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Walker says he's learned lesson from collective bargaining fight



File photo

PEWAUKEE -- An animated and defiant Gov. Scott Walker, in his first public appearance since his recall election became official, conceded he'd learned a hard lesson about acting first and explaining later regarding the collective bargaining measures he introduced last February.

"If I'd spent more time making the case in January and February, I bet taxpayers would have said, 'Governor, you have to fix this,' " he said Saturday. "Instead, I just went out and fixed it and explained later. I admit I learned a lesson from that and I'm going to spend a whole lot more time explaining things in the future."

"But if I've got to be wrong on something, I'd rather be wrong on fixing something then talking about something I didn't fix in the first place," Walker said to applause from Waukesha County Republicans attending the party's annual Lincoln Reagan Dinner Saturday evening at the Country Springs Hotel.

But Walker insisted the upcoming recall is not about collective bargaining.

"At any other time and any other circumstances, (our actions) would be almost a slam-dunk for re-election," said Walker. "We made our promises, we delivered on them, we made our state better, we're headed in the right direction. And yet on June 5, I'll be the only the third governor in American history to face a recall election. Why is that?"

Walker said his administration decided that in addition to asking public employees to contribute more toward benefits, "that we should give the good, decent hard-working public servants of our state, the nearly 300,000 people who work in our schools and our cities and towns and our state governments -- those great people who work hard for us every

day -- we should give them the freedom of choice, the freedom to choose whether or not they want to be in a public employee union and no longer be forced to do this. That's the heart of this, that's what it's all about."

"That's why they bused and shipped and flew in all those people from out of state," said Walker. "That's why tens of millions of dollars was spent last summer against Alberta (Darling) and the others in recall elections and why they're going to spend tens of millions of dollars more against me and Rebecca (Kleefisch) and the four state senators."

"It's not because of collective bargaining, it's not because of pensions or health," Walker said. "It's because they want the money. Not the money for the workers, not the money for the members. They want the money so the special interests from out of state can continue to draw off of that money that will automatically go into their hands to pay for political activities in the future."

Still, Walker vigorously defended his actions last February.

"We couldn't wait a year, or two years. We couldn't wait for a blue-ribbon panel or another discussion. We had to act because the voters sent us to the state Capitol to act and not to talk," he said.

Walker urged the Republicans at the dinner to help him win the recall by contributing to the "three M's" -- message, manpower and money.

"The more we repeat the message, the better," Walker said, urging people to talk him up to others at the grocery store, church and at work. In asking for donations, Walker said, "You know, the media often talks about money as though it only comes from a handful of really wealthy people, but the reality is ... more than three-quarters of my donations came from people who gave me \$50 or less."

-- *By Kay Nolan*

Labels: [2012_recall_elections](#)