered. We just have to keep asking those questions."

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32559>

Nurse denied medical supplies in Capitol shutdown
[Bill Lueders](#) on Tuesday 03/01/2011 2:45 pm

I saw Ruth again today, and met her for the first time. I even learned her last name: Fox. I knew Ruth from last Thursday, when I was in the [Assembly chamber](#), watching Republicans table amendment after amendment proposed by Democrats -- all of them, it turns out.

Ruth was one of the people introduced from the floor by Rep. Nick Milroy (D-Superior). He explained that she had stage 4 colo-rectal cancer and was one of the people who would be affected by the changes in Medicaid eligibility that are part of Gov. Scott Walker's bill. He said she considers the action of the 14 Senate Dems to leave the state as "a stay of execution." He also introduced her husband Jeff, a disabled rights activist who uses a wheelchair.

Milroy pointed to the couple and said: "Thank you for helping us put a face on what we are about to do here." The Republicans in the chamber joined in the applause, with Rep. Howard Marklein of Spring Green rising to give a standing ovation, moments after he voted to table an amendment to protect them.

Today Ruth is in the Capitol Rotunda. In fact, despite her illness, or perhaps because of it, she's been there every day since last Thursday, when this sorry drama played out. She's slept on the Capitol floor.

Yesterday, Ruth was so cold that she sought emergency help. Paramedics arrived, and she asked them to take her vitals -- pulse and so forth. According to Ruth, they refused. "They told me I would have to go to the hospital. I said I'm not leaving."

Since then, Ruth *has* received some medical attention. Laura Nessler, a registered nurse from Viola, Wis., has been checking her vitals all day. "They're pretty good now," Nessler reflected, heedless of HIPAA.

Nessler, wearing a "Walker is a weasel, not a badger" T-shirt, told me how she got into the building this morning. She was in the crowd of hundreds milling outside, being denied entrance, when the call went out for a medical professional. "They said they needed someone" with medical training; she came forward to help. The doors opened for her.

Among the people Nessler said she's treated today was a woman who reported being "manhandled by five police officers." Nessler did a DAR -- Data Assessment Response -- and wrote a report documenting what the woman said and what Nessler observed. The woman had visible swelling on her right forearm and pain in her lower back.

Nessler told me how sorry she is to not have her medical supplies. She said she has a bag in her car with a stethoscope and other items that might come in handy. I couldn't believe anyone would deny her access to these, and I walked back with her to one of the building's entrances. We spoke with the officers there providing security, with whom I had earlier had a cordial exchange.

The officers said that if Nessler were to leave the building she would not be allowed back. One added that she would not be allowed to bring in her bag of medical supplies.

Anyway, that's how these officers understood their orders. It was suggested that Nessler try talking to security at other entrances. I don't know if she did. I saw her a moment later, back in the Rotunda, talking to Ruth.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32562>

Scott Walker's budget address: The ego has landed

[Bill Lueders](#) on Tuesday 03/01/2011 6:38 pm,

This afternoon, at the Wisconsin State Capitol, I witnessed what at times appeared to be the greatest governor in the history of this or any other state showered with affection as he announced a bold new plan to rescue Wisconsin from the brink of otherwise certain economic ruin.

He was feted with more than a full minute of thunderous ovation, with whistles and hooting and cheers, as he entered, and again at the end of his 30-minute address. He received long rounds of applause and a few standing Os while he spoke. The balconies seemed to be filled almost entirely with people who love him, and who applauded him at every turn.

Gov. Scott Walker appeared statesmanlike and poised, a gracious and knowing leader who has the state's best interests at heart. God bless Scott Walker and God bless the United States of America. He is a man of the people, a patriot, a protector...

What's that you say? Oh, *those* people. The ones who sat sullen through the whole thing? Who never rose or applauded? You mean the Democrats.

Yes, the Assembly Dems never quite got in the spirit of things. In fact, all 14 of the ones who were elected to the Senate were absent, off somewhere on vacation in sunny Illinois, getting tans and sipping pina colodas. And the ones from the Assembly who were present were *such* party poopers.

Before the speech began, Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca made some dispiriting remarks about how it was hard for many of his fellow Democrats even to attend, on account of how the Capitol was in lockdown -- in apparent violation of state law as well as a restraining order issued by a Dane County judge this morning.

Plus Barca was still complaining about "the chaos that erupted here last week," more than three days ago, when the Republicans ended debate on the governor's "budget repair bill" with a surprise quickie vote. "If we don't follow our rules, we cease to be a nation of laws."

Oh for Pete's sake, get over it, will ya? Everyone else did.

After the introductory cheers died down, Walker was introduced by Senate President Mike Ellis, who quipped, "He used to be the youngest governor, now he's the oldest!" Ha-ha. Good one.

Then Walker launched into [his speech](#), outlining in refreshing candor and particular what changes he has in mind for the state. He...

What's that you say? He really didn't give much at all in the way of specifics? He mainly repeated lines and talking points he's been using day in and day out?

The governor said his budget "reduces all spending by \$4.2 billion, or 6.7 percent, and decreases the structural deficit by 90 percent from \$2.5 billion to \$250 million – the lowest structural deficit in recent history." That brought the Assembly – or at least the part of it that is Republican – to its feet. They apparently weren't the least bit bothered that Walker gave little indication where these cuts will be made. Why should this bother anyone else?

Walker repeated his "I'm an optimist" line, saying "I believe that after our budget repair bill passes, tempers will cool, and we will find a way to continue to work together to help grow our economy."

Yes, of course, when the Legislature finally delivers to Walker everything he wants, that's really going to smooth things over with the malcontents who have been making such a fuss.

As the governor delivered this line, the chants from the relatively small number of protesters who have been allowed to stay in the Capitol, as well as those from thousands more standing in the cold outside, could be heard loud and clear. "Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame!" It was the same old familiar refrain that those gloomy Assembly Dems lobbed across the aisle in this very same room three days ago.

Yes, this chant -- along with "Kill the bill!" and "The people, united, will never be divided!" -- did intrude on the proceedings. But other than that, what a glorious day it was for Wisconsin's new governor! He said that, after years of fiscally reckless leadership by "Democrats and Republicans alike," the time had come for Wisconsin "to make the tough choices necessary to put our state back on the path to prosperity."

And by prosperity he meant delivering even more tax breaks to businesses. Walker said he would "eliminat[e] the capital gains tax for investors in Wisconsin companies" and "include tax relief for employers who hire more people to work in our state." Moreover, he'll "provide real tax relief for homeowners across the state by implementing property tax reform that locks in property tax levies at the local level."

It's common-sense approaches like this that Wisconsin needs to...

Not *you* again. What are you complaining about this time? Well yes, it does sound as though the governor may have just dropped another bomb and announced his intention to end the ability of local governments in Wisconsin to raise property taxes to meet needs in their communities. And with the governor saying he plans to cut state spending to local government by "just over" \$1.25 billion, this might be flexibility local governments will want to have?

Oh ye of little faith! Were you not listening? The governor also said his budget repair bill, which guts the right of most public employees across the state from engage in collective bargaining, will deliver "the tools" they local governments and school districts need to balance their budgets.

In other words, Walker is going to both slash state aids and block local governments and school boards from raising taxes. But there's no reason for alarm, because the governor is giving them the tools to fix this lickity-split -- by going after the benefits of teachers and local government employees, just as he has done.

Then these school districts and local governments can experience the same almost-universal support and popularity in their communities that Walker enjoys as governor. And won't that be just lovely for us all?

Don't answer.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32578>

At Rotary mayoral debate, Cieslewicz hails Madison, Soglin rues its decline
[Bill Lueders](#) on Wednesday 03/02/2011 3:58 pm

As protesters chanted and marched in the cold across the street, Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz and former mayor Paul Soglin squared off at a debate Wednesday, presenting significantly divergent assessments of the city's health and future.

In a 45-minute exchange before the [Rotary Club of Madison](#) at the Inn on the Park, Cieslewicz (mayor since 2003) hailed how good things are in Madison, while Soglin (mayor from 1973-79 and again from 1989-1997) focused on how good things used to be, back when he was in charge.

In a telling moment, Soglin answered the inevitable question about what he most regrets as follows: "My greatest failure was leaving office early. I should not have done that." If he had been mayor, Soglin said, the city's finances and ethics would be in better shape and the Overture Center would not have become such a pain.

"I let you down," he told the audience.

Cieslewicz, in turn, deadpanned his biggest regret: "I wish I had made Paul buy breakfast more often." This referred to the monthly meetings between the two at which Soglin purportedly never expressed his deep dissatisfaction with the city's direction or his intention to seek Cieslewicz's ouster. (Cieslewicz also said he wishes he'd done more to push for a Regional Transit Authority before Walker's ascension made it a sitting duck.)

The exchanges were cordial and the disagreements, while many, did not suggest fundamentally different philosophies of governing. Both candidates seemed to be in favor of competent management and inclusive government, but Soglin, in particular, didn't think Cieslewicz practiced it.

In an apparent reference to the mayor's [plan to ax the position](#) of longtime Madison bicycle-pedestrian guru Arthur Ross, Soglin said: "You don't build trust by writing people out of the budget because you disagree with them."

Soglin, whenever possible, used words like "chaos" to describe changes Cieslewicz has wrought. He said "I can guarantee you" that if the city's dalliance with deepening debt is

left unchecked, it will lose its triple A bond rating -- achieved during Soglin tenure -- during the next two years. And he clucked about no-contract bids, including the one that brought the city into partnership with Trek for a bike rental program starting this year.

Cieslewicz championed his successes in stabilizing Madison Metro and ending the "nightmare" that Halloween parties on State Street had become. He boasted about the city's low unemployment rate and vowed to "continue our progress in building our modern economy," like high-tech companies and stem-cell research.

"What traits do I possess?" Cieslewicz asked. "An enduring sense of optimism and a belief in the city of Madison."

Neither candidate seemed to have found the Holy Grail of an answer when asked how the city was going to deal with the funding cuts and property-tax freeze proposed by Gov. Scott Walker.

Soglin seemed to think the city had no choice but to cut, saying Walker "clearly believes in what he is doing. He is not going to back down." Soglin identified two positions within the mayor's office itself, including the spokesperson job, as expendable. Cieslewicz defended these positions and suggested Soglin was going too far: "Pretty soon he's going to be answering his own phones." Not if he isn't elected.

Cieslewicz said he hopes to persuade the governor and Legislature to build flexibility into their plans. He thinks the Madison public wants and deserves "quality services" and should have the option of raising taxes to allow these to continue: "I believe local governments should decide that on their own, based on local values."

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32594>

Wisconsin Capitol protests, Day 17: Killing off the diehards
[Bill Lueders](#) on Wednesday 03/02/2011 7:39 pm

Wajid Jenkins says he's protested at Wisconsin's state Capitol off and on between Tuesday, Feb. 15 to Friday, Feb. 18. Since then, he's been here continuously, day and night.

I've met Jenkins before; he's a Madison activist who previously put his energy into [saving a community garden](#). "I'm here," he says, "in solidarity with workers and families and disabled Wisconsinites" -- all of whom stand to lose if Gov. Scott Walker wins.

It's about 5 p.m., and the Rotunda appears to have about 100 people in and around it. There is one person on the first floor, who police are letting be, even though protesters have been asked to stay on the ground floor.

Jenkins did not come here as part of a group, but he's part of one now. "We have found an affinity," he tells me. "This has brought all sorts of people out. We're making connections and networks that are going to last decades. This is an organizing hot spot."

But Jenkins thinks that may be slowly coming to an end. He says the operative rule being enforced by law enforcement, who at this moment seem to outnumber the protesters, is “one out, one in.” That is, every time a protester leaves, one of the people standing outside in the cold is supposed to be allowed in.

According to Jenkins, this already goofy system is working to the detriment of those who hope to maintain a presence inside. The cops are not letting in people to replace those who say that they were there the previous night.

“It's a war of attrition, and it's all behind the scenes,” he charges.

Tessa Wyllie de Echeverria backs him up. She's been monitoring the one door, on the Capitol east side through which people are now being allowed to enter or depart.

“They say they have a one-out, one-in policy, but we haven't seen that,” says Wyllie de Echeverria (thank heavens for cut and paste), who has been at the Capitol continuously since Feb. 15, except for one night. “We're down eight people in the last two hours,” she said at 5:30 p.m.

I walk out the Capitol's east entrance. There is a young man standing there holding a sign telling people who are leaving to be sure to tell police they were here overnight. The corridor is packed with law enforcement -- dozens of officers from departments all over the state.

The officers are asking people as they leave if they were here last night.

I walk through the thicket of police, holding up my press credentials, being waved through. As always, the police are friendly. As I walk out the door in the cold and the crowd of people locked out of the building, one of the cops rushes to try to catch the door before it shuts.

