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POLITICS | MARCH 1, 2011

## Wisconsin Governor Issues Ultimatum to Democrats

By [AMY MERRICK](#) And [KRIS MAHER](#)

MADISON, Wis.—Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker issued an ultimatum Monday to the 14 state Senate Democrats blocking a vote on a bill that would restrict public workers' collective-bargaining rights, saying the state would lose its chance to refinance \$165 million of bonds if the bill weren't passed by Tuesday.

"Failure to return to work and cast their votes will lead to more painful and aggressive spending cuts in the very near future," Mr. Walker, a Republican, said in a statement. "This is the Senate Democrats' 24-hour notice."

Democratic state senators fled to Illinois on Feb. 17, refusing to return until collective-bargaining restrictions are removed from the bill.

Sen. Fred Risser, a Democrat, said Mr. Walker's deadline on the bond issue wouldn't sway his colleagues to return to Wisconsin. He said the group continued to meet daily. "The bond threat is not going to scare us one way or another," Mr. Risser said. "The 14 of us are still united. We haven't developed any exit strategy at this time."

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The governor's budget-overhaul bill would restructure a \$165 million debt payment that would otherwise be due May 1. Under his plan, the state would issue a 10-year bond to repay the \$165 million.

According to the nonpartisan Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, issuing new bonds typically takes at least two weeks and that process must be complete by March 16. The new financing is projected to add \$42 million of interest payments over the next 10 years, said Al Runde, a fiscal analyst with the bureau.

Mr. Risser said his colleagues were talking to Republicans about trying to reach a compromise on the standoff.

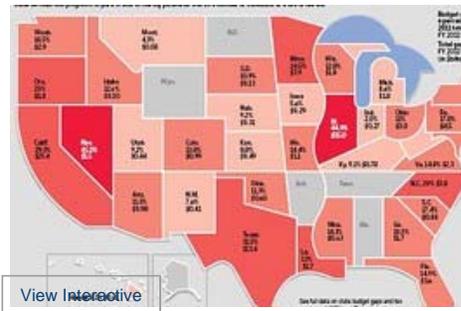
"I suspect there will be an understanding sooner or later," he said. "I know there are some Republicans that are not happy with the bill."

State Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald said it wasn't true that some GOP members were wavering. "The members are very solid," he said. He added that he had spoken to Democratic senators who were trying to return. "If anything is falling apart, it is their coalition in Illinois," Mr. Fitzgerald said.

The governor said the legislation addresses a \$137 million shortfall in the current budget and a \$3.6 billion gap in the coming two-year budget.

The state on Monday closed the capitol building to new protesters, after avoiding a confrontation Sunday night with hundreds of demonstrators who remained inside, defying an order by officials to end nearly two weeks of occupation.

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On Monday afternoon, more than 50 protesters remained inside the building, chanting and pounding rhythms on plastic buckets, wooden drums and metal pots.

Mr. Walker plans to present his budget to the legislature on Tuesday. The proposal is expected to include more than \$1 billion of cuts to school districts and local governments.

The Wisconsin council of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees filed charges of unfair labor practices with the state employment-relations commission Monday. The union claims Mr. Walker broke state law by refusing to negotiate in good faith with public workers.

At a White House meeting, President Barack Obama urged the nation's governors to support state workers. Many state employees have agreed to compensation cuts, he said, adding: "I don't think it does anybody any good when public employees are denigrated or vilified or their rights are infringed upon."

Mr. Obama on Feb. 17 charged Mr. Walker with making an "assault" on unions by trying to curb collective-bargaining rights. Some Democratic and union officials have complained that the president had given little public support since then.

Separately, Indiana's Republican and Democratic legislative leaders spoke by phone Monday morning but made little headway toward resolving a standoff that has blocked action on bills there.

Indiana House Democrats fled to Illinois last week to deny Republicans a quorum on bills that would impact unionized workers.

B. Patrick Bauer, the House Democratic leader, said he wants Republican House Speaker Brian Bosma to negotiate on about a dozen bills, including one on school vouchers and another that would change prevailing-wage rules.

—Ilan Brat contributed to this article.

**Write to** Amy Merrick at [amy.merrick@wsj.com](mailto:amy.merrick@wsj.com) and Kris Maher at [kris.maher@wsj.com](mailto:kris.maher@wsj.com)

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