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## Next Up for Wisconsin: The Mother of all Recall Drives

*After Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker signed a bill to limit collective bargaining for many public unions, efforts are afoot to recall 16 state senators – eight from each party – by the summer.*

By MARK GUARINO

The partisan fight over collective-bargaining rights in Wisconsin is moving from the streets of Madison toward the ballot box.

A recall drive of unprecedented scale is underway, with 32 efforts targeting 16 state senators involved in the three-week budget standoff between Senate Republicans and Democrats. In the 103 years since Oregon first adopted the recall process, only 13 state legislators have been recalled nationwide.

The campaigns – against eight Republicans and eight Democrats – have been infused with money and energy from outside the state, making the movement “a national event” that could drive momentum for similar efforts in other states, says Joshua Spivak, an expert on recall history at the Hugh Carey Institute for Government Reform in New York.

Others agree that the Wisconsin recall drive is unique in American history. “In Wisconsin, nothing like this has ever happened; in terms of the US, nothing comes close to such a wholesale effort,” says Greg Magarian, an election law expert at Washington University in St. Louis.

Republican Gov. Scott Walker ended the standoff by signing into law a measure that eliminated collective bargaining from all non-law-enforcement public sector unions – a move his party says will help better state budget woes, but that critics say amounts to nothing more than union busting. Wisconsin recall law prevents him from being subject to a recall until 2012.

Democratic senators are being criticized for fleeing the state for several weeks to prevent Republicans from having a quorum to vote on a budget bill. Republican senators are being criticized for removing the collective-bargaining provision from the budget bill through a controversial legislative maneuver and then passing the provision as a separate bill without a quorum.

### THE MOTHER OF ALL RECALL DRIVES

Recall efforts are seldom used, and when they are, they typically fail because of the money needed to mobilize petition drives and to defend the validity of the signatures in court, Mr. Magarian says.

But the organizational help from outside the state could help, says Mr. Spivak. “The money is there and the will is there. Which makes it an unusual situation compared to the past but it may not be unusual compared to the future,” Mr. Spivak says.

Wisconsin makes it easy for outside forces to get involved in recall efforts. According to the state’s Government Accountability Board, which oversees campaign finance, elections,

ethics, and lobbying laws, only one person from each recall committee is required to reside in the district of the legislator who is the target of the recall.

The actual petitioner who files the paperwork also does not need to be a resident of the district or state.

The American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 48 is helping lead the recall efforts of the eight Senate Republicans. AFSCME Council 48 Executive Director Rich Abelson told a Milwaukee television host Sunday his organization decided to invest in recalling the legislators instead of calling for a strike.

“We think by summer we will have changed the face of the Wisconsin Senate,” he said.

Democratic state party chairman Mike Tate told the Wisconsin State Journal Sunday that \$940,000 was raised in donations last week for similar recall efforts.

Helping target the eight Senate Democrats is the American Recall Coalition, a Salt Lake City organization. In a statement, the group states that the grounds for its recall effort of the Democrats “are conspiracy to intentionally interfere with the proper functioning of the Wisconsin Senate and gross dereliction of duty.”

“Politicians must learn that the American people will no longer tolerate political tantrums, holding the legislative process hostage or attempting to impose their will through extortion or dereliction of the duties they were elected to perform,” it adds.

Wisconsin Sen. Dave Hansen, one of the eight the group is targeting, released a statement last month questioning the integrity of the organization. “One has to wonder why a group in Salt Lake City Utah is so interested in what is happening here,” he said.

## HOW WISCONSIN'S RECALL PROCESS WORKS

Recall committees have 60 days from the time of their filing to collect the needed signatures. To qualify for the ballot, the committees must have signatures from one-quarter the number of people who voted in the most recent election.

The signature deadlines for the 16 senators range from April 25 to May 4, because they were filed at different times. If any recall efforts qualify, a recall election would follow in that district within weeks or months, followed by an election to name a replacement if the recall is successful.

Wisconsin politicians are eligible for a recall only after they have been in office for a year, meaning that Governor Walker will not be eligible for a recall until Jan. 3, 2012.

That could benefit Walker if the economy improves and passions diminish, Magarian says.

On the other hand, if the economy does not improve, his opponents are likely to sustain their argument in every way they can through January.

“Labor is not going to go away. Obviously you’re not going to have 100,000 people in Madison every weekend, but if they keep the spotlight on Walker, he’s going to have a real problem,” Magarian says.