He misses, barely. Even he seems unable to get in. The building is in lockdown. I hear a lone chant of “Shame!” I wish I'd said it myself.

From the paper, March 4 edition:

<http://www.thedailypage.com/isthmus/article.php?article=32583>

A few downtown Madison businesses have gladly staked out positions on the Walker budget

Signs of the times

[Bill Lueders](#) on Thursday 03/03/2011

In recent days, a sandwich-board sign has adorned the corner of State and Gorham streets, by a retail store. Its messages have included, "Stop the Walker wrecking crew." But an employee says the sign does not belong to the store: "We're a business. We can't really do that."

Tell that to the dozen or so State Street businesses — a minority, to be sure — that are displaying signs protesting Gov. Scott Walker's plans and supporting his opponents.

"We knew a lot of our customers were going to be affected by this bill," says Laura Komai, co-owner of Anthology, 218 State St. "We felt very strongly we needed to make a statement in support."

So way back on Feb. 15, the store put up a sign: "Our small business depends on students, faculty, staff and state workers," above a protest poster with a raised fist. Since then, says Komai, "A lot of our regular customers have stopped in and said, 'Thanks for your sign, thanks for your support.'" Anthology, which makes buttons, has even gotten some business out of it.

Jack Garver, owner of the Fanny Garver Art Gallery, 230 State St., says a protest-themed art display in his window, along with a sign backing public employees, has been wildly popular. "Everybody thinks it's really cute. People are thanking us for our support."

But Garver says the protests are "hurting business," to where he may need to lay people off. "I think it's keeping some people away from the downtown," in part by making it harder to park.

Other businesses report that their signs have pulled customers in. "We've definitely had some sales because of them," says Jacky Trudeau, owner of Sunshine Daydream, 434 State St., which has a large number of signs.

According to Mary Carbine, executive director of Madison's Central Business Improvement District, the protests have been "very good for downtown businesses that either serve food or sell it" but "not necessarily a boon for other types of businesses. It doesn't seem that this is a shopping crowd."

Carbine has not seen any downtown businesses with pro-Walker signs, adding "that doesn't mean they don't exist, because there is a diversity of opinion on this."

Across the street from the Capitol at 20 W. Mifflin St., the Coopers Tavern last week brandished a "We support working families" sign. Owner Pete McElvanna says this drew an angry call from someone who vowed, "We'll not be in as long as you've got your sign up." His caller ID (a feature Gov. Walker apparently lacks on *his* phones) identified the call as coming from "State of Wisconsin."

McElvanna says "no threats were made," and his reaction was "whatever, dude." The sign was stolen overnight, but he's disinclined to jump to conclusions: "Maybe someone's got a poster for their wall."

Of the State Street businesses *Isthmus* spoke to, the only negative reaction was reported by an employee at a store with a vast array of protest signs, who said some people complained about an erasable board message, "No tea parties allowed in the store." This play on "No Food or Drink" signs was meant as a joke but perceived as discriminatory. "They didn't get the joke."

Afterward, the employee contacted *Isthmus* to ask that the store's name not be mentioned, saying, "My manager is afraid we will get a lot of harassing phone calls."

Hawk Schenkel of Hawk's Bar & Grill, 425 State St., is a bit less bashful: "I'm proud to have signs in the window." The protests have been good for business, and "there's been some good debates at the bar" — unlike, say, in the state Legislature.

Craig Butenhoff, owner of Jazzman, 340 State St., is also proud of his signs, which have drawn a warm reaction from customers. He doesn't think the protests have hurt his business any, but even if they did, "I don't care because I'm behind these people."

Protests a win-win for police

While no one has a firm handle on how much it will cost for the daily presence of hundreds of law enforcement officers at peaceful protests at the Capitol, it is possible to guess.

State officials say about 200 officers a day have been sent to the Capitol from dozens of agencies across Wisconsin. The state has promised to reimburse local governments for salaries, mileage and lodging costs.

The city of Madison has been heavily represented, with a daily presence at the Capitol of between 70 and 220 officers, according to Madison police spokesman Joel DeSpain.

As of Monday, DeSpain said Madison is "somewhere about the 12,000-hour mark in terms" of its commitment of officers. But he declined to crunch the numbers, in part because it isn't known how much overtime pay is involved. The department was unable to provide a midweek update.

The average salary of a Madison cop is just over \$60,000. Assuming a 40-hour workweek, that translates to \$28.85 an hour. Multiply that by 12,000 hours and the state — which Gov. Walker insists is "broke" — already owes Madison \$346,200. And that's just for straight wages through Monday, Feb. 28, without overtime or other costs.

But perhaps it is money well spent. Over the past two weeks, warm relations have developed between protesters and the law enforcement officers on hand to keep them in line. By and large they like each other, and see each other as being on the same side.

"There are going to be some positives that come from this," says DeSpain. "People who didn't know their local law enforcement before, they've spent a lot of hours with each other and learned that police are here to protect and serve."

A fox among chickens

Is Gov. Scott Walker going to fire Manny Perez, his pick to head the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development?

That's a logical if not inevitable conclusion to draw from remarks made by the governor at a press conference last week. In seeking to refute charges that he is out to bust unions, Walker said, "I don't have any interest in doing anything to the private unions. I think the private unions are too important to getting the state's economy going. I welcome working with them."

This sentiment would appear to put Walker on a collision course with Perez, a labor market economist who for the last several years was president and co-owner of JNA Staffing Inc., a Milwaukee-based temp help firm. An advertisement from 2009 touts Perez as a featured speaker at a seminar on "What Can Be Done to Keep Your Business Union Free."

Isthmus sent Perez an email asking him to put this past role "into the context you feel is most appropriate."

Perez did not reply. Perhaps he's out looking for work?

<http://www.thedailypage.com/isthmus/article.php?article=32584>

Scott Walker, Desperado: Why don't he come to his senses?

[Bill Lueders](#) on Thursday 03/03/2011,

In recent weeks, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker has been called a lot of things. But perhaps no description is more apt than the one he acquired in high school: "The Desperado."

Bob Olsen, a retired Madison attorney, grew up in Walworth County and still subscribes to his hometown newspaper, the *Sharon Reporter*. Thus he saw an article the paper ran this January following Walker's inauguration. It included a yearbook photo of Walker from his senior year at Delavan-Darien High School, in 1986, with the caption: "Scott K. Walker — the Desperado."

An article in the [school district's newsletter](#) also carried this photo, and links to a panoply of other yearbook pics, including Walker's senior-class portrait with shoulder-length hair.

It's not clear whether the "Desperado" tag was chosen by Walker or for him, only that someone thought it appropriate at the time. Many people still might.

Opinion

<http://www.thedailypage.com/isthmus/article.php?article=32587>

Many of Scott Walker's claims have been proven untrue, at times by Walker himself
Liar, liar, pants on fire

[Bill Lueders](#) on Thursday 03/03/2011

The other day, the office of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker issued an indignant press release, titled "[Response to Factual Inaccuracies.](#)"

It correctly identified a fundamental difference between two numbers that Walker's critics have linked: the state's \$137 million deficit through June 30 and the \$140 million in tax breaks for business approved by Walker and the Legislature since he took office in early January.

The tax breaks, it noted, "do not apply to this fiscal year." They merely add to the state's budget hole down the line.

Thanks for the clarification. If there's one thing this heated debate doesn't need, it's factual inaccuracies. To that end, let's turn our attention to some of the things Scott Walker has said:

"If anyone doesn't know what's coming, they've been asleep for the last two years." That's Walker at his [Feb. 17 press conference](#), in which he also insisted that extracting unilateral benefit concessions from some public workers and stripping almost all of them of their collective bargaining rights were "modest, modest requests." At his [Feb. 21 media meet-up](#), Walker even claimed to have "campaigned on this throughout the election."

In fact, not once during the campaign or in the time between the election and his "budget repair bill" unveiling on Feb. 11 did Walker indicate he would refuse to negotiate with public employee unions or seek these radical changes. Walker himself clearly knows this, as shown by his [comments to a prankster](#) he thought was billionaire benefactor David Koch. There Walker refers to the time just prior to his budget unveiling as "before we dropped the bomb."

"To protect our schools, to protect our local governments, we need to give them the tools they've been asking for, not just for years but for decades." Walker initially made this point repeatedly, as at his [Feb. 18 press conference](#).

But, as *Isthmus* reported ([Madison.gov., 2/24/11](#)), all four major state associations representing schools and local governments (not their employees) say this isn't true. Walker, at his [Feb. 24 press powwow](#), amended his sound bite, saying he is giving schools and local governments "the tools they need."

"The guys we got left are largely from out of state." This is what Walker told "Koch" about the demonstrations in Madison, adding, "I keep dismissing it in all of my press comments, saying...they're mostly from out of state." He also claims one-third of the 70,000 people who came out to demonstrations on Feb. 19 supported his bill.

The Madison police estimated the total crowd at 68,000, so Walker was in the ballpark here. But even the pro-Walker side's wildly inflated numbers put their totals at 8,000 to 10,000, with more credible estimates being in the 3,000 to 5,000 range. And no sane person believes the protesters that day — or the 70,000 to 100,000 who turned out last Saturday — are "largely" or "mostly" from out of state.

"I have great respect for those who have chosen a career in government. I really do." Walker has trotted out this line repeatedly, including in his [Feb. 22 "Fireside Chat."](#) His tone is much different in private, as in his [conversation](#) with "Koch."

The mock caller says, "I'll tell you what, Scott, once you crush these bastards, I'll fly you out to Cali and really show you a good time." The governor's great respect for public employees is nowhere in evidence as he replies, "All right, that would be outstanding. Thanks for all the support in helping us to move the cause forward."

Besides these demonstrable falsehoods, Walker has made many statements of questionable veracity. Here are a few:

The governor claimed at his [Feb. 17 press conference](#) to have gotten "over 8,000 emails" from citizens, most urging him to "stay firm." At his [Feb. 18 press conference](#), exactly 24 hours later, he claimed to have 19,000 emails, again the "majority in favor." On Feb. 23, he said there were 100,000, "obviously some for, some against."

As of press time, the governor and his staff had not responded to open records requests from *Isthmus* and others for these emails, which would allow his claims to be checked; *Isthmus'* request was made on Feb. 18.

In a [Feb. 23 press release](#), Walker began asserting his "budget repair bill" would deliver at least \$1.44 billion in savings to local school districts and governments. He even gave breakdowns: "[S]chool districts would save \$488 million (\$976 million over the

biennium). Municipalities would save \$98 million (\$196 million over the biennium). Counties would save \$64 million..." and so on.

Wow, those are really great savings. Just one question: How would they be achieved? Walker hasn't been specific, so far as I can find. A Walker staffer passed my inquiry on to press secretary Cullen Werwie, who did not respond.

Walker continues to make this claim but has since altered it. He no longer claims it will deliver these savings; he now says it gives schools and local government "the tools" to make this happen — presumably by following his lead in cutting employee benefits.

Finally, there's this, from Walker's [Feb. 21 press conference](#), about the utter chaos he says is reigning just south of our border because of reckless actions taken there: "[L]ook at what Illinois did a month ago. [It] raised taxes on businesses and individuals and in turn we've seen a massive exodus of employers and jobs and individuals looking to come to places like Wisconsin."

What "massive exodus" is he referring to, and how come no one else seems to have noticed it? Is that even a question worth putting out for Walker aides to ignore? Or can we safely assume, as with so much else, that Scott Walker is lying?

Bill Lueders (blueders@isthmus.com) is news editor of Isthmus.

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Web again

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32626>

Cop-apalooza at the Wisconsin Capitol on Day 18
[Bill Lueders](#) on Thursday 03/03/2011 5:50 pm

For a state that according to Gov. Scott Walker is "broke," Wisconsin seems to have a remarkable tolerance for spending vast sums of money on police protection.

At about 5 p.m. today, using a press pass that allowed me access to places no mere citizen can go, I made circular jaunts around all five floors of the building, counting cops.

On the ground floor I counted 92 officers, police and sheriffs deputies. The largest number, about 30, were congregated on the East corridor, which is where the citizens being allowed to enter the building are screened for weapons.

I counted 24 cops on the first floor, 21 on the second, eight on the third and six on the fourth. The fourth floor is where the building's police command center is located. When the Senate Sergeant at Arms entered the room, I saw there were apparently about 15 officers inside. That pushed the total into the building to 166.

All of the cops I encountered were courteous, but they didn't seem to have a lot to do. Most were sitting or standing in Capitol nooks devoid of protesters.

It seemed to me there were about 60 demonstrators in the Rotunda, but these were harder to count because they, unlike the police, were mostly moving around. When I left the building through the east entrance, I counted ten additional officers outside, where the protest presence had largely petered out.

