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**Unions blast gov over yanked raises; 'fundamental assault on worker's rights'**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD-Labor strife marred "Governor's Day" at the Illinois State Fair on Wednesday as the state's largest public employee unions teed off on Gov. Pat Quinn for his "fundamental assault on worker's rights."

That story line, rooted in a series of pay raises Quinn yanked last month for about 30,000 state workers, dominated the Democratic Party's annual pep rally at the Illinois State Fairgrounds, which boasted a crowd of several hundred party supporters.

The day's political events also were overshadowed by the appearance of President Barack Obama about two hours away in Atkinson.

The chairman of the Democratic Party of Illinois, House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago), was noticeably absent. Usually a fixture at the Democratic events at the State Fair, he opted uncharacteristically to skip the rally and the Obama event to "spend some time with members of his family out of state," Madigan spokesman Steve Brown told the Chicago Sun-Times.

Brown would not divulge the whereabouts of the party boss or say anything beyond the stock statement about Madigan's apparent summer vacation.

That left Quinn as the chief host at the event, where he touted his record as governor, praised Obama and got in his licks on the evolving GOP presidential field. But he was thrust into the uncomfortable position of being picketed by one of the core constituencies that helped elect him in 2010: organized labor.

"With each passing day the governor leaves a more bitter taste in the mouths of public employees," said Roberta Lynch, deputy director of AFSCME Council 31, the largest public employees union in the state and one of nine unions to present a united front against Quinn at Wednesday's Democratic Party festivities.

Union protesters manned several entrances to the fairgrounds, holding up signs that read, "Gov. Quinn Keep Your Word" and "Collective Bargaining is the American Way."

The unions are furious with Quinn for his move to nix scheduled pay increases for state workers and to sign off on legislation that makes pensions for new teachers and government employees less generous.

Tim Drea, secretary-treasurer for the Illinois State AFL-CIO, referred to Quinn's actions as a "fundamental assault on worker's rights'' and "a flat-out assault on the bargaining process itself.''

But the governor defended his actions, saying the state Legislature tied his hands on the pay increases.

"Working people are behind me. I know that every day,'' Quinn said. "Working people around Illinois understand if the Legislature doesn't appropriate money for pay raises for any people, they don't get pay raises. There is no money to pay these pay raises.''

On July 1, Quinn said he was going to renege on a series of pay raises totaling 5.25 percent by Feb. 1. Some of the raises had been deferred from previous years, which the unions said they had approved to help the state with its finances.

Quinn is now challenging an arbitrator's ruling siding with the unions, while AFSCME has sued the Quinn administration in federal court.