

CRISIS IN WISCONSIN
Untold Consequences
March 9, 2011

By now, every lucid person in the country is aware of the building crisis here in Wisconsin. Governor Scott Walker's attempt to strip collective bargaining from the workers of our state has created the type of passionate reaction never before witnessed in this great state. At a time when we should be engaged in an open and honest debate about the state's next biennial budget, we are instead embroiled in sixteen recall elections, consumed with the necessity of protest, and mired in a fight that should not have been picked. In just a few short weeks, we have become more polarized than at any time in our history.

Wisconsin has a long tradition of successful and productive collective bargaining. Public employee unions and collective bargaining have served this state well. We have enjoyed labor peace, labor-management cooperation and collaboration, and outcomes that have benefited our citizenry. Wisconsin, for example, has one of the best public education systems in the nation, in large part because of the contributions made by unions and collective bargaining.

All of these contributions are now under attack and genuinely threatened. This attack by the Governor has instigated a fight that will consume our state for many months to come. The many consequences of this attack and the resulting fight have been nightly documented on virtually every national news broadcast. Indeed, the whole world is watching.

There are consequences of this attack on collective bargaining, however, that have gone largely unnoticed. Among the untold victims of these attacks are the types of progressive education and compensation reform that can only be achieved through collective bargaining. For the last four years, the Educator Compensation Institute has tracked, promoted, and crafted teacher compensation reforms that attract and retain the highest quality talent, enhance the delivery of instruction to kids, and improve the science and profession of teaching. In the model promoted by the Wisconsin Governor, all of these progressive reforms are at risk.

For more than a decade, I have promoted, examined, and bargained teacher compensation reform in Wisconsin and in at least twenty other states. Among the hundreds of alternative compensation systems I have examined or bargained, the only ones that have proven effective and sustainable, without exception, are those that were collectively bargained. Those that are imposed by a state or school system fail with each attempt.

Successful compensation reform requires the kind of collaboration, compromise, and broad-based acceptance that can only be achieved through collective bargaining. This assertion is not a supposition; it is rooted in years of advising, examining, and successful bargaining.

What is happening in Wisconsin makes me sad and angry. These attacks on collective bargaining are an affront to the working men and women in our state. They are an affront to the valuable contributions made by our unions. And, they are an affront to efforts of positive, production, and progressive education reform.

It is a tragedy.

Sincerely,
Jim Carlson, President