Up on the fourth floor, I ran into Dane County Sheriff Dave Mahoney, and asked him if this huge presence of officers made sense to him. He was the picture of diplomacy: "What we've seen up to this point has been very peaceful demonstrations. That's all I can say."

He said a bit more: "We're very happy with two weeks and more than one million people coming through the Capitol. ... I would hope people in the weeks and months ahead will continue that."

Weeks and months?

Tim Donovan, a spokesperson working with the state Department of Administration, says the level of security -- and number of the protesters -- is about the same today as yesterday. He said the size of the police presence is "discussed and reviewed every day and its at the level the law enforcement officials believe is the right level."

And then, as we spoke, the possibility loomed that what seemed like overkill a moment ago might be too little now. A Dane County judge issued a [letter](#) late Thursday afternoon asking protesters to leave the building under regular hours. Normally, the building closes at 6:00.

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32629>

Protesters vacate Wisconsin Capitol, seeking to foil Scott Walker
[Bill Lueders](#) on Thursday 03/03/2011 11:07 pm

In the end, the group's decision was swayed because of what it felt Scott Walker wanted. About halfway through an hour-long discussion among the throng of protesters gathered inside the state Capitol Thursday night, a young man took his turn at addressing the group.

"Think about Scott Walker," he said. "What would he want us to do -- stay and be arrested or walk out in solidarity?"

At about 5:30 this afternoon, Dane County Judge John Albert concluded a two-day hearing by issuing an order that "unauthorized materials and people" needed to be vacated from the Capitol building. But he also ruled that restrictions on access imposed by the state Department of Administration were unconstitutional, and that full access to the building during normal hours must be restored by Monday, March 7.

The protesters, who numbered well more than 100 after an open door allowed several dozen people to flood in around 5:30 p.m. -- spent about an hour and a half awaiting particulars of the decision, followed by appeals from Capitol Police Chief Charles Tubbs and others, before holding the discussion that led to their decision to leave, at about 9 p.m. Through it all, dozens of police officers ringed the Rotunda, their ranks swelled from [already high levels](#) by an influx of additional officers around 7 p.m.

Early on, the sentiment was strongly against leaving. Tubbs stood among the demonstrators and implored them: "I am asking for voluntary compliance. I am asking you to cooperate and leave. I don't want to see anyone arrested, but if we have to take action, we'll take action."

Some members of the crowd responded defiantly. "Every time we cooperate, we just lose more and more of the building," said one demonstrator. Said another, a young man named Damon Terrell: "We've been repeatedly lied to and we've been repeatedly manipulated." Vowed Ruth Fox, a resident of northern Wisconsin who [has been at the building all week](#), though she has stage 4 colo-rectal cancer, "I'm going to be the last one out."

The crowd members were told that they could not be found to be in violation of a court order until a court order was presented to them. This was still being prepared, and so the protesters waited.

During this interim, Madison historian Stu Levitan urged a group of protesters including Fox to consider what was best for the larger cause. "The goal of every movement is to advance the cause," he said, adding that "the more this turns into a drum circle" or seems like "a Phish concert" the less helpful it will be.

Fox unloaded: "This is not kids in a drum circle. This is kids that we raised. I am doing this out of respect for all these thousands of people out here. I respect you," she told Levitan, "but I am demanding respect for me and these" -- the young people around her -- "are the people who respect me."

Others in the crowd argued that Judge Albert's order was a victory of sorts. "It says Scott Walker broke the law," said protest coordinator Erika Wolf. "If the doors don't open tomorrow morning, they will be held in contempt."

Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca, Rep. Brett Hulsey and Rep. Kelda Roys came forward to urge the protesters to do what was asked of them and leave. Former state Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager explained the terms of the deal -- the DOA could restrict but not deny access through Monday; protesters could no longer stay overnight; and on Monday the building would have to return to normal hours and access.

UW Campus Police Chief Sue Riesling told the group "I have the same questions you do" as to particulars of the order. But she said that the DOA rules restricting access "have been declared unconstitutional, and I will not ever violate the constitution of the United States." Tubbs backed her up: "No one here has any intention of violating anyone's rights."

Addressing another concern raised by the group, Tubbs promised that the signs that adorn the building will be dealt with "in a very respectful way." Apparently the Wisconsin Historical Society has photographed the signs in place, and will preserve many of them, although it did appear likely they would soon be removed from where they hang.

The sentiment was swinging, and it was the group's perception of Walker's wishes that decided it. Organizer Wolf, after reiterating that Walker "wants us to get arrested" for breaking the law, said she didn't want to give him the satisfaction: "I want to claim the moral authority" that comes from not violating the court's decision.

Unknown to these protesters, Walker had at a 6 p.m. press conference laid the groundwork for turning arrests to his advantage. He said that while the majority of protesters over the last two and a half weeks have been "decent and respectful," there were other less savory elements, "a small minority trying to create problems and difficulties for the Capitol police."

By when it came down to it, even this small minority proved elusive, if not illusory. The crowd walked out of the building, singing "Solidarity Forever" and banging drums.

One small cluster of four people stuck around longer than the rest, but after about an hour they left too, according to Mitch Cooper, a Madison lawyer who was on hand as an observer. He says one member of this small group in particular found it difficult to leave, fearing it would be seen as a betrayal of the 14 state Senators who have left the state.

But in the end, said Cooper, "They all left peacefully. They were no arrests, no swearing, no disturbances, just a complete peaceful, uneventful evacuation of the Capitol."

Take that, Scott Walker.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32638>

Isthmus, Wisconsin Associated Press sue Gov. Scott Walker over access to emails
[Isthmus Staff](#) on Friday 03/04/2011 3:41 pm

Isthmus newspaper and the Wisconsin Associated Press today filed a lawsuit against Gov. Scott Walker over his office's failure to respond to open records requests regarding emails received by his office.

"The governor said he had gotten more than 8,000 emails as of Feb. 17, with 'the majority' urging him to 'stay firm' on his budget repair bill," says *Isthmus* News Editor Bill Lueders. "We're just trying to see these largely supportive responses."

The lawsuit, filed this afternoon in Dane County court, names as defendants Gov. Walker and the office of the governor.

Isthmus made its request by hand-delivered letter on Feb. 18, a day after Walker referred to these 8,000 emails and about an hour before he held another press conference saying the number had since swelled to 19,000, again mostly positive. The paper followed this with two communications with Walker spokesperson Cullen Werwie (the second of which, on Feb. 24, was also sent to Brian Hagedorn, the governor's legal counsel). Both asked for an update on the status of the original request.

The Associated Press, through reporter Todd Richmond, emailed its request for the referenced 8,000 emails on Feb. 18. Richmond followed this on Feb. 25 with an email to Werwie and Hagedorn inquiring as to the status of his request and asking that it be expanded to include "all emails the governor has received that mention the budget repair bill."

As of today, the governor's office and his legal counsel have not responded to these requests for records, or provided information on their status.

As the (attached) complaint notes, the state's Open Records Law requires that open records requests receive responses "as soon as practicable and without delay." The complaint states: "Defendants have violated the Wisconsin Open Records Law and Wis. Stat. § 19.37(1) by withholding the requested email messages and delaying granting access to the email messages." It calls the defendants' failure to provide these records "arbitrary and capricious."

Isthmus is a Madison-based weekly newspaper now in its 35th year of publication. The Wisconsin Associated Press is the state's largest news service. Bill Lueders is president of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council, a statewide group that seeks to protect public access to meetings and records. Christa Westerberg, the attorney filing the action, is the group's vice president. The Wisconsin Associated Press is one of the Council's sponsor organizations.

Lueders, in his Feb. 25 email to Werwie and Hagedorn, stated: "My strong preference is never to litigate when it is possible to cooperate, but I should let you know that, given the obvious news value of these communications and the urgency of these issues, media requesters of this information are considering legal remedies." "We deeply regret the need to take this action to compel the governor and his office to comply with the law," says Lueders. "As governor-elect, Scott Walker promised to be responsive to open records requests and to make his administration a model of transparency. [See [December 2010 column](#).] We thought then and still think that would be a good idea."

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32648>

Michael Moore to Wisconsin protesters: 'Don't give up!'
[Bill Lueders](#) on Saturday 03/05/2011 3:53 pm,

By now, it's unlikely that anyone besides Scott Walker would dispute that the protests at the Wisconsin state Capitol have energized the labor movement, as well as citizens throughout the state and nation. What became clear during raconteur Michael Moore's 30-minute talk this afternoon is that these events have also radicalized the public, in ways no one anticipated and those in power should perhaps fear.

Between a performance by Michelle Shocked and Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin telling the audience that "this is the fight of our lives," Moore delivered a rousing speech full of invective toward the ruling class. There was nothing surprising about that. What was surprising is that his speech was received, seemingly from every quarter of the crowd -- estimated from the podium at 50,000 and by police as "tens of thousands" -- with thunderous applause.

Moore began by showering praise on the "Wisconsin 14" -- the state senators who have fled to Illinois rather than let Walker's assault on collective bargaining rights be passed.

"This kind of resolve we're used to seeing on the other side," said Moore, referring to Republicans. "They only need one of them [to cave] and they won't do it. And they're *Democrats!*"

Moore then launched into a critique not just of Scott Walker but of contemporary American capitalism. Again the response was enthusiastic -- more than I would have thought possible for his thoroughly radical message. (I once introduced Michael Moore at an overflow event at the UW-Madison. But it was nothing like *this*.)

"America is not broke," declared Moore, playing off of Walker's incessant refrain that Wisconsin "is broke" -- except, of course, when it comes to givebacks to businesses and the rich. "The country is awash in cash," Moore assured everyone. "It's just not in your hands." He identified what he said were the world's three biggest lies: 1) Wisconsin is broke; 2) there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; 3) the Packers need Favre in order to win the Super Bowl.

Applause and cheers, from tens of thousands.

Moore talked about the nation's growing economic disparities, saying the total amount of wealth held by the nation's 400 richest individuals is equal to the assets of 155 million Americans on the other end of the spectrum. He said people don't like to admit what has happened in America in recent years but that it is time to face facts: "We have indeed surrendered our precious democracy to the wealthy elites."

Boos and catcalls, from tens of thousands.

Moore charged that 'the very people who don't pay taxes crashed our economic system,' referring to the economic collapse of late 2008. He said these wealthy few manipulated things to their advantage and everybody else's detriment, by threatening to crash the economy unless the taxpayers came along to bail them out. He describes the nation's meek response: "Take our money. We don't care. We'll even print more for you!"

Afterward, he said, the fat cats were writing huge bonuses to themselves and laughing about "how perfectly they had played a nation of suckers."

Boos and catcalls, from tens of thousands.

Moore continued, "But there was no revolt -- UNTIL NOW!" Applause and cheers, from tens of thousands.

"I am so proud of you," Moore said, Tammy Baldwin by his side. "You have aroused a sleeping giant known as the working people of the United States of America! Right now, the earth is shaking and the ground is shifting under the feet of those who are in charge. Your message has inspired people in all 50 states, and that message is: '*We have had it!*'"

He added, mischievously, "We are all Wisconsinites now." Chuckles from tens of thousands.

The crowd at one point picked up his chant: "The United States of America!" Moore ran with it. "Thank you, Wisconsin. Right now is our last best chance to grab what is left of America. One thing is certain: Madison is only the beginning!"

There was more from Moore. "The rich have overplayed their hand." They aren't content to just ship jobs overseas. Now they want to strip school teachers of their dignity. The

rich want to "demean and dehumanize" the working class. The media are flummoxed over what is occurring, unable to get the story right. (Um, Michael, maybe you ought to check out TheDailyPage.com.)

He wrapped up on a high note. "Madison, you are not alone. America thanks you! Don't give up. Please, don't give up."

Applause and cheers from tens of thousands, none of whom had any intention of giving up anytime soon.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32657>

Abraham Lincoln and the Wisconsin 14
[Bill Lueders](#) on Monday 03/07/2011 1:09 pm

Sunday, three weeks into the crisis caused by Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker's proposed "budget repair bill" and now his equally radical biennial budget, I took the day off. Or tried to.

I settled down in the late afternoon and resumed reading the biography of Abraham Lincoln by David Herbert Donald (it's called *Lincoln*, published in 1995) that I had started just before this mess broke out – in fact, on Lincoln's birthday, Feb. 12.

Several years ago my wife and I spent a couple of days in Springfield, Illinois, taking in the Lincoln sites: His home, the original Springfield Capitol building, his tomb. I was especially moved by the Lincoln museum, where the sense of Lincoln as a man of great character and principle is almost overwhelming.

Then, last summer, we visited Lincoln's boyhood home in Indiana, as part of our travels in that state. We stayed at a state park with a Lincoln memorial and toured the site of his family's farm. There was also another museum, and again the sense of Lincoln's greatness left me moved.

