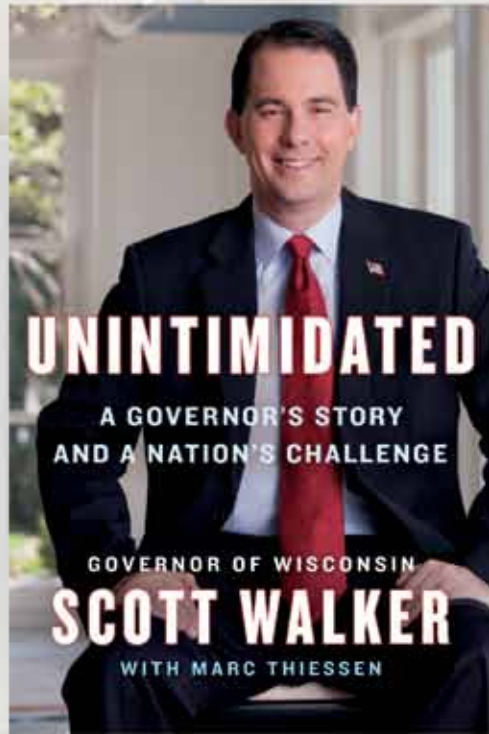




Threats, doubts and resolve

Editor's note: When Scott Walker was sworn in as Wisconsin's 45th governor on Jan. 3, 2011, he faced an unprecedented \$3.6 billion deficit. Moving quickly to deal with the crisis, on Feb. 11 he announced his bold plan to balance the budget, prompting Democrats and their union supporters to explode in fury. We're fortunate to present the governor's account of

those tempestuous days in this edited excerpt from his new book, *Unintimidated: A Governor's Story and a Nation's Challenge*, which he wrote with Marc Thiessen. (The selection and photos are offered through an agreement with Sentinel, an imprint of Penguin Random House. Copyright © Scott Walker and Marc Thiessen, 2013.)



In an excerpt from his new book, Gov. Walker details his struggle to break the union stranglehold on Wisconsin government

On Feb. 15, I went to La Crosse for a visit to a manufacturing company. Outside the facility, we were greeted by hundreds of angry protesters, but inside we got an enthusiastic reception from the blue-collar workers. As I recall, they were paying about 25 percent of their health insurance premiums and had to match their employer contributions to their

pensions, so they didn't have a whole lot of sympathy for the folks outside complaining about having to pay 5.6 percent for their pensions and 12.6 percent for their health care. It was a great event.

As we prepared to leave, the state troopers saw that the protesters had physically blocked the entrance we had used to come



onto the property. So they turned the squad car around and headed toward the other exit. We watched in disbelief as the throng of people rushed toward the second exit to block our path. As we tried to pull out, they surrounded the car and began beating on the windows and rocking the vehicle. Just as we extricated ourselves from their grip, a truck pulled up and blocked our path, playing a game of chicken with the troopers. They turned the lights and sirens on and warned him to get out of way. Eventually he backed up, and we sped off.

It was a lesson in how much our circumstance had changed in a matter of a few days. We were dealing with people who were so blinded by their anger that they were not in the least bit afraid to storm and shake a police car. We had never seen anything like it in Wisconsin before.

And that was only the beginning. The

protests following us around the state grew bigger and louder — and the protesters got more aggressive with each passing day.

After the La Crosse incident, State Patrol Capt. Dave Erwin took me aside and explained that we needed to increase security — not just for me but also for Tonette and the kids. Dave briefed me about the stream of intelligence he was receiving from the state Division of Criminal Investigation. Our whole family was being watched, followed and tracked, he said.

Dave was not prone to exaggeration. He is a former marine who had headed former Gov. Jim Doyle's security detail. He is the consummate professional.

"Governor, I've been at this awhile, and when the hairs stand up on the back of my neck, you have to be concerned," Dave said. "They know where you go to church; they've been to your church. They're following your

children and tracking your children. They know where your children go to school, what time they have class, what time they get out of class. They know when they had football practice. They know where your wife works, they know that she was at the grocery store at this time, they know that she went to visit her father at his residence.”

