

WISCONSIN GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES PAY FREEZE PLAN



The Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, has proposed a plan to freeze the pay of the state workers for the next two years. This comes on the heels of a controversial law that was approved earlier in 2011 that states that public employers do not have to negotiate with unions for the most part. Documents sent by the Office of State Employment Relations (OSER) to legislators detailed the plan for compensation and a union leader promised there would be a major fight against this proposal. Base pay will be frozen by the plan, and a new system will be created for merit pay that will be controlled by OSER. The plan will also suspend the funding for OSER during the current two-year budget cycle. Other key items from the plan include the following: "eliminates union-negotiated procedures for scheduling work hours and assigning overtime and it hands authority over those work rules to agency managers while preserving most benefits including vacation and sick leave." Mike Huebsch, the Administration Secretary, had the following to say: "We have terrific people working for the state of Wisconsin who do great things — we will now have a way to recognize them appropriately," Huebsch said. "An overview of the plan OSER provided to legislators includes an attachment specifying that merit pay funding will be suspended." The director of the Wisconsin State Employees Union, Marty Beil, had the following to say about the proposed law: "This is just another chapter in the power grab by the Walker administration," Beil said. "What does Greg Gracz know about the guy who works second shift in a prison? They can play footsie with their favorites without knowing whether someone deserves merit pay or not." The union represents 22,000 of the nearly 40,000 unionized state workers, Beil also said that if the state restricts pay and seizes control of work schedules, anger in state workplaces would be rampant. "We'll be talking to our legal counsel and our leadership about what we can do and should do about this," Beil said. "We'll be in a full-court press about this stuff." There have been no raises for state workers since 2009 and they have been required to pay more for their health insurance and pension costs under a law that removed most of their collective bargaining rights. The president of the 250-member Wisconsin State Attorneys Association, Francis Sullivan, had the following to say: "Our union is disappointed to see no general wage adjustments for state employees, but we expect, pending the successful outcome of our certification election, that the administration will bargain that issue in good faith with us," Sullivan said. In order for unions with expired contracts to negotiate raises, they must win elections. The majority of the larger state unions are not looking for certification because there is very little that can be negotiated. It also takes 51 percent of the unions' members to certify.