I was telling this to a friend not long ago, and he urged me to read Donald's biography, a 700-page tome, so I bought the book. I got to P. 74 on that first weekend, Feb. 12 and 13. Then All Hell broke loose in Wisconsin, and I put it aside.

Sunday I began reading again ... for about five minutes. That's when I saw it.

At this point in the narrative, Lincoln is a respected member of the state legislature, working as a lawyer on the side. He was then still a member of the Whig party, before he became a Republican. Lincoln liked the idea of a national bank, Donald relates, but when President Andrew Jackson destroyed the Bank of the United States, Lincoln became a big booster of Illinois' State Bank, which had its main branch in Springfield.

The Democrats of Illinois, then the majority party, launched an investigation into this bank, with the goal of killing it. Lincoln managed to get himself appointed to the committee charged with this task, and was able to prevent this from happening.

On P. 77, the narrative picks up from here:

"The fate of the bank remained in doubt, as Democrats, opposed to all banks on principle and especially hostile to this Whiggish bank in Springfield, mounted campaign after campaign for its destruction. ... Nevertheless, [Lincoln] persisted, and in December 1840 he demonstrated the extent of his devotion to the bank in an episode that became celebrated as what he called 'that jumping scrape.'

"The bank had been authorized to continue its suspension of specie payments only until the end of the legislative session, which was scheduled for the first week in December. Knowing that the bank would immediately be bankrupt if forced to pay our specie, Lincoln and his fellow Whigs hoped to prevent the adjournment of the Legislature, now holding its first session in the newly completed capitol at Springfield. Of course, Democrats, who wanted to kill the bank, favored adjournment.

"The only way Whigs could keep the legislature in session was by absenting themselves, so that there was no quorum. They left Lincoln, together with one or two of his trusted lieutenants, to watch the proceedings and to demand roll calls when the Democrats tried to adjourn. The session dragged on into the evening, and candles had to be brought in. Several Democrats rose from their sickbeds to help form a quorum. Rattled, Lincoln and his aides lost their heads and voted on the next roll call. Then, still hoping to block adjournment, they unsuccessfully tried to get out of the locked door. When the sergeant at arms rebuffed them, they jumped out the second-story window.

"Their effort was in vain, because the speaker recorded them as present and voting, and, with the quorum assured, the house adjourned and the bank was killed. The whole affair became the subject of much amusement among the Democrats, who ridiculed 'Mr. Lincoln and his flying brethren' and noted that his celebrated leap caused him no harm because 'his legs reached nearly from the window to the ground!'"

As Scott Walker and the Republicans berate the 14 Senate Democrats who left the state to prevent them from taking actions the Democrats find repugnant, perhaps they should reflect on how this follows an example set by Honest Abe - a man so eager to avoid letting his rivals have a quorum to do what he felt was the wrong thing he jumped from a second-story window.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32658>

Walker, Republicans focus on fighting the real enemy: Sen. Mark Miller
[Bill Lueders](#) on Monday 03/07/2011 2:12 pm

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and the Legislature's Republican leaders have met the enemy and the enemy is ... state Sen. Mark Miller, Democrat of Monona.

At a press conference held at 12:30 today, Walker was flanked by brothers Scott and Jeff Fitzgerald, respectively the leaders of the state Senate and state Assembly. All said they

were committed to moving the budget process forward, but for one main obstacle: Mark Miller, the Senate's minority leader.

Walker said he hoped he would be announcing some good news today, that "we have an agreement" for the 14 missing senators to return, so the state can once again move forward. "Instead," it was his sad duty to report, "we have a letter from Mark Miller."

The [letter](#) (PDF), released this morning, is addressed to Walker and Sen. Fitzgerald. It conveys Miller's offer "to meet, in-person, as soon as possible to resume discussions on how we can reach a bipartisan solution to our differences" regarding Walker's budget repair bill. It also asks "that you or your authorized representatives agree to meet with us near the Wisconsin-Illinois border to formally resume serious discussions as soon as possible."

Walker, at the press conference, was just appalled. "We need to walk through why this letter is so ridiculous," he said.

He and the Fitzgerald brothers proceeded to do just that. Walker said there have been meetings with "reasonable and responsible" Senate Dems who want to end the stalemate, but "time and again the person standing in the way has been Sen. Miller." He said his staff was so encouraged by the progress made in some of these talks that they woke him up past 11 one night last week to share the good news.

But then Miller put the kibosh on all of this good work. Miller, said the governor, was like Lucy in the "Peanuts" cartoon, who plays the same cruel joke in holding the football for Charlie Brown to kick: "Time and again, Lucy would pull the football away." Oh, good grief!

Scott and Jeff sang from the same hymnal. It was Miller who was mucking everything up. Scott Fitzgerald said the Republicans have "been willing to sit down and talk about these things," and in fact have had productive meetings with Sens. Tim Cullen and Bob Jauch on the budget bill. (Fitzgerald also mentioned, as an aside, that with regard to the budget repair bill – with its sweeping provisions to do away with most collective bargaining and probably destroy public employee unions altogether – "we're not flexible on that.")

Today, as at his press conference last Friday, Walker made repeated reference to Senate Democrats he said were "reasonable and responsible," in contrast to Sen. Miller. He has declined to name names, for obvious reasons: What self-respecting Democrat would want to be known as someone Scott Walker considers "reasonable and responsible"?

But that fortress of secrecy was punctured today when Scott Fitzgerald dropped the names of Cullen and Jauch, as being exemplars of reasonableness in contrast to their misguided leader. After the press conference, [WisPolitics.com spoke to Jauch](#), who said: "Never, never has there been a suggestion that Tim Cullen and I would somehow abandon the other 12 for the sake of cutting a deal. That's just an outrageous lie."

Walker, in the question-and-answer portion of the press conference, ratcheted up the rhetoric, saying Miller "appears to be listening to the labor union bosses in Washington rather than to his own caucus." He said Miller "apparently got a phone call" – really, governor, you want to speculate about who's calling who? – from these labor bosses, which prompted him to send his incendiary letter.

Jason Stein of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, normally a savvy reporter, asked a question that showed he was just not getting it: "The person who is holding this up wants to talk to you. Why is that a negative thing?"

Walker, as is typical, did not directly answer the question, but spoke of the frustration he and the public are feeling over Miller's obstinacy: "We need to find out who in the caucus can really deliver."

Mike Tobin, a correspondent for the national Fox News, wondered whether the decision last Thursday by Senate Republicans to find their missing Democratic colleagues in contempt and issue warrants for their arrest might have contributed to the Democrats' sour mood. Walker would have none of it. No, he insisted, what happened was the labor bosses in Washington "got on the phone" – again with the phone! – and told Sen. Miller, "You cannot budge."

Of all the nerve!

Said Walker, "The facts are clear that we have put idea after idea on the table and there's been give and take." He declined to identify any of these the ideas heaped on this table, and returned to his main theme: Mark Miller.

"It just seems so apparent that the person standing in the way," he said, "is the person putting out a press release trying to redirect attention from himself."

Ah, yes, that time-honored strategy of trying to divert attention from oneself via press release. But this time, thanks to Scott Walker and the Brothers Fitzgerald, it isn't going to work.

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<http://www.thedailyreport.com/daily/article.php?article=32667&sid=f78392d85a768d78f116888400d9a9a0>

Gov. Walker's team resists prompt release of emails to *Isthmus*, AP
[Bill Lueders](#) on Tuesday 03/08/2011 10:17 pm

About halfway through a three-hour hearing Tuesday afternoon on the [lawsuit](#) brought by *Isthmus* and the Wisconsin Associated Press over emails received by the office of Gov. Scott Walker regarding his "budget repair bill," Dane County Judge Patrick Fiedler made it clear he understands what is at issue – perhaps what is at stake – as much as anyone. (Full disclosure: I am a named plaintiff in this lawsuit.)

"It's obvious to me why the media wants this before the outcome of the budget repair bill is known," said Fiedler during a scheduling conference that turned into a substantive discussion of the case's unresolved issues. The former secretary of the state Department of Corrections noted that in his own dealings with the media, he's noticed that "typically they want the information sooner rather than later, because the root word of 'news' is 'new.'"

Unfortunately, it seemed at times during this hearing that the release of these emails – which Walker has characterized as being mostly positive – might happen later rather than sooner. This even though there was no dispute that they are public records, or that the media requesters and governor’s office were not very far apart in terms of reaching an agreement that could provide access.

At his [press conference on Feb. 17](#), Walker said his office had received more than 8,000 emails in the week since he unveiled his proposal to extract benefit concessions and rein in collective bargaining rights from most public employees. He said the “the majority are telling us to stay firm, stay strong, to stand with the taxpayers.” At another [press conference the following day, Feb. 18](#), he said the number of emails had risen to more than 19,000. This statement was made within an hour of *Isthmus* hand-delivering a records request; the Associated Press made its own request earlier that day.

The governor’s office did not respond to either request until about two hours after the lawsuit was filed last Friday, March 4, although both the AP and *Isthmus* sent follow-up e-mails asking for updates as to the status of their requests. At Tuesday’s hearing, this failure to respond was chalked up to “a clerical oversight”; Judge Fiedler, while not doubting this, said it seemed obvious to him that the sending of these responses was triggered by the filing of the suit.

On Monday, Walker’s office invited *Isthmus* and the AP to look at some of these emails on its computers. The emails that had been sorted into folders labeled “Con BRB [Budget Repair Bill]” and “Pro BRB” showed a lopsided tally at that time of 46,124 pros to just 7,349 cons. More detailed analysis was not possible, under the circumstances; both media outlets felt this access was unworkable, and asked for these records on disc.

Tuesday’s hearing was attended by Brian Hagedorn, the governor’s chief counsel, and Assistant Attorney General Clay Kawski, representing the state. I appeared at the plaintiffs’ table alongside Christa Westerberg, a Madison attorney representing *Isthmus* and the AP.

Fiedler quickly established that the process of saving emails to a computer disc was not complicated, and could be accomplished in perhaps as little as ten minutes. But the sticking point, explained Kawski, was that many of these emails have never been read, much less reviewed for sensitive personal information that might have to be redacted.

Kawski provided examples of emails he felt presented a particular concern, like one from a parent worried about losing health-care benefits for a child with severe health problems that are discussed in-depth. A couple other emails were from people who raised concerns of harm should union supporters learn they supported Walker’s plan.

To keep content like this from becoming public, Kawski argued, the office would have to conduct a careful review, using what is known as a “balancing test” to determine if the statutory presumption of openness is outweighed by other considerations. Moreover, “We would argue that the balancing test should be applied to each and every email.” The number of emails at issue for the longer time period encompassed by the AP’s request, he said, has been estimated at 125,000. He allowed that this would take “a great deal of time.”

Westerberg argued that many of these concerns were answered by the agreement of her clients to not use the people's email addresses, home addresses, personal medical information, Social Security numbers or the names of anyone who clearly asked for anonymity. But the requesters balked at a counterproposal from the governor's office for the media to get prior approval before referring to anybody by name and hometown.

"If Sen. Mark Miller has sent an email to the governor's office saying he would like a meeting, we would like to use that name without having to pre-clear it with the governor's office," said Westerberg, who made the same point about potential emails from David Koch. She also noted the delay obtaining preclearance might cause.

Kawski raised several other issues, including that the filing of the lawsuit was premature. Feidler rejected this: "I'm satisfied that the ... plaintiffs acted in good faith in filing when they did." He also noted that most of the case law in Wisconsin regarding access to records has been created as the results of legal actions brought by media, who are where the public goes to get information and do "not necessarily accept on blind faith the representations of anyone who holds public office."

"Lawsuit stands," declared Fiedler. "We're going ahead." But the judge held out hope that the two sides might yet reach some sort of deal. The key unresolved issue is whether the balancing test must be applied to each and every email, whether it can be applied to the category as a whole, or whether agreed-on or court-ordered restrictions could address what information can be used without the need for applying the balancing test.

A briefing schedule was set. The governor's office has until March 11 to file its response to the complaint; the plaintiffs must file their brief on the unresolved issues on March 15; the governor's office's response brief is due March 18. Fiedler promised an oral ruling on Monday, March 21, at 1:30 p.m.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32693>

Wisconsin GOP to public employees: Screw you
[Bill Lueders](#) on Wednesday 03/09/2011 8:53 pm,

By the time I got there, it was already over – and it was just beginning. I walked through the doors of the state Capitol at 6:23 pm, having raced back downtown after hearing word that the Republican state senators were meeting to achieve at least some of what's been denied them by the exodus of their 14 Democratic colleagues on Feb. 17.

