

Public Hearing to Gut Civil Service Just Another Show

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Members of Gov. Scott Walker's administration joined with the bill's sponsor as the only testifiers in support of the measure that is moving quickly through the Legislature. Proposal would eliminate objective civil service exams, replacing them with a review of "qualifications" by administration appointees, and cripple workplace protections for our state workers.

MADISON - Today, the Senate Labor and Government Reform Committee held a public hearing on Senate Bill 285 to change the state's civil service system. It must have seemed like déjà vu, from French literally "already seen", to state workers still smarting from Act 10 in 2011.

The bill comes four years after the Legislature passed Gov. Scott Walker's proposal, known as Act 10, that effectively eliminated collective bargaining for most public workers, including state employees. Walker said then that he wasn't interested in making changes to the civil service system.

Today's public hearing was nothing more than a parade of Walker's political appointees pushing for gutting civil service protections and doubling down on politicizing our state workforce.

The proposal would eliminate objective civil service exams, replacing them with a subjective review of "qualifications" by administration appointees, and cripple workplace protections for our state's civil servants. These changes open the door to hiring partisan political hacks and making party loyalty a qualification for a state job, the very hiring practices that civil service was established 110 years ago to root out.

A parade of State workers testified the Republican-backed bill that would make it easier to hire and fire public employees, saying the proposed overhaul of Wisconsin's 110-year-old civil service system would lead to political patronage and cronyism.

Members of Gov. Scott Walker's administration joined with the bill's sponsor as the only testifiers in support of the measure that is moving quickly through the Legislature. The Senate Labor and Government Reform Committee hearing came just one week after the bill was publicly released.

"The legislation's not needed and does not address problems that are alleged to exist," said Jim Thiel, a former 40-year state employee representing the Association of Career Employees, which advocates for maintaining the civil service system. "This will lead to a patronage system."

An appeal that fell upon deaf ears from the Republican majority.



Democratic Sen. **Chris Larson**, of Milwaukee, said the bill would gut the current system and lead to buddies of politicians in power getting jobs whether they're qualified or not.

"What's to prevent patronage? What's the check? Right now we have a neutral exam to make sure that doesn't happen," said Larson, a member of the committee that held the hearing. "This is the elimination of good government. This is just another step in that."

In a statement released after the hearing, Sen. Larson went on to say:

"Make no mistake, Wisconsinites are not fooled by what Walker and the GOP are trying to do in our state – consolidate power and fast-track corruption. In fact, we already have proof of what happens when we throw out strong hiring standards and replace them with subjective evaluations by looking at the failed Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). The quasi-private state agency does not use the same civil service standards as other state

agencies. As a result, corruption and high turnover has run rampant within WEDC since its creation.

“Walker’s Wisconsin already has the fastest shrinking middle class in the U.S., is last in the nation for new business startups, and lags in job creation. Wisconsin families face real challenges every day and are tired of the cronyism and political power grabs by Republican leaders who are focused on undermining our open records laws, eliminating government accountability, and shielding themselves from criminal investigations.

“My Democratic colleagues and I are listening to the hardworking neighbors in our communities. Rather than looking for ways to tear down Wisconsin workers, Democrats are focused on strengthening our middle class, boosting family wages, and ensuring greater retirement security.

“Unfortunately, this bill is more political Snake Oil being pushed at Walker’s carnival of corruption; it fails to remedy the employment problems created by this administration, and poisons our heritage of good government.”

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