



Howey Politics  
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March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011

## **Charlie Sheen and the Statehouse Walkout**

Over the last two weeks, Hoosiers have been treated to two major public meltdowns – each difficult to watch, but also equally difficult to ignore. One involving pop culture icon Charlie Sheen, the other involving Indiana’s own Democratic legislative caucus.

Let me start with two important caveats. First, mental illness is not a joke, and we all hope for the best outcome for Mr. Sheen. Second, I am not equating Mr. Sheen’s mental state with the mental state of the House Democratic Caucus. I do, however, believe that their behavior has been similar.

Day after day, it has been painful to watch images of Charlie Sheen declaring that he is “winning,” while he loses his job, loses his children and loses his dignity. Without knowing him personally, there is no way to really know the truth behind his story. From a distance, it is hard to understand his perspective. Yet somehow, it all seems to make sense to Charlie.

The same sentiment can be said for House Democrats. It is also painful to watch. Though Pat Bauer continues to declare they are “winning,” some legislators may eventually lose their jobs and/or their reputations. From a distance (far away from Urbana, IL), it is difficult to understand their perspective. Yet somehow, it all seems to make sense to them.

Don’t get me wrong. House Democrats have every right to stand up for what they believe. They have every right to challenge the policy proposals put forward by Governor Daniels and Republicans in the Indiana legislature. They have every right to organize their supporters, encourage debate and make sure their points of view are heard.

By the time this column is published, it is likely that organized labor will have staged a statehouse rally bringing thousands (maybe tens of thousands) of protestors to the Statehouse to declare their opposition to proposed labor reforms. No matter how large the rally, one simple fact remains: House Democrats are ignoring their constitutional obligations and acting outside the boundaries of the law.

It is difficult to see what they hope to gain from their prolonged absence.

Originally, they walked out to protest consideration of a right to work bill. But, that bill was shelved for the session before most House Democratic legislators bought their first Illini sweatshirt.

Next, statehouse Democrats demanded they would not return to business unless Republicans agreed to have eleven labor and education bills taken off the table for consideration through the rest of this session.

Surely, House Democrats never believed these demands would be taken seriously. If they were to prevail, the House would fall into almost permanent gridlock. In effect, any group of 34 legislators would have the power to tell the rest of the body what agenda items were appropriate for consideration in the chamber. That is not what our state's founding fathers intended. And, equally important, it is not how the chamber has conducted business throughout our state's history.

Yet, day after day, House Democrats put on their best Charlie Sheen smiles and declare that their conduct is A-OK. Nothing unusual going on here. Just doing our job and standing up for the people. "Winning!"

It is a remarkable sight.

Sadly, the end does not appear near. House Republicans and House Democrats seem equally convinced of their respective moral authority and political standing.

To paraphrase Abe Lincoln, though they might both be wrong, they cannot both be right. History will eventually declare a victor.

Whatever the outcome, my sincere hope is that the biggest losers in this mess are not the citizens of Indiana. Our state does not have time to waste. Our kids deserve better.