"It's going to be a riot," I overheard one person say as he crossed the street with me. Already, several hundred people were gathered outside, some in a line trying to get in. "Whose house? Our house!" was the chant of the moment. "Shame!" was another.

By 6:30 p.m. I was inside the Capitol, having gained easy admission by holding up my thick wad of daily press passes from the last several weeks. The guards waved me through. But there was no legislative action to witness.

"They just passed the collective bargaining bill," a legislative aide told me. "It took about a minute and a half." A minute and a half to accomplish what nearly a full month of GOP bullying and threats had failed to do. The hoped-for end of public employee unions in Wisconsin was achieved with a dirty trick.

For weeks, Gov. Scott Walker and the Republicans have been saying that the gutting of collective bargaining is absolutely essential to deal with the state's budget crisis, as it will give local governments and schools "the tools" – i.e., no other choice – but to impose the same unilateral benefit cuts on their employees as those Walker wants for state workers. Both Walker and GOP leaders have stated repeatedly that the part of the bill that deals with collective bargaining rights is a fiscal issue.

Heck, the governor's office put out a press release on this just yesterday, entitled ["Collective Bargaining Has a Fiscal Impact Part 4"](#). That the release is entitled "Part 4" is a clue to the fact that this has been a recurring theme.

But suddenly, this afternoon, the Senate's leadership decided that this part of the bill really wasn't a fiscal matter at all, and so there was no reason it couldn't be split off for the rest of the budget bill and voted on. Fiscal items require a quorum of 20; non-fiscal items can be passed with 17. There are 19 Senate Republicans.

And so, just after 6 p.m. this evening, they met and passed a brand new version of the budget bill that puts the whammy on workers' rights so their benefits can be savaged, claiming for the first time that this is not a fiscal measure. The vote, I'm told, was 18-1, with all except Sen. Dale Schultz voting in favor.

Inside the Capitol when I entered were several hundred protesters, most congregated outside of the Senate, where this vote had taken place. I used my press pass to get into a corridor behind the Senate chamber. It was loaded with law enforcement officers.

At 6:43 p.m., as the demonstrators outside chanted "The whole world is watching!" the security prepared to lead the 19 senators from a back room to which they had retired to safety. Capitol Police Chief Charles Tubbs and UW Campus Police Chief Sue Riesling were both there, along with at least two dozen officers. "Stay to the left and you'll be fine!" shouted Riesling as the senators began their journey. I'm sure she meant left in a directional and not political sense.

I was standing in an open doorway off to the side of this corridor as the senators paraded past. An officer in front of me said the senators had asked that no one take pictures. "Do you think that is a reasonable request?" I asked him, as I snapped away. Eventually he put his hand up in front of my camera. The senators filtered out the doorway and down a flight of steps. I wasn't able to follow them.

Afterward, I made my way to the Assembly hearing room, where Democrats were holding a press conference. Rep. Peter Barca, the Assembly's minority leader, was at the podium, flanked by a dozen of his colleagues. He was surprisingly restrained, given his evidently biblical rage.

"The big picture is just so clear. They will stop at nothing to ensure that they do what the people of Wisconsin do not want" – the eradication of collective bargaining rights. "They felt the urgency to violate the law and cram this thing through."

Barca was referring to the fact that the Senate session was not noticed 24 hours in advance, as the state's Open Meetings Law requires, except for extraordinary circumstances. Here's the law, state statute 19.84(3): "Public notice of every meeting of a governmental body shall be given at least 24 hours prior to the commencement of such meeting unless for good cause such notice is impossible or impractical..."

There was no good reason this meeting had to be held without 24 hours' notice, said Barca. There was no reason for this at all. "The law is very clear," said Barca. "I do not believe this action will stand. What they did was improper and illegal."

According to Barca, the Assembly is being called back into session tomorrow, at 11 a.m., after being told no session would be held. He said the Assembly Dems will be there, prepared to fight, knowing they don't have the votes to prevail.

"They may win this battle tomorrow," he said, "but I am quite certain they will not win this war." He predicted a backlash that is even now occurring, as I type these words.

The officers stopped letting people into the building at 7 p.m., just as I was leaving. I asked one of them why: "Cause the Senate's not in session and the building's closed." But people have continued to flood downtown. Outside my window across the street from the Capitol, the din is deafening -- honking horns and shouts and cheers as thousands of people continue to flock to the Capitol.

Barca, at the press conference, indicated that this would happen. "I expect the crowds are going to get bigger rather than smaller this weekend," said Barca. "I have little doubt that the recalls [of Republican senators who passed the bill] will be effective."

Rep. Mark Pocan, talking to David Douglas of Ch. 3, made a similar point: "The governor has showed us he has no respect for the public and there's going to be a reaction."

At 6:53 there is a loud thud as something hit the hearing room window, or near it. A woman inside went to the window and held up her hand, flashing a peace sign to those outside. "Democrat," it seemed to say. "Friend."

Barca said the Senate Democrats are on their way back to Wisconsin, to vent their outrage over what has occurred. Whoa. I asked him if maybe this was all a trick, to achieve just this result. Hold an illegal vote, get the Dems to come back, achieve a quorum even if it requires the use of shackles and chains, and pass the budget bill legally.

Barca allowed that this was possible: "I wouldn't put anything past the people who are presiding over this body at this point."

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32700>

Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council weighs in on open meeting controversy
[Bill Lueders](#) on Thursday 03/10/2011 10:54 am

I have been asked whether the Wisconsin FOIC has a position on last night's action by the state Legislature. As you know, I am not a lawyer and do not play one on TV. These are difficult issues to parse. But a few points can be made:

The Open Meetings Law, at 19.84(3), states: "Public notice of every meeting of a governmental body shall be given at least 24 hours prior to the commencement of such meeting unless for good cause such notice is impossible or impractical, in which case shorter notice may be given, but in no case may the notice be provided less than 2 hours in advance of the meeting."

There is no dispute that yesterday's meeting was not noticed 24 hours in advance and I see no way it could be argued that giving 24 hours notice was "impossible or impractical," three weeks into a budget stalemate. There is also some question as to whether a full two hours notice was given, in that it was arguably not posted in a location to which media and others have unfettered access. The Assembly Dems say they did were not notified until 4:10 pm, and the Senate meeting purportedly began at 6 p.m.

The Senate Chief Clerk, Robert Marchant, has advanced the argument that the notice was sufficient under Senate Rule 93, which holds that the Senate can convene in special session without giving advance notice. Others have pointed out that this rule pertains to the Senate, whereas last night's meeting was a Joint Committee of Conference, a.k.a. Joint Conference Committee. They say Rule 93 would not apply in such a case.

The council's position is that, whether or not a viable legal challenge can be brought, this action merits the condemnation of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council as contrary to the spirit, at least, of the Open Meetings Law, as well as to the state's traditions of openness.

We believe the meeting was hastily convened without adequate public notice because the people convening it felt they needed an element of surprise to prevail -- making it precisely the sort of action the state's Open Meetings Law was intended to preclude.

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32705>

Supremely relevant: David Prosser vs. JoAnne Kloppenburg
Capitol turmoil ups ante in high court race
[Bill Lueders](#) on Thursday 03/10/2011

[David T. Prosser Jr.](#)

Age: 68

Bio: Chicago native, raised in Appleton; single; DePauw University and UW Law School grad; former Outagamie County DA, U.S. Justice Department official and congressional aide; state Assembly rep from 1979 to 1996; served briefly on Wisconsin Tax Appeals Commission; appointed to the Supreme Court in 1998; reelected in 2001.

[JoAnne Kloppenburg](#)

Age: 57

Bio: Born and raised in Connecticut, in Madison since 1985; husband and three kids;

Peace Corps volunteer in Botswana in late 1970s; Yale and UW Law School grad; interned for Shirley Abrahamson and clerked for federal Judge Barbara Crabb; state assistant attorney general since 1989, specializing in environmental issues.

David Prosser tells a story of how he intervened to protect the state Capitol's custodial staff. It happened during the week of Feb. 20, when the building was packed with people protesting Gov. Scott Walker's anti-union agenda.

"Working in the building, the noise has just been deafening," says Prosser, since 1998 a Wisconsin Supreme Court justice. And so, when a custodian he knows well came into his chamber, he asked her, "Do you have earplugs?" She didn't.

"I think you need earplugs," Prosser responded, noting that these were being worn by law enforcement officers throughout the building. "I went down to the police and said, 'You have got to give custodians at least the opportunity to wear earplugs.' It was done within the hour."

It's a little story of little import, other than that Prosser is a considerate guy. But it was one of the only times in a 90-minute interview at *Isthmus* last week that Prosser was willing to stake out a position — it's too loud — on issues almost everyone else is taking sides on, and which will surely play a pivotal role in his bid for reelection to a 10-year term against challenger JoAnne Kloppenburg.

"Two weeks ago, Prosser looked like he had a commanding lead," reflects Mike McCabe of Wisconsin Democracy Campaign. "Now this race has been made into a referendum on Scott Walker."

Prosser, an appointee of Gov. Tommy Thompson who was reelected without challenge in 2001, agrees this is happening, and he doesn't like it one bit: "They don't want to vote against my record; they want to vote against Scott Walker."

But even Prosser's supporters cast the April 5 election in partisan terms, seeing it as integral to Walker's determination to transform Wisconsin.

"David Prosser is the only conservative running in the state Supreme Court race," declares a [recent web post](#) from the Wauwatosa Republicans. "If he doesn't win, the court will have a 4-3 liberal majority, and all of the reforms that Governor Walker is accomplishing will be challenged and judged by liberal legal activists who believe that their opinions are more powerful than the Constitution. Please don't let that happen. Volunteer to help."

It's no mystery why the crisis in the Capitol has added urgency to the high court race. Prosser, 68, came up through the political ranks as a Republican district attorney, congressional aide and member of the state Assembly. Should he lose the election, the court's conservative majority — variously placed at 4-3 or 5-2 — could be eroded at a critical time.

Kloppenburg, 57, a longtime assistant attorney general, wants to capitalize on this moment without claiming partisan ground.

"I'm running to restore people's confidence," she says. "I will preserve the role of the court as a coequal and independent branch of government that serves as a check and

balance on overreaching by the executive and legislative branches." She adds, "What's happened in the last three weeks has brought that home."

Does that mean Kloppenburg thinks there has been overreaching by the governor and Legislature? Here she hits the brakes.

"I think, ah...." Ten-second pause. "That can't be determined yet. We don't know if there's overreaching until you have a law, and there has been no law."

What about the budget repair bill and biennial budget in their current form: Any signs of overreaching there?

In the absence of a particular case that is brought before the court, says Kloppenburg, "I can't speculate on that."

Ray Dall'Osto, a Milwaukee attorney who handles criminal and civil cases and is considered an expert in constitutional law, agrees the role of the Supreme Court is magnified by recent events, as is the importance of the upcoming election.

"Our whole system of government is built on laws, and we're seeing this upended," says Dall'Osto, who in the late 1970s and early 1980s was legal director of the Wisconsin ACLU. "This is creating a critical tension in this state."

Among the issues of the moment that Dall'Osto thinks could end up before the Supreme Court:

Are the restrictions imposed on access to the state Capitol legal? It's been argued that these violated the Wisconsin Constitution, the state's open meetings law, and a statute requiring access to court proceedings (including the Supreme Court, which was in session last week while citizens were being denied entry). A Dane County judge deemed the state's restrictions unconstitutional, but disputes over access will not likely end there.

- Does the governor's attempt to revoke the collective bargaining rights of some public employees but not others violate the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution?
- Can the governor and Legislature impose what Dall'Osto calls "gross limitations on local powers," demanding that they freeze property taxes at the same time as state funding for schools and local services is slashed?
- Can these local governments ignore existing contracts with public employee unions in order to balance their budgets? Dall'Osto says the Walker team seems to be "taking the position of treaties with Indian tribes: They're good the day they're signed, and then we can just abrogate them."

Despite the supreme relevance of these issues, the candidates are reluctant — perhaps appropriately so — to comment on them.

For instance, when asked last week about the restrictions to state Capitol access, Prosser replied, "It would be extremely ill-advised for me to comment on something that could literally be before the court in a couple of days." (Prosser, by the way, was "completely shocked" to learn during his March 3 Isthmus interview that former U.S. Congressman David Obey was barred from entering the building the day before. The justice says he doesn't watch the news.)

Here's Kloppenburg on this same issue: "It does concern me as a citizen that a public building was closed to the public. But whether that was unlawful is not something I can say."

Kloppenburg does find fault with the process, saying there should be "a dialogue and discussions, hearing each other out" within all branches of government. "What's going on here [at the Capitol] is in part a reaction to the fact that no discussion took place, that there has been no listening."

