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Wisconsin Assembly Passes Anti-Union Bill as Senate Democrats Stay Away

By **RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr.**

MADISON, Wis. — Over shouts of protest from Democrats, the Republican-controlled Wisconsin State Assembly passed a bill in the early morning hours Friday that would strip state employees of most of their collective bargaining rights. But there was no sign that a stalemate over the proposal would end, as Democrats in the Senate remained out of the state after fleeing to prevent their own vote on the proposal.

The 51-to-17 vote just after at 1 a.m. in the Assembly drew boos and shouts of “Shame! Shame!” from Democrats who said that leaders had abruptly cut off debate and prevented more than a quarter of the legislators from casting votes. It came during the second week of sustained demonstrations inside and around the Capitol. Union workers and others from Wisconsin and nearby states continued to protest the proposals backed by the new governor, [Scott Walker](#), a Republican elected in November.

Some Republican leaders in other states have moderated their talk against state employee unions in recent days. But in Wisconsin, Mr. Walker traveled the state on Friday in an effort to put more pressure on the Senate’s 14 Democrats to return from Illinois.

Democrats said the early-morning vote showed that Republicans had little interest in negotiating. They “rushed a vote in seconds, cheating Democratic representatives of the opportunity to vote against this horrible legislation,” said the leader of the Assembly’s Democrats, Peter Barca. “Then they fled the chamber surrounded by armed law enforcement agents,” he said.

Republicans said the Assembly debated the bill long enough during a three-day Democratic [filibuster](#). Mr. Walker said in a statement, “The 14 Senate Democrats need to come home and do their jobs, just like the Assembly Democrats did.”

While Republicans have a majority in the Senate, they are a vote short of a quorum for fiscal legislation. Democrats say they will not return until the governor agrees to negotiate on his proposals to strip unions of power, which include forbidding collective bargaining except for basic wages, and limiting raises to no more than the rate of inflation.

Democrats have already indicated that they would accept provisions that would cut the take-home pay of state employees by diverting money to help finance pension and health care costs.

A spokeswoman for the Wisconsin Department of Administration said the increased contributions to pensions and health care would amount to about a 6 percent decrease in take-home pay for a state employee with a \$50,000 income, the average for state workers. Workers would pay more than 12 percent of their health care premiums, up from 6 percent, while 5.8 percent of their pay would be diverted to finance pensions, up from less than 1 percent for typical workers.

A fight over similar legislation in Indiana was stalemated as well, after 37 of 40 Democratic House members walked out, preventing a quorum. B. Patrick Bauer, the House minority leader, said from Urbana, Ill., that Democratic lawmakers would be staying in Illinois through the weekend, and beyond.

Susan Saulny contributed reporting from Indianapolis.