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By IKE MGBATOGU

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COLUMBUS – So much for running over folks who refuse to get on board with his conservative agenda as well as the “my way or the highway” posture he brought to state government.

Now, Republican Governor John Kasich wants a parley.

After the fierce partisan brawl over Senate Bill 5 that bifurcated state government into reproachful camps and spurred boisterous rallies and angry town hall clambakes across the state; after locking SB 5 protesters out of the statehouse; after refusing to meet with unions and other stakeholders to discuss the bill; after declining repeated efforts by Democratic lawmakers to offer input when the bill was being crafted; and after swaggering into office with palpable disregard for the spirit of bipartisanship and compromise, Kasich is now looking for a chance to sit down with foes of SB 5 to talk things over.

That’s a titanic shift, to say the very least.

SB 5, lest you forget, is the same bill Kasich furiously championed and signed into law faster than you can say “break the backs” of teacher unions. His GOP controlled legislature studded with his apostolic minions rubber-stamped it and Kasich signed the bill into law on March 31.

Now, all of a sudden, the hard-charging and truculent governor who is known for his steely resolve to hold his ground on core issues important to him, is walking it all back with a dovetailing spirit and seeking to negotiate a compromise deal. He officially sent a letter to We Are Ohio, the group formed to coordinate effort against SB 5, pitching his new found spirit of compromise.

He, alongside Senate President Tom Niehaus and House Speaker William Batchelder held a news conference last week requesting to meet with union leaders at his office, Friday at 10 a.m.

“We are standing here saying to people, bring your grievances to us. We will look at them,” said Kasich. “Why would people say I’m not going to talk? It doesn’t mean that because you talk you reach agreement. Just because you talk doesn’t mean you work it all out.”

It certainly doesn’t. And he vowed to soldier on in support of SB 5 if his compromise overtures are ignored.

From all harbingers, they will be ignored. But why exactly is Kasich swooning for compromise now, months after he signed SB 5 into law. Ohio Democratic Party Chairman Chris Redfern expressed the opinion that “he must have seen the latest poll results by Quinnipiac, showing that voters want SB 5 repealed by 56 to 32 percent, summing up to a comfortable 24 point margin.

But Kasich’s spokesman Rob Nichols explained that the poll numbers favoring the repeal of SB 5 has nothing to do with the governor’s overtures, arguing that the governor only wants to avoid “a very ugly, expensive campaign.”

And of course, he is doing it all for the Ohio public.

“But I think the public would like us to talk. So we’ll see where this all goes,” said Kasich.

It will probably go nowhere as foes of SB 5 are having none of it. They had an immediate answer for Kasich’s 11th hour overtures.

First ‘repeal the law” and then we can talk.

“These politicians who passed Senate Bill 5 have the ability to come back and repeal the law,” said Melissa Fazekas, spokeswoman for We Are Ohio. “And that is what they should do, repeal the entire law. Or they can join us and vote no in November on Issue 2.”

Fazekas lampooned the governor’s compromise overtures as comical, laden with the hypocrisy of seeking dialogue when the bill he signed into law stands opposed to negotiation.

“I think it’s funny to now be standing here and talking about coming to the table when this entire bill takes away their rights to do so,” she said.

Repealing the law, she said, “would be the starting point” for any compromise.

Ohio House Democratic leader Armond Budish agreed.

“I’m pleased that Governor Kasich and Republican legislative leaders recognize that this is a flawed bill but, asking for a compromise without taking the first concrete step to repeal this bill is disingenuous,” said Budish. “Given the very limited time frame, I’m concerned that their request to meet is more of a publicity stunt than a sincere effort to reach common-ground.”

Dale Butland, spokesman for the Columbus-based progressive group Innovation Ohio, took the same view.

“I think that it is a clumsy attempt to paint union workers as uncompromising and intransigent, but I think Ohioans are smarter than that,” said Butland. “They know that a governor who calls police officers ‘idiots’ and promises to ‘break the back’ of teachers isn’t interested in compromise.”

Echoing the same sentiment, State Representative Tracy Heard called it a “false flag of truce.”

“If the GOP was serious about working together at this late stage, they will convene the legislature next week, repeal SB 5 and start the process with a clean slate and everyone at the table,” she said. “Anything else is simply media theatrics.”

The President of Cleveland Police Union Stephen Loomis called Kasich’s compromise acrobatics “hypocritical.”

“We asked for them to sit down to have these discussions while the bill was still going through the legislature and were summarily dismissed by Governor Kasich and the House and Senate leadership,” recalled Loomis.

He reiterated the same theme: “Repeal the bill in its entirety and we’d be happy to sit down with you. There is absolutely no trust. Once bitten, twice shy. Talk is cheap.”

SB 5 dismantled Ohio’s collective bargaining laws that protect 350,000 public sector employees in the state, stripping them of their collective bargaining rights, including the right to strike against government.

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