Asked specifically about Walker's call to extract unilateral concessions and strip away collective bargaining rights, Kloppenburg says, "Whether it is overreaching is unclear until a case is brought and it comes to the court. But what troubles them [the workers and other protesters] is the process — that they've just gone ahead and done this without engaging."

Prosser puts it like this: "It's imperative that the state get its fiscal house in order [and] send a message that this is a great place to do business. [And] it would seem to me that the governor makes his strongest case when he can show a linear relationship between the proposal he makes and our fiscal situation. To the extent he is unable to do that, he begins to lose public support."

He continues, "I had no forewarning of anything the governor proposed. I don't necessarily agree with some of the things that he's proposed. But I may have to rule on them at some point, so I don't think it is really appropriate for me to weigh in on his strategy or tactics."

Both Kloppenburg and Prosser are in a bind — anything they say that suggests bias in how they'll approach cases can and will be used against them. So both insist they are fair-minded and nonpartisan, while painting each other as ideologues.

"If you look at her political contributions, affiliations, the kinds of cases she's handled, there is a pattern here," says Prosser of his opponent, implying she's an ultra-liberal.

But Prosser's evidence is notably thin, and, by his own admission, not based on anything Kloppenburg has said. He notes that her campaign is run by Melissa Mulliken, who also — gasp! — has managed the campaigns of Kathleen Falk. He finds it "significant" that Kloppenburg endorsed Wisconsin Green Party candidate Ben Manski over Democrat Brett Hulsey in last fall's election. And he claims others have told him, about Kloppenburg, "Here is an unbending ideologue." He won't reveal who these tipsters are.

Kloppenburg, of course, denies this: "I am not running to join any bloc. I am not running to advance any political agenda, be it conservative or liberal or anything else." She says Prosser, in contrast, "has already indicated how he is going to judge cases."

Exhibit A is a Dec. 8 [press release](#) in which Prosser's newly hired campaign manager said his reelection was about "protecting the conservative judicial majority and acting as a common sense compliment [sic] to both the new [Walker] administration and [GOP-controlled] Legislature."

Prosser says he didn't approve this release and doesn't agree with it; he vows to "review legislation impartially," upholding whatever is constitutional and in keeping with legislative intent.

A self-described "judicial conservative," Prosser has a [100% rating](#) from the Wisconsin Civil Justice Council, a coalition of state business groups, on its issues of concern, from 2008 through the end of 2010. And clearly, Republicans in the state Legislature feel that David Prosser is one of them.

When the Supreme Court justices were introduced at Walker's State of the State speech and again at his budget speech, Prosser, a former state Assembly speaker, received by far the loudest and most sustained ovation, mostly from the Republican side of the aisle.

Prosser says he's always enjoyed warm relations with the Legislature, sending Christmas cards to the entire body each year since the mid-'70s. "These people are friends of mine," he says, adding that Dems as well as Republicans fill out the ranks of his fan club. "I get along with all of them."

He says this adulation, though gratifying, "doesn't prove I can't be an impartial judge." And while Prosser often aligns with the court's conservatives — Justices Pat Roggensack, Annette Ziegler and Mike Gableman — there have been cases where he's sided with Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson, the court's reigning liberal; he even provided a list of 13 of them, going back to 2000.

"On paper, I have the most partisan background of any member of the court," admits Prosser, who from 1952 to 1998 was an unabashed partisan. But he insists he's outgrown all that, noting that he's backed Abrahamson in past elections and defended her in an internal court dispute in the late 1990s ("I wouldn't do it today because she has changed"). He claims overall to have shown an independent streak on the court.

Yet Prosser's [campaign website](#) prominently displays a newspaper editorial that states, "The court is split 4-3, with self-described judicial conservatives, including Prosser, most often in the majority."

And Prosser agrees the court tends to divide in predictable ways. He says he sometimes plays "a game" with his law clerks, asking if they can guess the outcome of the vote just taken in closed session, after oral arguments.

"It is usually not difficult to determine exactly what the vote was," says Prosser. "I suspect on some other courts, the game that I'm talking about would be more difficult."

Candidates may be only ones who limit spending

The April 5 election, the first and likely last in which Wisconsin Supreme Court candidates will accept public financing and abide by spending limits (Gov. Scott Walker's budget calls for axing this expenditure), will nonetheless see a huge outpouring of spending by special interest groups.

David Prosser and JoAnne Kloppenburg will each receive \$300,000 for their campaigns and potentially up to three times as much in matching funds for expenditures made by outside groups. But the groups can and probably will evade this by running phony "issue ads" that tear down or talk up candidates without actually telling people how to vote.

Major players will include, on Prosser's side, the conservative Wisconsin Club for Growth (perhaps serving as a conduit for groups like Wisconsin Manufacturers &

Commerce) and, for Kloppenburg, the liberal Greater Wisconsin Committee. Other groups, including unions and national conservative groups, could also get in on the act.

Prior to the Feb. 15 primary, Wisconsin Club for Growth [spent \\$321,000](#) in support of Prosser, 70% of all ad spending in the race, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. The [group's ad](#) took the familiar approach of pegging the candidate as an "ally" of law enforcement, with the usual images of flashing squad-car lights and clanging prison cell doors. Prosser won the four-way race with 55% of the vote; Kloppenburg got 25%.

But now that the [Wisconsin Professional Police Association](#) has come out strongly against what it calls Walker's "union-busting measures," and with huge numbers of police, sheriff's deputies, correctional officers and firefighters joining the protests at the Capitol, it's worth wondering whether some of their unions might get involved in the race on Kloppenburg's behalf.

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<http://www.thedailyage.com/daily/article.php?article=32723>

From lockdown to shutdown, a day of anger, a day of shame in the Wisconsin Capitol

Bill Lueders on Thursday 03/10/2011 4:13 pm

The toughest thing I did today was get into the Wisconsin state Capitol. It took more than two hours. For the first time in a month of protests and restricted access, my press credentials – actually a thick stack of them, one from each day – got me nowhere, at least early on. I'd hold these up to the windows of the doors at the various entrances, and the law enforcement officers inside would look at me and shake their heads.

"Let us in, please," people were shouting, all around the building, as they banged on the building's various closed entrances. "Shame on you!" came a chant from large groups of people outside. Earlier in the day, some demonstrators were forcibly removed, the first time that's happened.

I don't like the idea of reporters having special access. I think any citizen ought to be able to walk into the state Capitol. But the media *have* in recent weeks enjoyed special access, and that's the only way we've been able to do our jobs.

At 11 a.m. the building's east entrance was opened, and people were allowed to begin trickling in. This was done because the Assembly was supposed to go into session, and the state Constitution makes it illegal for the Legislature to meet if the building were closed.

All were subjected to weapons screening, supposedly because of threats that had been received. This had the effect of preventing most of those who wanted to enter from being able to do so, in a timely fashion.

Just before 1 p.m., I was able to enter, through the building's Martin Luther King entrance. I made my way to the Press Room – "give me this day my daily pass" – and into the Assembly chamber, where the issue on the floor was whether to remove Assembly Speaker Jeff Fitzgerald.

"This is wrong, terribly wrong," said Rep. Peter Barca, the Assembly's minority leader. He said of the speaker, "Your judgment is impaired." He argued that last night's surprise vote to pass the budget bill in the Senate violated the state's Open Meetings Law and that the denial of access to the building was a travesty. "Democracy is ceasing to exist in the state of Wisconsin."

Assembly Republicans, no surprise, saw it differently. Said Speaker Fitzgerald, "If you want to talk about Democracy not being upheld, talk about your 14 Democratic colleagues [who left the state]." He noted that the budget repair bill had been the subject an 17-hour hearing and a 61-hour legislative session, the longest in state history. And now it was time to do what the public wanted: pass the bill.

"The public spoke," said Fitzgerald, referring to the Nov. 2 election. "They said no more." He reiterated Gov. Scott Walker's tried-and-true line, "We're broke." He admitted passing the bill, which effectively eliminates the collective bargaining rights of most public employees, was a "bold political move" (again a phrase used incessantly by Walker) and "a gamble" (which is not a note Walker has struck). He said Republicans believe "this is the right thing for Wisconsin."

Fitzgerald said that in the 60 hours of legislative testimony, "I didn't see one serious effort to address the budget shortfall." The only idea he heard the Democrats suggest was "tax the rich" – an idea Fitzgerald apparently considers so outlandish as to be unworthy of consideration, although most state residents agree this is a good idea.

Then, Fitzgerald tried to present himself as a victim of irrational and dangerous people. He read a presumably anonymous email from someone making ridiculous claims about planting bombs "in and around places where you frequent" as well "putting a nice little bullet in your head." Isn't that the very definition of overkill?

Fitzgerald said most protesters were peaceful but "there are some people out there who have problems" and suggested that allowing full and open access to the Capitol amounted to putting people's lives at risk. "You're going to vote on this bill and it's going to pass. I hope everybody gets home safe."

Rep. Donna Seidel (D-Wausau) spoke in support of the motion to remove Fitzgerald as Speaker, saying the "chaos" the state has experienced over the last several weeks shows "a failure of leadership." Her voice quivered with outrage as she described a scene from yesterday's surprise session, at which "a woman imploring to be heard [was] removed in her wheelchair." She said she and other Democrats were "heartbroken" by what they see happening in their state.

Rep. Scott Suder (R-Abbotsford) found this ridiculous. "The emotion we hear ... is a distraction, a delay tactic, a gimmick," he said. "We all know that." He said the Speaker has followed every rule required of him and now it was time to get on with it.

"Democracy is not always easy and it is not always pretty."

Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Madison) noted that he has over the last six terms "evolved a lot" and made common cause with Republicans. But what he was seeing now amounted to "a complete meltdown of democracy." He said he felt he was living in a place he no longer recognized, a place he called "Fitzwalkerstan."

"We've locked out the public," said Pocan. "We've locked out the press. We've locked out legislators. ... There are no rules in this building anymore." He openly speculated that many of his Republican colleagues would be removed in recall elections for what they were preparing to do today. "[People are being asked to] jump off a cliff [and] you have no idea where the bottom is."

The vote on removing Fitzgerald was defeated 57-38, a party-line vote. Then the Assembly promptly passed the budget repair bill, 53-42. Four Republicans (Dean Kaufert of Neenah, Lee Nerison of Westby, Dick Spanbauer of Oshkosh and Travis Tranel of Cuba City) dissented; that's four fewer recalls.

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32739>

Scott Walker inks end to Wisconsin workers' rights at 'singing' ceremony
[Bill Lueders](#) on Friday 03/11/2011 6:03 pm

Heading over to the Capitol this afternoon to take in a press conference by Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca and the ceremonial signing of the now officially non-fiscal "budget repair bill," I overheard a conversation between two demonstrators making their way around the building.

"I've spent twice as much of my life as an adult than he has," the one man was saying to his companion, in reference to Walker. It was a comment that would stay with me throughout the afternoon.

I entered the building at 2 p.m., and was wanded with a hand-held metal detector for the first time, my press credentials no longer sparing me this indignity. Having no weapons other than my two pens, I was allowed in.

Just as there were only a handful of protesters outside, the building was mostly empty when I entered. For the first time in a month of daily protests, I looked around and wondered, "Where is everybody?" Most of the people who were present were congregated as near as they could get to Walker's office.

As I made my way past the security in front of Walker's office, one of the officers pointed downward, urging me to watch my step. There was a man lying on the floor, surrounded by cops. He had apparently collapsed. It seemed as though he was unconscious, until paramedics arrived and hoisted him on to a stretcher; then I saw his head move. The crowd outside the office cheered as the paramedics carried the man out.

The governor's conference room was packed with media, jockeying for position for the momentous event scheduled to take place there at 3 p.m. The event was heralded this morning in a press release from the governor's office entitled, "Budget Repair Bill

Singing Ceremony Announced." In fact, Walker officially signed the bill around 10 a.m.; the afternoon singing ceremony was strictly for show.

I headed over to the Assembly parlor, for Barca's press conference. Because most of the Capitol press corps was waiting for Walker to sing, it was sparsely attended, although Barca planned to do another one after Walker's event.

"It's official," Barca said. "The charade is over." Walker had succeeded in doing what he intended all along: to take away the rights of workers, through a process that, in Barca's opinion, reeked of impropriety. "Wisconsin's proud progressive tradition has taken a huge blow."

Barca called Walker's action "a full-frontal assault on the working class," and predicted that after first eradicating the rights of public sector employees, Walker would set his sights on the private sector ones.

But Barca also asserted that "rights die hard for any Americans, and especially for Wisconsin Badgers." He predicted that huge protests would continue, at one point speculating that tomorrow's turn-out could top 100,000, and that legal challenges could undo what Walker and the Republicans have done. "I believe the Badger State will come back."

