News reports say close to 100,000 people turned out in Madison last Saturday for a demonstration on behalf of Wisconsin's public union workers. But that battle seems to be over.

A few days earlier, the Wisconsin Legislature approved Gov. Scott Walker's highly controversial legislation that weakens collective bargaining rights for public employee unions.

The bill also increases workers' contributions to pension plans and health care. It was proposed to help address a $3.6 billion shortfall in the Wisconsin state budget.

That part wasn't controversial. Union officials were willing to go along with workers paying a bigger share of their benefits.

But all the political theater, which has had Wisconsin's capital in turmoil over the last month, was over removing collective bargaining rights for the unions.

The bill was approved last week and signed into law by Gov. Walker. In the aftermath of the month-long, high-volume debate, the big question is what will happen next.

Time will tell. We don't want to guess, and we don't want to take sides in the Battle of Madison. To us, it is just the latest sad example of government by confrontation, when the two parties are inflexible and unable/unwilling to work out a solution.

Wisconsin's Democratic state senators fled Madison for Illinois in hopes of delaying action on the bill. That tactic failed last week; the bill became a law. But it sure isn't a story you would use as a good example to a high school civics class.

We recently read an interesting article by Robert Kleine, Michigan's state treasurer from 2006 to 2010. During his term, Michigan's state budget problems were far worse than Wisconsin's.

During the last decade, Michigan's pension system went from being 100 percent funded to 80 percent—because of the stock market. The state found it had to reduce future liabilities for retiree health care and school employee pensions.

Ex-Gov. Granholm worked with the teachers union on a series of reforms. The union cooperated, in view of the state's fragile finances, and a compromise was worked out that saves Michigan taxpayers.

Ending bargaining rights was never considered.

Of course, Granholm was a Democrat, and the unions tend to support Democrats. But Kleine goes back further in history. In 1997, Republican Gov. John Engler and a GOP legislature made changes to the state pension system. Nobody talked about taking away bargaining rights.

And this year, new Gov. Rick Snyder, a Republican, is asking state employees for $180 million in concessions. "He's a practical businessman," Kleine writes, "who understands that stripping workers of their rights will ruin labor relations in Michigan."

So, he wonders, why did Wisconsin's new governor take such an adversarial stance towards the unions? Did he want to exploit the crisis? If Gov. Walker had done what was done in Michigan, he would have easily had an agreement and saved taxpayer money without raising the wrath of union workers.

Instead, he did what he did, and now we wait for the law of unintended consequences to strike.

"Compromise is not a dirty word," Kleine wrote. "It is an integral part of politics and the collective bargaining process. Anyone who thinks otherwise should not be in politics or in a leadership position."

--Peter Nocerini