We talked about some of the additional measures he would take to keep the family safe. Dave increased the size of our detail and assigned troopers to keep an eye on the kids at school. (Both of my sons were attending a public high school, and the Wauwatosa police officers really looked out for Matt and Alex too.) He also explained that we could no longer do simple tasks like going to the curb to pick up the mail, which would now have to be screened.

We soon began to get a steady stream of death threats. Most of these Dave and his team intercepted and kept from Tonette and me. They were often graphic (one threatened to “gut her like a deer”), but for the most part they amounted to little more than angry venting.

But one afternoon, as I prepared to go out to the conference room for my daily press briefing, Dave came into my office and shut the door. “Sir, I don’t show you most of these, but I thought you ought to see this one.” He handed me a letter addressed to Tonette that had been picked up by a police officer at the executive residence in Maple Bluff. It read:

HI TONETTE,

Has Wisconsin ever had a governor assassinated? Scotts heading that way. Or maybe one of your sons getting killed would hurt him more. I want him to feel the pain. I already follow them when they went to school in Wauwatosa, so it won’t be too hard to find them in Mad. Town. Big change from that house by [BLANK] Ave. to what you got now. Just let him know that it’s not right to [EXPLETIVE] over all those people. Or maybe I could find one of the Tarantinos [Tonette’s parents] back here. Lots of choices for me.

The letter had a Green Bay postmark, but there were no fingerprints or other indications of who had sent it. Dave explained that it raised red flags because, unlike most of the hate mail and death threats we received, it was very specific. The sender talked about following our kids to school, the street where we lived, and threatened not just me but my children and my in-laws. I decided not to share the note with Tonette and the kids right away.

Security was already tight around the family. Eventually, long after everything was over, I told her, Matt, and Alex about it. According to my staff, the only time they ever saw me angry during the entire fight over Act 10 was after I read that letter. They were right. I didn’t mind threats against me, but I was infuriated that these thugs would try to draw my family into it.

One of the reasons for Dave's increased vigilance was the fact that the protests in Madison came just a month after the shooting of U.S. Representative Gabby Giffords in Tucson, Arizona. In the wake of that tragedy, I was amazed to see how quickly so many on the left jumped at the opportunity to blame conservative political rhetoric for the shooting. New York Times columnist Paul Krugman wrote, "We don't have proof yet that this was political, but the odds are that it was. ... [V]iolent acts are what happen when you create a climate of hate. And it's long past time for the GOP's leaders to take a stand against the hate-mongers."

Well, just a few weeks later, when protesters screamed at elected officials, threatened them and created a “climate of hate” in Madison, their actions were met with silence from these same quarters. Protesters followed us around the state, assaulted police vehicles, harassed Republican legislators and vandalized their homes. One day, someone scattered dozens of .22-caliber bullets across the Capitol grounds.

At the Capitol, they carried signs comparing me to Adolf Hitler, Hosni Mubarak and Osama bin Laden. Those never seemed to make the evening news, so we took pictures to document them. One read “Death to tyrants.” Another had a picture of me in crosshairs with the words, “Don’t retreat, reload.” Another declared, “The only good Republican is a dead Republican.” Another said “Walker = Hitler” and “Repubs = Nazi Party.”

It wasn't just the protesters who engaged in

such shameful rhetoric. Democratic Sen. Lena Taylor also compared me to Hitler, declaring, “The history of Hitler, in 1933, he abolished unions, and that’s what our governor’s doing

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today.” Her colleague Sen. Spencer Coggswell called our plan “legalized slavery.” Jesse Jackson came to Madison and compared me to the late segregationist governor of Alabama, George Wallace (who was paralyzed in an assassination attempt), declaring we had “the same position” and that I was practicing the politics of the “old South.”

Later, when the Capitol was cleared of protesters, *Time* magazine reported, “The Wisconsin State Capitol had taken on an eerie quiet by late Friday. ... The chalk outlines around fake dead bodies etched with Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker’s name remained in dismembered parts, not yet completely washed away by hoses.”