In response to a reporter's question, Barca defended his unsuccessful effort yesterday to have Jeff Fitzgerald removed as Speaker of the Assembly. He cataloged the abuses of process -- including the surprise 1 a.m. vote to pass the bill in the Assembly and the hasty vote Thursday night in the state Senate that is being decried as a violation of the state's Open Meetings Law.

"What we have seen is a blatant disregard for the rules, in order to push through a bill the people don't want," he said. "If a Speaker of my party caused this much turmoil" and violated as many rules and laws, "I would no longer support that person."

The Republicans in the Legislature, apparently, have no such qualms; they [rejected this motion](#) on a 57-38 party line vote. Barca still hasn't gotten over it: "What's gone on here is nothing short of trampling Wisconsin democracy."

I went back downstairs for the governor's 3 p.m. singing. Media continued to pour into the room; I think the turnout was close to 100. It was the largest such gathering I've seen, even though the event was destined to be the most pro forma of them all.

Walker's cabinet entered the room at about 3:05, followed by Walker, who sat at a table and signed the already signed bill, or a ceremonial duplicate. From outside of the room, the chants of the throng outside, which had by this time swelled significantly, could be heard loud and clear: "Shame!"

The document ceremonially signed, Scott Walker began, as only he can, to sing.

He thanked the GOP lawmakers and one independent (Bob Ziegelbauer of Manitowoc) for getting the bill passed and invited Democrats "to join with the Republicans in the Legislature to get Wisconsin working again." He said of the bill: "This is about protecting middle-class jobs and middle-class taxpayers," at least three times. (I think it was the chorus.)

Walker again referred to the concessions he's gotten from state workers, and the identical changes the end of collective bargaining will allow local governments and school districts to extract from their workers -- as "a very modest request." He said it had saved 1,500 middle-class jobs, the number he said would have been laid off had it not passed. In other words, it saved these jobs from him.

From outside the room could be heard what appeared to be foghorns blaring and sirens of uncertain origin.

For the umpteenth time, Walker talked about his brother David, who runs his own small business and would "love to have" the deal public employees still have under this bill. By which Walker must mean a sudden [average salary loss](#) (PDF) of \$4,000 a year and the permanent eradication of the right to bargain over benefits, overtime, sick pay and workplace rules. His brother David would just love this.

Walker said again that, in his opinion, there are "good, decent people" who work for state and local governments. "We want to thank them for that and respect them for that."

From outside the room: "Recall Walker!"

Walker noted that he's been asked "if this is going to set a national precedent." His response: "I don't know." He said Gov. Tommy Thompson did create a national precedent with "welfare reform," but argued that he was focused on Wisconsin: "We're doing this in our own state, to get Wisconsin working again."

During the brief question and answer session -- the entire event lasted just 20 minutes -- Walker mostly repeated the talking points he had already made, in his typically long-winded fashion. He said the benefit concessions would start in April, as would the need for individual public employee unions to conduct secret certification votes to see whether they should still exist.

One reporter acknowledged the elephant outside the room: "We can hear thousands of people in the hall shouting 'Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame!'" the reporter noted. Wasn't Walker concerned about that?

Of course not, said Walker, returning to his mantra that these people have "a right to be heard" but should not be allowed to drown out the millions of taxpayers he just knows are on his side, no matter what the opinion polls say.

Walker similarly swatted down questions about legal challenges to how the bill was passed, and recall efforts that are sure to be launched. These would all work out in good time, to his advantage. He was sure of it -- no doubt as sure as his staff was in putting out a press release for this "singing ceremony."

I missed the announced last-question cutoff, but I still tried to ask the question that was on my mind. I thought it was an excellent question: "Governor, you're not concerned about legal challenges; you're not concerned about demonstrators; you're not concerned about recalls; you're not concerned about animosity in the Legislature. Is there anything you *are* concerned about?"

But as by the time I finished asking, Scott Walker left the room, apparently without a care in the world.

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32757>

One Madison school board member to another: 'F--k you'
[Bill Lueders](#) on Tuesday 03/15/2011 12:40 pm,

Gov. Scott Walker says the changes he has rammed through the Legislature will give school districts and local governments "the tools" they need to withstand the severe cuts in state aid his budget will deliver. What he doesn't get into is how the tensions caused by his agenda will divide the members of these bodies, as they have the state as a whole.

One example of this is the Madison school board, where disagreements over the impact of Walker's actions have spurned an ugly exchange, in which school board member Lucy Mathiak lobbed an F-bomb at a fellow board member, Marj Passman.

The exchange happened yesterday, March 14. Passman was contacted by a Madison school teacher who felt Mathiak had been dismissive of the teacher's concerns, urging her to "get over yourself." Passman, who allows that board members have been deluged with angry emails, says she expressed to Mathiak that she agreed this response was a little harsh.

Mathiak, an assistant dean with the UW's College of Letters and Science, in its department of Communication and College Relations, sent this e-mail in reply:

"EVERY state employee has been handed a >9% pay CUT for April, May and June. We have not had 3% raises plus step plus lane for the past decade. But then again, we clearly are not hard working or deserving of respect or sympathy. What we do clearly does not have value the way that teachers do. FUCK YOU"

Passman forwarded this email to the teacher, who showed it to a relative, who called it to *Isthmus'* attention.

Mathiak admits sending this email, saying it "has to do with a difference of opinion between board members and some extremely personal comments she [Passman] made to me, that the only people [affected by Walker's benefit cuts] were teachers." She adds that Passman "has made comments to me and about me that were inappropriate during board meetings" and that "I don't have to take crap from my fellow board member."

Mathiak declines to say what inappropriate comments Passman made about her. Passman at first told *Isthmus* she "accused [Mathiak] of being Walker," then, on reflection, denied having done so: "I certainly have never called her a name."

Both board members downplay the significance of the exchange, with Mathiak saying the dispute "has to do with differences in style" and Passman saying she does not "take it personally." Passman adds that she does not wish to stir things up: "Lucy is brilliant when it comes to finances, and I depend on her knowledge and skills."

Passman says the past several weeks have been "very tough" on board members and teachers. "I have to excuse Lucy for this. There's an enormous amount of pressure on us now."

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32762>

A quiet -- not quite normal -- day at the Wisconsin Capitol
[Bill Lueders](#) on Tuesday 03/15/2011 4:41 pm

The Capitol was relatively quiet today, but that does not mean things have gone back to normal, or that they will anytime soon.

Most of the building's entrances were closed, except the two where everyone who enters must pass through a metal detector. When I got inside just before 2 p.m., the Rotunda was mostly empty, save for a dozen or so people.

I spoke to two of them: Darla Colvard of Chetek, near Rice Lake, and her daughter Joleen. Colvard is a retired school employee and former union member. Today was the first time she made the four-hour trek to be at the Capitol, protest sign in hand.

"I came because I've very upset about what Gov. Walker is doing with this bill, kind of ramming it down our throats," says Colvard. "It's not right."

Colvard says she was prevented from joining a union for about half of her 21-year career at Roselawn Elementary in Chetek, for various reasons, including that she worked in the same office as administrators. When she finally qualified for union membership, her pay increased by \$2.50 an hour: "That's how much I got gypped before I joined the union."

She also doesn't like that the budget repair bill allows the governor to sell off state property, like power plants: "He's not the king, he's the governor."

Joleen, the daughter, lives in Reedsburg and works for the state. This is the second time she's come to the Capitol to protest. The first time the building was packed with many thousands of people.

"I don't like what he's done to us," says Joleen. "No one mentions that we took two years of furloughs. I'm tired of him making it seem like we're the bad guys in this."

Just then a large group of people began flooding into the Capitol from both working entrances. It was about 400 members of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, who came from all over the state and met up this morning at Bethel Lutheran in Madison. They were here to meet with their actual state senators and representatives, if possible.

I linked up with a subset of the group from the 15th Senate District, around Janesville. It included Lanny Knickerbacker of Janesville, Cathy Manthie of Clinton, Cathy Thompson of Janesville, the Rev. Eric Jones of Orfordville, as well as another minister, a retired teacher and a Council member who filmed the whole thing.

The group headed off to the office of their senator, Tim Cullen. At first they were told the senator was busy returning phone calls and would not have time to meet with them. So they met instead with his aide, Kelley Flury, in an anteroom outside his office.

They each explained who they were and why they came. Some were worried about the impact Walker's budget cuts will have on poor children in their communities. Others were upset that Walker has delivered tax breaks to the rich while demanding sacrifices of those who aren't. Some spoke about relatives and other loved ones who are in dire need of human services.

After about 15 minutes, Sen. Cullen appeared, and spoke with the group for at least that long. He said that, as people of faith, they could "play a big role" in what he called "such a frozen place in partisanship." Cullen ruefully admitted that the events of the last few days have caused deep wounds.

"My district is divided. Families are divided, husbands and wives," said Cullen, mentioning a family so torn over the issue it could not manage a get-together. "I think you should [help] break the partisanship, the rancor, the harsh words."

Cullen was notably circumspect. He says his district is probably about evenly divided on its assessment of Walker, but thinks a majority oppose Cullen's having left the state to block a vote on the initial budget bill. "I'm glad we did it, I'm proud we did it," said Cullen. "I'm not apologizing for what we did."

But Cullen does worry about the precedent it might set for future conflicts, which is why he's drafting a state constitutional amendment to prevent any future exodus of this sort, saying "Democrats have some responsibility for what's happening to this institution." He urged the church people to reach out in a positive way to Republican lawmakers, to ask "Are we still okay?" and have a conversation.

Cullen agreed with the visitors when they spoke about the economic inequities that seem exacerbated by Walker's agenda. "I have no desire for class warfare," he said, "but people who have all the breaks don't need our help."

The meeting ended with a prayer. And then the group split up to visit with their Assembly reps, all Republican. The Rev. Jones was told his rep, Evan Wynn, was not in. But I was able to briefly join the largest group, which met with Rep. Joe Knilens of Janesville, a freshman Republican.

Knilens, unlike Cullen, came out right away. He quickly established that he knew the churches people in the group attended, and some of the parishioners. He said he couldn't answer questions about the budget bill because "we're just getting the highlights of it."

The group members voiced their concerns, and Knilens did his best to make it seem as though he shared them. When people spoke about loved ones who need endangered services, he spoke about the people he hears from who say they cannot possibly continue to live in their homes if property taxes rise any higher.

When asked if he would hold a listening session in his district, Knilens said he hoped this could be arranged, but maybe not right away. "I don't want a shout-fest, and I'm afraid that would happen right now."

There was no shouting that I heard at the Capitol today. Just people trying to have their voices heard, and be a voice for those who can't. It's still unclear whether anyone was listening.

Lawsuit settled: *Isthmus*, AP will get emails, Walker must pay legal costs
[Bill Lueders](#) on Wednesday 03/16/2011 1:56 pm

<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32765&sid=bd5fb208835c764eaf38c018f8049ed2>

The office of Gov. Scott Walker has agreed to a settlement in a [lawsuit](#) brought by *Isthmus* newspaper and the Wisconsin Associated Press over access to emails sent to the governor in response to his "budget repair bill." The settlement requires the governor to produce the emails and pay attorney fees for the plaintiffs' costs in bringing the suit.

The settlement calls for the defendants, Gov. Scott Walker and his office, to produce a disc containing these emails next Tuesday, March 22, at or after 4 p.m. It is agreed that the governor will produce emails "in the folders in which they are stored at the time of production."

In exchange for this access, the media requesters have agreed not to use the names of individuals who have sent emails to the governor in cases where there is reason for withholding them, as when they contain personal medical or financial information or raise a concern about retribution. The requesters also agreed not to use, publish or disclose any home addresses, email addresses, telephone numbers or Social Security numbers that may be contained in these emails.

Attorney Christa Westerberg represented *Isthmus* and the AP in this action; the governor and his office were represented by Assistant Attorney Generals Clayton Kawski and Mary Burke. The governor's chief legal counsel, Brian Hagedorn, also took part in the case.

As part of the settlement, the governor's office agreed to pay just over \$7,000 in plaintiffs' attorney fees and costs. But the settlement says this payment "is not nor is it to be construed as any admission of liability or of a violation of the public records law by Defendants, their agents, their officers or their employees."

Isthmus and the AP both made requests, under the state's Open Records Law, on Feb. 18, seeking emails that had been received by the governor's office in response to his "budget repair bill." Gov. Walker stated at his [press conference on Feb. 17](#) that his office has gotten "over 8,000 emails" over the last few days and "the majority are telling us to stay firm, stay strong, to stand with the taxpayers."

The next day, [Feb. 18](#), the governor said his office had now gotten 19,000 emails from state residents, with the "majority in favor" of his plan.

Both *Isthmus* and the AP sent follow-up emails seeking information as to the status of their requests, which drew no replies. The AP updated its request on Feb. 25 to include emails received as of that date.

