

## **Wisconsin Judge Blocks Implementation of Law Curtailing Collective Bargaining Rights**

A Wisconsin judge issued a temporary restraining order blocking the state's new and contentious collective bargaining law from taking effect, a measure that drew tens of thousands of protesters to the state Capitol and sent some Democrats fleeing to Illinois in an attempt to block a vote on it.

The judge's order is a major setback for new Republican Gov. Scott Walker and puts the future of the law in question.

Dane County Judge Maryann Sumi issued the order, which was requested by that county's District Attorney Ismael Ozanne, a Democrat. Ozanne filed a lawsuit contending that a legislative committee that broke a stalemate that had kept the law in limbo for weeks met without the 24-hour notice required by Wisconsin's open meetings law. The Republican-controlled Legislature passed the measure and Walker signed it last week.

Secretary of State Doug La Follette planned to publish the law on March 25, but the judge's order will prevent that from happening, at least for now.

Assistant Attorney General Steven Means said the state will appeal the ruling, but he didn't say when. Walker spokesman Cullen Werwie said in a statement that the governor was confident the bill would become law in the near future.

"This legislation is still working through the legal process," Werwie said.

A spokesman for Republican Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald declined to comment, citing the ongoing legal fight.

Democrats were hopeful the ruling would lead to the undoing of the law.

"I would hope the Republicans would take this as an opportunity to sit down with Democrats and negotiate a proposal we could all get behind," said Democratic Sen. Jon Erpenbach, of the 14 senators who stayed in Illinois for three weeks in an attempt to stop the bill from passing.

The bill was part of Walker's solution for plugging a \$137 million state budget shortfall. A part of the measure would require state workers to increase their health insurance and pension contributions to save the state \$30 million by July 1. Other parts of Walker's original proposal to address the budget shortfall were removed before the bill passed last week. The Legislature planned to take those up later. Lawmakers are not scheduled to be in session again until April 5.

People opposed to the law converged on the state Capitol over the past month with massive demonstrations that went on for more than three weeks.