Krugman and his cohorts never got around to taking “a stand against the hate-mongers” in Madison.

In his moving speech after the Giffords shooting, President Obama declared, “at

a time when our discourse has become so sharply polarized, at a time when we are far too eager to lay the blame for all that ails the world at the feet of those who happen to think differently than we do, it's important for us to pause for a moment and make sure that we're talking with each other in a way that — that heals, not in a way that wounds."

Those words apparently fell on deaf ears in Madison.

Ultimately, the unions took their stand in Wisconsin because of the unprecedented nature of our reforms. We did not simply go after the money — the lavish benefits the unions had extorted from taxpayers over the years. We dismantled the entire system of corruption and cronyism by which the unions perpetuated their political power and dictated spending decisions to state and local government. We took the reins of power from the union bosses and put the taxpayers back in charge.

Normally, they would have succeeded in thwarting our efforts. But two things suggested to me that we had a unique opportunity to do something that might be impossible at any other time: We had the votes, and we had no choice. We were in a fiscal hole with no way out. I didn't lead our party into this fight when we had a budget surplus. It wasn't like I was Evel Knievel saying, "I wonder if I can jump this canyon"

just for the sake of jumping over a canyon. I did it because we had a \$3.6 billion deficit and no practical way to close it.

One night we were standing in our bedroom and [Tonette] turned to me, visibly upset, and said: "Scott, why are you doing this?"

The question took me aback. At first, I thought she was blaming me for the protests. But it was more than that.

"Why are these people so upset with you?" Tonette demanded to know. "You got what you



wanted. Why are you pushing this?"

I had just assumed that Tonette understood why our reforms were necessary. The fact that she didn't was a wake-up call to me. If my own wife didn't see why we needed to change collective bargaining, how could I expect the voters of Wisconsin to see it? I was obviously doing a lousy job of explaining our reforms.

Before we had introduced Act 10, we had methodically gone through every aspect

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strike. But the one thing we had not done was prepare the people of Wisconsin for the changes we were about to enact.

Usually in government, politicians talk about problems but never fix them. My mistake was, in my eagerness to get busy fixing the problems of our state, I didn't spend enough time laying out what they were to the people of the state. We did not do enough to help people understand why we had chosen this path, how collective bargaining was hurting schools and local governments, and why reforming it was the only way to get our fiscal house in order.

I figured the people of Wisconsin had just elected me to make bold changes, and had sent me to Madison backed by strong Republican majorities in both houses — so they expected us to go ahead and take bold action.



I knew I was doing the right thing, but I had not taken the time to explain why it was the right thing to do. I wish that on my first day in office, I'd told the taxpayers how, under collective bargaining, school districts were forced to buy health insurance from just one company that happened to be affiliated with the teachers union — and that it cost them tens of millions of dollars more than it had to because there was no competition.

The citizens would have told me to go ahead and fix the problem. I wish I had pointed out that because of overtime rules in a collective bargaining agreement, there were bus drivers in the city of Madison who made more than the mayor. If I had explained these things, the people would have said to me: “Fix it.”

But I had not done that. Now the Democrats and union activists were charging that I wanted to take away workers’ “rights,” and my fellow citizens (including my own wife) were asking, “Why has he got these folks all upset?”

I had to start making the case for our reforms, or I would lose the citizens of our state. I started with the citizen closest to me. Tonette is an excellent political barometer for me because she is like a lot of Wisconsin voters — smart and well-read, but focused on things other than politics. Despite being married to me, her life is centered not on events in Madison but on raising our two sons, her work at the American Lung Association, and her volunteer work with teens and young adults recovering from substance abuse. She is your typical informed voter.



Now here she was, demanding to know: “Why are these protesters in front of our house? Why is this so important that it is worth all this grief to our family?” We talked it over and prayed about it together.

Eventually, I convinced her that our reforms were a necessary course of action and worth the pain and grief they were causing our family. That gave me hope. If I could convince Tonette, I could probably convince most of our citizens as well. ■