



**State Engineering Association**  
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February 23, 2011

Governor Scott Walker  
115 East Capitol  
Madison WI 53702

Dear Gov. Walker,

The State Engineering Association remains open to cooperating with your administration in repairing the state's budget problems. The Wall Street meltdown that severely -- but only temporarily -- damaged the national economy and state revenues was not of our membership's making. Nevertheless, our Association is prepared to share in paying for the fix through adjustments to our compensation, even though other, wealthier sectors of Wisconsin's economy are not being asked to do likewise.

However, we regard your proposal to effectively destroy public collective bargaining as an unacceptable overreach. This proposal represents a permanent response to a temporary problem. It is utterly unnecessary in any fiscal sense. That is why our Association along with other bargaining units will never agree to surrender our most important workplace rights.

The State Engineering Association is extremely disappointed by your clear retreat from past statements assuring that you intended to work with us. Summarily removing all meaningful collective bargaining rights is not working with us. It is, instead, working against us and against the greater interests of clean, open, effective government.

Democracy isn't by design efficient. As every wise politician knows, open negotiation and debate often provide insights and compromises that drive more successful outcomes. The state's budget problems are not so great that ramming through in only a few days the sweeping changes you have proposed can in fairness be fully justified, even if they actually made sense.

You insisted before your inauguration that days and even weeks would not be enough time to fully consider legislative approval of tentative bargaining agreements, although the terms of those contracts were quite well already understood. So how can a measure to all but do away with the underlying collective bargaining process itself require any less consideration? How can summarily canceling current contracts lead to more rational state budgeting and planning? These moves will, in fact, lead our state toward more political polarization and away from effective problem solving.

Your steps to cancel existing contracts and fundamentally do away with collective bargaining can in themselves be seen as unfair labor practices. The fact that many school administrators, municipal officials and even private employers have questioned the scope of these sudden proposals -- and the upset they will bring about beyond state government -- ought to be enough to give your office and our Legislature serious pause.

Beyond the above, the Association is especially aggrieved by continuing statements from your administration that the compensation paid to our members is too high. In fact, as studies have shown, our

total compensation is noticeably lower than that of our professional counterparts in the private sector. Statements to the contrary are not only hurtful and untrue; they represent a serious affront to dedicated public workers. That and your effort to take away many of their workplace protections are, of course, why many dedicated public servants and their supporters have demonstrated in public rallies.

As we have pointed out in previous letters, the record is very clear: Not only are our members hard workers, they deliver services at a cost typically below that of the private consultants the state often hires to take over our work.

Our Association did not insist upon a 2009-2011 contract agreement before your inauguration, even though that contract would have expired this June. We have in the past accepted reductions in compensation and are open to doing so in the future. However, your office, the Legislature and our fellow taxpayers need to understand that such compensation cuts will come at an unintended price:

State government will lose considerable professional talent and institutional knowledge through a sudden spike in early retirements, interest in which is already noticeably greater. That lost talent will not be easily replaced by offering prospective workers even lower, under-market wages. Further, the impact of reduced public worker compensation will be multiplied by dollars no longer spent throughout local economies across the state.

If the public were more aware that this one aspect of your plan will cost local communities a collective billion dollars a year in economic losses, the polls would tilt even more in opposition.

In sum, your budget repair measures will increase both misery and uncertainty in these difficult economic times, and not just among public employees, Surely that is not your intent, but it will be your legacy, should you prevail. The State Engineering Association urges you to join in working out a compromise, in the best traditions of our state government, and under our state constitution's mandate of moderation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Klipstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "M" and "K".

Mark Klipstein  
President