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## Ends Testing, Seniority Rights Walker Regains Stride, Gutting Civil Service

By MARK TOOR Updated 17 hrs ago



SCOTT  
WALKER: There  
he goes again.

Continuing his war on public employees, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker signed a bill Feb. 12 wiping out key aspects of the civil-service system, abolishing seniority protections, exams and bumping rights.

Hiring will be done by the Walker administration based on résumés rather than scores on civil-service tests. Agencies will be allowed to extend probationary periods from the current six months to two years. “Merit” bonuses will be offered to some hires. The changes will take effect July 1.

**‘Get Best and Brightest’**



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Mr. Walker and his supporters say the new law will make civil-service hiring more efficient and will “get the best and brightest in the door and keep them there.”

The Wisconsin chief executive signed the bill at the Appleton offices of ManpowerGroup, which specializes in temporary employment and outsourcing. He said the state needed to learn from the hiring practices of companies like Manpower and update the way it hires, manages and fires the 30,000 state workers affected by the changes.

Public-employee unions and other opponents say it will bring back the type of cronyism that the civil-service merit system was meant to abolish.

“The outcome of this law is likely to be disastrous to Wisconsin’s public services,” Kim Kohlhaas, president of the Wisconsin chapter of the American Federation of Teachers, said in a column in the La Crosse Tribune.

### **‘Cronyism and Corruption’**

“By dismantling our state’s civil-service system, Governor Walker and legislative Republicans are kicking down the door for cronyism and corruption in Wisconsin,” said Peter Barca, leader of the State Assembly’s Democratic minority. “...Republicans have made it clear they will stop at nothing to consolidate their own power while rewarding their cronies with taxpayer-funded jobs.”

“We shouldn’t go back to the days of hiring people because of who they know rather than what they know,” said State Sen. Fred Risser, also a Democrat.

“This is another sad day for Wisconsin’s tradition of clean and open government,” said Rick Badger, executive director of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees council that cover state workers. “The problem isn’t the civil-service system. The problem is that public employees have been pounded on for so long by this administration that public-service jobs today are far less attractive than they were five years ago.”

Shortly after his election in 2010, Mr. Walker drew national attention with a bill to strip civil-service unions of their bargaining rights on every issue except wages; limit pay increases to the inflation rate; restrict the length of contracts to a year; eliminate the dues checkoff; require unions to be recertified every year by a vote of their members; and raise health-care and pension contributions. Police and fire unions, which had supported Mr. Walker in his election bid, were exempted.

The bill was passed and enacted into law in 2011 despite a walkout by Democratic State Senators and protests at the State Capitol by tens of thousands of Teachers and other public employees. Efforts by public-employee unions to recall Mr. Walker failed; with campaign contributions flowing in from

wealthy conservatives, he outspent his Democratic opponent nearly 8 to 1.

Mr. Walker followed up by making Wisconsin a right-to-work state, meaning employees may not be required to join unions, and abolishing the prevailing wage for construction workers on government projects.

During a short-lived bid for the Republican presidential nomination last year, Mr. Walker pledged to wipe out bargaining rights for Federal employees and dismantle the National Labor Relations Board, which settles disputes between private employers and their employees. When he withdrew from the race last September, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka tweeted, "Scott Walker is still a disgrace, just no longer national."

### **Speeds Hiring Process**

The authors of the new law, Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke and State Sen. Roger Roth of Appleton, say the changes will speed civil-service hiring as an increasing number of Baby Boomers approach retirement. The law calls for state agencies to complete the hiring process within 60 days. Mr. Walker said hiring can take much longer but did not accede to requests by newspapers for documentation.

The law also overhauls the civil-service disciplinary system by listing certain violations, such as viewing pornography at work, as transgressions that can result in immediate dismissal. Mr. Walker cited cases in which he said workers involved in outrageous conduct could not be fired.

However, one of his stories described two Railroad Commission employees having sex on state property. They actually could have been fired under a morals clause, but no one pushed for their termination. Another worker he said could not be dismissed turned out to be an at-will employee.



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