

FightFor15: Wisconsin workers vow to unseat Walker during their own 'State of the State Address'

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Jennifer Owens, [312-218-8785](tel:312-218-8785), jennifer@fightfor15.org

Janet Veum, [202-230-2143](tel:202-230-2143), janet.veum@seiu.org

Fast Food and Hospital Workers Take to the Capitol Demanding Better Pay and Denouncing 'Low-Wage Walker'

MADISON—Just hours before Gov. Scott Walker's State of the State Address, fast food and hospital workers along with community and faith leaders held their own 'State of Our State' press conference and rally inside the State's Capitol. Expressing their demands for a new governor who represents the people, workers held signs that read "Labor Strikes Back" and chanted "Low Wage Walker Has Gotta Go" throughout the rotunda.

In the North Hearing Room, Wendy's fast food worker Solo Littlejohn got right to the point. "We're going to defeat low-wage Walker and elect a governor who raises our wages and helps us build strong unions," said Littlejohn, a resident of Kenosha. "We're the working people and we matter. We may not run America, but we help make America run."

After eight years of Gov. Walker, working people are fed up with his failure to improve the standard of living in Wisconsin. Non-union and union hospital workers alike voiced their concerns about Walker's destruction of unions and his policies that block raising minimum wage. "I'm barely making ends meet. I can't pay bills, or I'm short paying bills," said Margie Brelove, who works in environmental services at

Aurora Sinai in Milwaukee. “Something’s lacking because there’s not enough income coming in. A minimum wage increase to \$15 an hour and unions are a good start on the right path.”

Echoing Brelove’s message, Madison Vander Hill, a CNA and a member of SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin, said, “We do this work because we are called to care for the most vulnerable people in our communities. We should be able to make a career out of this calling.”

Ahead of the 2018 election, Fight for \$15 workers and SEIU members in Wisconsin plan to engage voters who have been left out of the political process.

BACKGROUND:

Gov. Walker and Republican state lawmakers have waged a string of attacks on workers’ unions in recent years. Over the past eight years, Walker has blocked minimum wage increases, killed Wisconsin’s century-old wage boards, and busted the very unions that fight for working people, all while giving corporations major tax handouts.

Because of the low wage economy Gov. Walker designed, working families are forced to work multiple jobs just to afford the basic cost of living. Two-thirds of all jobs in Wisconsin and three-fourths of new jobs pay less than \$20. Today, 44 percent of Wisconsin jobs pay less than \$15 an hour.

In September, Wisconsin workers in the Fight for \$15 announced they are joining forces with the Service Employees International Union on a massive voter engagement drive aimed at unseating Gov. Walker and electing candidates who support workers demanding a union. Thus, volunteering 40 hours of their time in an unprecedented effort to engage voters in the state who have been left out of the political process.

By engaging voters via door-to-door canvassing, digital and radio advertising and mail, SEIU and the Fight for \$15 intend to show that those who have given up on the political process will reengage if politicians speak to issues that improve the lives of working Americans. Alongside the voter engagement drive, dietary aides, nurses’ assistants, transporters and others who work in Wisconsin’s booming hospital sector announced last year they are joining the Fight for \$15.

In Milwaukee and cities across the Midwest, hospitals are at the center of the economy the way factories were for previous generations. Each of the city's three largest private employers are health systems: Aurora Health Care (26,462 employees), Ascension Wisconsin (12,000 employees) and Froedtert Health (10,913 employees). While many hospital service workers in Milwaukee are paid too little to support themselves or their families, the city's hospital industry made a combined \$584 million in profits in 2015 according to the most recent data from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services.