

Walker, ALEC take war on workers national JOHN NICHOLS | Cap Times associate editor | jnichols@madison.com

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Two days after Ohio voters overwhelmingly rejected Gov. John Kasich's anti-labor agenda by 61 percent to 39 percent in a referendum, the nation's primary proponent of the war on worker rights opened a new front.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker jetted to Arizona, where he huddled with policymakers at the Phoenician Resort in Scottsdale. After a series of closed-door sessions, he briefed a thousand Arizona conservatives on how they could attack **"the big-government union bosses."**

"We need to make big, fundamental, permanent structural changes. It's why we did what we did in Wisconsin," declared Walker, who at the annual dinner of the right-wing Goldwater Institute said that **compromising with unions was "bogus."**

Comparing governors who have been attacking the **collective bargaining rights of public employees with the founders of the American experiment -- "just like that group that gathered in Philadelphia" -- Walker told his listeners: "We need to have leaders not just in Wisconsin but here in Arizona ..."**

If anyone missed the point, Walker said: "Tonight, you might say I'm preaching to the choir with a bunch of fellow conservatives. ... I preach to the choir because I want the choir to sing. So tonight I'm asking you to sing. Tell the message in Arizona and all across America that we can do things better."

The crowd was listening.

Last week Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer -- fresh from pointing her finger in the face of President Obama -- and her **allies in the Republican-controlled legislature announced that they would try to outdo the anti-labor initiatives of Walker and Wisconsin's Republican legislators.**

And they did so in conjunction with the very people Walker had consulted with, spoken to and urged on in November: the Goldwater Institute.

Indeed, as Arizona's anti-labor initiative was launched, the Goldwater Institute's website featured an image of 2011 protests at the state Capitol in Madison and a **headline speculating on whether Arizona's fight over labor rights would be: "Bigger Than Wisconsin?"**

Documents linked to the "Bigger Than Wisconsin?" headline outlined plans to "(ban) government sector unions from collective bargaining and entering into collectively bargained contracts." Indeed, they

suggested, **"Statistical analysis shows that if states prohibited all forms of collective bargaining, they could reap a total of nearly \$50 billion in savings for state and local taxpayers across the country."** Even if the argument were valid, its totalitarian premise raises the question: **How much more money could be saved by taking away other human rights?**

Urged on by Walker, Arizona Republicans are putting questions aside and racing to implement a militant anti-labor agenda modeled on legislation enacted last year in Wisconsin -- and promoted by national groups such as the right-wing American Legislative Exchange Council.

ALEC's model legislation, revealed by the joint Nation/Center for Media and Democracy project **"ALEC Exposed,"** provides conservative legislators in the states with preapproved bills for attacks on collective bargaining in particular and organized labor in general.

And the group has worked closely with Brewer and many Arizona legislators, including recently ousted Arizona Senate President Russell Pearce.

Indeed, Brewer began outlining the Arizona plan at an ALEC meeting in December, when she declared her intention to "reform the state's personnel system" in **order to make it easier to hire and fire public employees.**

That inspired speculation about Brewer wanting to be "the Scott Walker of the West."

In fact, Brewer and her allies are, as the Goldwater Institute suggests, **going even further than Walker did.**

The legislation introduced by the governor's allies in the state Senate would, according to an Arizona Republic blog:

"* Make it illegal for government bodies to collectively bargain with employee groups. Public safety unions would be included in the ban.

"* End the practice of automatic payroll deductions for union dues.

"* Ban compensation of public employees for union work.

"Wisconsin's collective bargaining law enacted last year made unions effectively irrelevant by limiting issues that could be bargained by a government and an employee group. Arizona's bills would do away with collective bargaining entirely and also go beyond Wisconsin law by including public safety unions.

"Coupled with Gov. Jan Brewer's plan to do away with civil service protections for state employees, the new legislation could make Arizona ground zero for union protests during this election year."

The Goldwater Institute's Nick Dranias is expecting success.

"In Arizona, we believe that the political will exists to do even more comprehensive reform," Dranias said.

"The environment, the climate that we face in Arizona is

much more receptive to these kinds of reforms than Wisconsin is."

Arizona is a so-called "right to work" state, where protections for private sector workers are weaker, and Republican legislative majorities in Arizona are bigger.

Both those factors may make Brewer's work easier than Walker's in Wisconsin.

But, for all the talk of how Arizona is "more receptive" to assaults on collective bargaining rights than Wisconsin, the states have one thing in common.

Like Wisconsin, Arizona allows for the recall of the governor and members of the legislature. Indeed, Arizonans recently used that power to vote out Pearce, the architect of the state's draconian anti-immigrant legislation.

In Wisconsin, more than 1 million voters have signed petitions supporting the recall of Walker.

Just as Walker guided Arizona conservatives toward a more militantly anti-labor agenda than that of Wisconsin, so the coalition of labor, farm and community activists that has formed the Wisconsin recall movement can guide their Arizona compatriots toward a proper response. If Brewer and her allies persist in trying to out-Walker Scott Walker, then Arizona progressives may find that they too will spell relief R-E-C-A-L-L.

John Nichols is the associate editor of The Capital Times. Follow Nichols on Twitter @NicholsUprising.
jnichols@madison.com

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