Walker's office sent responses to both *Isthmus* and the AP shortly after 5 pm on Friday, March 4, about two hours after the lawsuit was filed. The office said the responses were written earlier but not sent due to a "clerical oversight."

At a [March 8 hearing on the lawsuit](#), Dane County Judge Patrick Fiedler said he believed the lawsuit was the "trigger" that prompted the office's responses, and rejected arguments that the filing of the suit was premature.

"I'm satisfied that the ... plaintiffs acted in good faith in filing when they did," he said, explaining that he understood this was a matter of some urgency to the media requesters. "It's obvious to me why the media wants this before the outcome of the budget repair bill is known."

At this court hearing, Assistant Attorney General Kowski argued that the governor's office would have to conduct a careful review, using what is known as a "balancing test" to determine if the statutory presumption of openness is outweighed by other considerations, for "each and every email" at issue -- at that time more than 125,000. He said this was needed to prevent the release of possibly privileged information, like personal medical histories.

Fiedler set a briefing schedule that would allow him to issue a ruling on Monday, March 21, but he held out hope that a settlement could yet be reached. Today, the parties notified Judge Fiedler that an agreement was reached.

Comment:

From [Abha Thakkar](#) on 03/16/11 at 3:40 pm

Bill, I have a question I'm hoping you can clarify. You say that "the governor's office agreed to pay just over \$7,000 in plaintiffs' attorney fees and costs" as part of the settlement. The governor's office? Is that taxpayer money? Are we, as taxpayers, having to pay the legal fees to get access to documents that we should have been able to see anyway under the public records law?

From [Bill Lueders](#) on 03/16/11 at 7:06 pm

Yes, I believe that it is taxpayer money and, yes, it is an expense that could have been avoided had the governor's office responded to these records requests in a more timely and cooperative fashion. But as in other lawsuits, settling at this stage likely saved money and was the right thing to do.

What happened here was that it took a lawsuit to get a reply -- I think there may be other people who requested this same or very similar information who are still waiting for one -- but I also believe that the governor's office negotiated a workable solution in good faith, and for that it deserves credit.

As I said early on, I am never a fan of litigation to resolve records issues. The release of public information generally serves the interests of government as well as the governed, and thus can and should be obtained cooperatively.

But in these very rare cases where it is necessary to involve lawyers, it is essential that the party that brings an action and substantially prevails is able to recover its legal costs.

Without this provision, the state's Open Record Law -- used every day by Republicans, Democrats, media and citizens of all stripes -- would be meaningless.

Yes, the state is paying this sum, but in my opinion it is money well spent, especially relative to some other costs the governor's agenda has occasioned.

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<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32834>

Doug La Follette, reluctant petitioner in court challenge of budget bill
[Bill Lueders](#) on Wednesday 03/23/2011 1:27 pm

A pleading filed yesterday by Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne makes repeated references to the arguments of Wisconsin Secretary of State Douglas La Follette.

"The Secretary of State's position must mean that ... there is no circumstance under which a district attorney or the Attorney General could obtain an order voiding" legislation passed in violation of the state's Open Meetings Law, the [filing](#) (PDF) states. It also says "the Secretary of State challenges the District Attorney's authority to invoke constitutional provisions in support of his Open Meetings Law action."

But La Follette says he was never consulted and does not agree with the arguments being advanced on his behalf. "It's very frustrating."

At issue is Ozanne's challenge of the Legislature's [hasty passage](#) on March 9 of a trimmed-down version of Gov. Scott Walker's "budget repair bill," which would gut the collective bargaining rights of most public employees, among other major changes. Ozanne sued to block passage, arguing that the lack of proper advance notice violated the Open Meetings Law.

Last Friday, Dane County Judge Maryann Sumi agreed, and issued a temporary restraining order blocking publication of the bill, a function performed by La Follette's office. The state Attorney General's Office promptly appealed to a state appellate court, arguing that Sumi had no such authority. Its pleading asserts that "Secretary La Follette respectfully requests" an order overturning Sumi's ruling.

The state, arguing the Secretary of State's case, says the courts have no authority to impose such a remedy. But La Follette, a Democrat who has held the office for most of the last three decades, says, "I was not consulted about it and I was told I have no right to object. They can represent me whether I like it or not."

La Follette says he was present in court last Friday when Judge Sumi heard the arguments that are now being made in his name, and agrees with her decision to reject them.

"I think it was very proper for the judge to stop this thing," La Follette tells *Isthmus*. "To me, it made sense. The Open Meetings Law is sacrosanct."

La Follette says he heard from the AG's office yesterday, after he voiced similar concerns, and was told the office is under no obligation to consult him before representing his position; but it did apologize for the lapse and promised better communication.

What La Follette would really like is "some independent representation" so that the arguments being made in his name are ones he agrees with. But he says he was told this is not an option: "Apparently, I'm not allowed to do that."

Scott Walker vs. the no-longer sleeping giant
[Bill Lueders](#) on Thursday 03/24/2011 6:00 pm

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By now most people in Wisconsin and throughout the nation know *what* Gov. Scott Walker has done. He and the GOP-controlled state Legislature have rammed through a bill that extracts unilateral benefit concessions from state workers and strips most state and local public employees, from school teachers to prison guards to snow plow operators, of their right to collectively bargain over benefits and working conditions. It also imposes changes -- like making public employee union dues optional and requiring annual secret re-certification votes -- that will make it difficult for these unions to survive.

Also understood, thanks in part to Walker's [embarrassing 20-minute phone call](#) (PDF) with a prankster he thought was billionaire benefactor David Koch, is *why* the governor did this. Walker, [in this call](#), agreed with "Koch" that Wisconsin would be "the first domino" in a larger campaign among Republican governors to neuter public employee unions -- a major source of money and volunteers for Democratic candidates, against the now-unlimited ability of corporations to pour money into elections. He compared his crusade to President Reagan's 1981 firing of air traffic controllers, bizarrely calling this "the first crack in the Berlin wall." And Walker responded approvingly when urged to "crush these bastards," in reference to his state's public employees.

But perhaps the most pernicious aspect of Walker's agenda, and the one that's gotten the least attention, is *how* Walker has gone about achieving his aims. He's done it by seeking to turn worker against worker, neighbor against neighbor, family member against family member. And while in this vile endeavor he has had some success, it's clear that the division he's sown will make it difficult for him to prevail, and impossible for him to be an effective leader, at least not in Wisconsin.

The changes Walker included in his "budget repair bill," unveiled Feb. 11, passed March 10 and now in limbo pending legal challenges, are ostensibly necessary to balance the state's budget gap of \$137 million through June 30 and \$3.6 billion over the next biennium. But the need for this remedy is widely disputed -- including by all 14 Democratic members of the state Senate, who [fled the state](#) for three weeks to prevent its passage.

Under the bill, most state employees will have to pay half their pensions and twice as much toward health insurance costs, benefits their unions have forfeited salary hikes to maintain. Walker never even tried to negotiate, even after every affected union in Wisconsin agreed to these demands, if only they could keep collective bargaining rights. And, at every turn, he's sought to focus resentment on these workers.

"For those outside of government, who overwhelmingly ... are paying more than double what we're asking for in this measure, they look at this and say, 'Where do I sign up for this?'" Walker said at one press conference. "Every factory worker I talked to this last week, who is paying 25 to 50 percent for their health care premium, who doesn't have a pension, who has to pay into a 401(k) and in some cases had that suspended, every one of them looks at this and says, 'You know what? Not only do I not get that, [I have] to pay for it.' That guy has to pay the difference.... He has to [foot] the bill for everyone else."

National conservative commentators have echoed this theme. On the same day that Walker appeared as a guest on his program, Rush Limbaugh [ridiculed](#) Wisconsin's public employees as "a bunch of people who feel entitled to be freeloaders." Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher, better known as "Joe the Plumber," came to Madison to explain how these workers think: "I deserve this, I deserve that. I deserve the money in your pocket, sir.' Whatever happened to the word 'earn'?"

A similar sentiment held sway over the one "big" pro-Walker rally in Madison on Feb. 19. Organized by Americans for Prosperity, a right-wing group funded by the real David Koch, it drew an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 people, countered by more than 60,000 anti-Walker supporters. The pro-Walker attendees I [interviewed](#) talked about how hard they work and how tough they have it compared to teachers and other public employees. When I asked one woman about the gains, like worker's compensation and the 40-hour work week, that Wisconsin unions have helped secure even for nonunion folks, she shot back, "Why should I pay for them to have 40 hours when I have to work 60?"

The toxins Walker has unleashed into his state's body politic will remain for years, even decades, tearing apart families and communities. Personally, I cannot decide which seems less painful: The next get-together of my own extended family or having my face eaten by wild boars.

But something else is happening due to Walker's actions. For every state resident enraged by school teachers' generous perks, many more are disinclined to side against people who have played a key role in their lives. High school students have led walkouts and taken part in marches. "Don't bully my teacher" is a recurring sign.

The daily rallies at the state Capitol since Feb. 14 have drawn more than half a million people, including a [crowd of perhaps 100,000](#) on Feb. 26, a cold and snowy Saturday. For more than a week, mostly student protesters maintained a constant protest presence at the

Capitol, banging drums in support of collective bargaining rights and sleeping overnight on cold marble floors, until a judge's ruling that they could be removed prompted them to [voluntarily withdraw](#). The battle has been joined by public and private unionists all over the state, with support rallies all over the nation. These will likely reach a new level of intensity now that the bill has passed as a result of legislative maneuvers the Democrats are plausibly claiming to be illegal.

Most amazingly, the state's law enforcement officers and fire fighters, whom Walker exempted from his benefit concessions and collective bargaining crackdown, have been a major presence at these protest rallies. Warm relations have developed between the protesters and the more than 200 law enforcement officers called in each day from all over the state to keep the peace against no apparent threat; they see each other as being on the same side. When the state began severely restricting Capitol access, Dane County Sheriff Dave Mahoney [pulled his deputies](#) from the security detail, saying he would not let them be used as "palace guards."

Besides busting unions, Walker's "budget repair bill" curbs spending on Medicaid and replaces some state civil service positions with political appointees. His biennial budget bill, unveiled March 1, would slash state aid to public schools and municipalities while blocking them from raising the property tax; sharply reduce tax credits for low-income wage earners; end state funding for recycling and bicycle paths; eliminate a requirement that communities seek to reduce runoff pollution to lakes; cut state spending on the arts by two-thirds; jeopardize lending programs between public libraries; and strike down a law that requires insurance companies that pay for Viagra to also cover birth control. Among other things.

Each offended constituency is making common cause with others, ratcheting up the volume of the state's dissent and creating camaraderie between groups -- unions and advocates of social justice, for instance -- which formerly maintained a sort of respectful distance. Peace activists will join efforts to recall Republican lawmakers who support union-busting measures (and ultimately Walker himself, when this becomes an option early next year, after he's served a full year in office), and unions will join the battle to fight cuts in programs that serve people in desperate need.

"Existing coalitions are strengthening and new alliances are being formed," says Scot Ross, executive director of One Wisconsin Now, a statewide progressive advocacy group. "People are pulling together because they know it's them against Gov. Walker and the Republicans, who are trying to undo what has been the core of our quality of life in Wisconsin -- things like education and access to health care."

The protests have drawn supporters from all over the country. Jesse Jackson has come here several times. Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary, Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine, and singer Michelle Shocked have performed.

On March 5, raconteur [Michael Moore addressed](#) a Capitol crowd estimated at between 30,000 and 40,000. He cataloged the injustices heaped on working people, from outsourcing to corporate bailouts, remarking that "there was no revolt ... UNTIL NOW!"

"I'm so proud of you," Moore told the gathering. "You have aroused a sleeping giant known as the working people of the United States of America! Right now, the earth is

shaking and the ground is shifting under the feet of those who are in charge. Your message has inspired people in all 50 states, and that message is: *'We have had it!'*"

Already, tough talking Republican governors in other states -- including Terry Branstad of Iowa, Tom Corbett of Pennsylvania and Mitch Daniels of Indiana -- have backed off from anti-union efforts there. Even New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, the toughest talker of them all, now insists, "I love collective bargaining." Don't expect any serious Republic contender for president to profess an affinity for Walker or his anti-union crusade.

From every perspective it's clear Walker has overplayed his hand and invited a backlash that will permanently undermine his ability to govern. The opportunity he inherited from past Wisconsin governors like Tommy Thompson -- to be respected even by political foes -- is forever lost. From now until the end of his term, Walker will be will be regarded with bitter enmity by hundreds of thousands of resourceful people who hold positions of influence within their communities.

Can the people of Wisconsin and the people of the United States stop Scott Walker from getting what he wants? Maybe not. But they can and will ensure that the price he pays to get it will make him the biggest sucker in America.

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