

Republican "Right to Work" Public Hearing Turns into Mockery

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MADISON - Nothing usually gets decided at public hearings. They are mostly an exercise to make the public feel heard. But the GOP majority failed Tuesday to even do that at the Senate Labor Committee public hearing they had hurriedly staged for the so-called "Right to Work" Bill.

About 2,000 demonstrators showed up outside the Capitol earlier in the day to keep the politicians honest and the "hearing" had proceeded peacefully for about six hours. Committee chairman Sen. Steve Nass (R-Whitewater) introduced several witnesses from Bradley Foundation and Koch Brothers funded Republican think tanks to support the legislation and a long parade of small businessmen and labor union representatives, mostly from the Building Trades, to oppose it. Other private citizens, almost all opposed, then gave their testimony.

The three Republican members on the committee showed little interest and asked few questions, leaving that work up to the Democratic Senators Bob Wirth of Kenosha and Chris Larson of Milwaukee.

The public hearing turned into a complete mockery shortly before 6:30 p.m. when committee chairman Nass said he was cutting off the meeting abruptly because of what he called a "credible threat". What Nass called a "credible threat" turned out to be a [Milwaukee Journal](#)

[Sentinel repor](#)

t that said union demonstrators were planning to peacefully disrupt the committee vote by raising their voices if Republicans didn't let everyone from the public testify.

Nass called for a quick vote on the measure and the fearful Republicans exited the room. The vote was 3-1, with all three Republicans voting for the bill to prohibit requiring workers to pay union dues and one Democrat, Sen. Wirsch, voting against. The other Democrat on the committee, Sen. Chris Larson, did not cast a vote as he and people in the room argued unsuccessfully for Republicans not to take the vote at that moment.

Afterwards, hundreds of business owners, union members, veterans, and just plain concerned citizens sat in stunned silence in the room waiting to speak. Many have been waiting since eight in the morning.

"There was no threat," Bruce Colburn of the Service Employees International Union state council said. "We wanted to ensure that people had a right to speak."

"They used it as a straw man to get out of a very uncomfortable position," AFSCME Council 48 Executive Director Boyd McCamish added. "It's an act of political cowardice."

The so-called "Right to Work" Bill now moves on the Republican controlled Senate and Assembly where quick passage is expected.

The bill has also spotlighted Governor Scott Walker's stance on the measure. In May 2012, the governor said he would do " [everything in my power](#) " to keep the legislation from getting to his desk. But Walker, who is now eyeing a run for the presidency, has said in recent days he would sign the bill.



In a statement released earlier today, Senator Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) commented on the

events in Madison saying:

"Senate Republicans once again have shown their disdain for those who disagree with them by shutting down the public hearing this evening on legislation that will cost Wisconsin families over \$5,000 a year in lost wages, increase child poverty and create more dangerous working conditions."

"As Wisconsin business owners, workers and veterans waited to testify Senate Republicans chose to shut the hearing down early rather than continue listening to the overwhelming testimony against the bill."

"Senate Republicans talk about less government intrusion but the fact is Senate Bill 44 is one of the most intrusive bills of all because it denies Wisconsin employers the right and freedom to run their businesses as they see fit."

"It is unfortunate that at a time when our state needs to work together to move our economy forward governor Walker and Senate Republicans have chosen to continue their attempts to "divide and conquer" Wisconsin families."



Assembly Democratic Leader Peter Barca (D-Kenosha) released the following statement after Republicans shut down a committee public hearing on their so-called "Right to Work" bill:

"I am deeply disappointed that Senator Nass and Republicans did not at least live up to their promise of holding the public hearing until 7:00 tonight. Slamming the door on public testimony and silencing the hundreds of people who have come all day to testify is just another abuse of power by Republicans and an affront to our Wisconsin values of open, honest and transparent government."

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