



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March, 3 2015

Contact: Rep. Josh Zepnick

Rep. Zepnick Testimony: Right To Work

Chairman Jacque and members of the Assembly Committee on Labor:

On behalf of thousands of active and retired union workers in the Ninth Assembly District on Milwaukee's South Side, as well as the rest of Wisconsin, I want to add my voice to oppose the cynical and poorly worded "right to work" legislation.

The evidence is overwhelming. This kind of anti-worker policy is designed to do several things: weaken an employee's rights on the job, lower wages and reduce benefits for union and non-union workers alike (even the Heritage Foundation admitted as much this morning), and create barriers for the free speech rights of workers who want to participate in the political process.

Under current Federal law, no one can be forced to join a union.

That bears repeating: No one can be forced to join a union.

No one can force a worker who is in a unionized shop, to participate in political activities. That includes campaign donations to elected officials. None of your money will go to that Zero Zip Zilch. You do not want to give to a candidate for public office? No problem. You can keep your money, it's voluntary. Just like, it's voluntary for you to choose where you work, as Republican Senator Jerry Petrowski pointed out smartly last week in his No vote on the Senate Floor.

Nobody forces anyone to work at a job which has a union contract. In fact, even if you do not join the union, you still get the benefits of the union contract: higher wages, health care and pension benefits, right to file a grievance, right to protect yourself from unsafe or illegal working conditions.

What you do need to do and what this lousy bill accomplishes is pay the bills for negotiating a contract and enforcing it. For example, the union hires staff to communicate with workers about job conditions hires mediators/lawyers to sit down and negotiate with the employer's lawyers and accountants, paying for these and other expenses over an amount of time that could last six months or more at the bargaining table.

That's real money. The only logical solution is to spread those costs to all workers who gain from the contracts benefits. In most cases, this is a proportionally small dollar amount and is minimal when you take into account the increased wages or benefits that you as a worker have no power to negotiate on your own. If you think, walking into your boss's office and begging for a few more dollars is somehow more of an option. Historically, being covered under a union contract where you have power in numbers grants the ability to better leverage your prosperity and security are directly tied to strength of union representation at the bargaining table. For the service sector and lower wage industries, it could mean the difference between making minimum wage vs. a family supporting wage. Worse, it can mean the difference between life and death: workplace safety, job security, employer intimidation, the examples go on and on.

Various economic estimates have been floated around about the benefit to Wisconsin workers, even those who do not belong to a union or are in a workplace that has no union contract whatsoever. That's because of competition in the labor market. We like competition in America right? Capitalism, freedom, the American ideal.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
JOSH ZEPNICK
WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

Well, when say for example, several large metal fabrication manufacturers, or road builders, or papermaking industries have union contracts on site, it raises the wages and benefits of other workers in non-union shops. Why? Because those workers could either: shift to the union shop for better pay/benefits, or link with them and organize their own union at their workplace.

That economic pressure more than anything is what builds and maintains a middle class. The other option, which frankly is a serious threat and risk today, is the working class stuck in neutral or reverse, while the upper middle class and ownership elite get to hit the gas pedal and collect all the benefits of a successful company.

Make no mistake, those companies are successful for multiple reasons: smart capital investments, trained workforce, and the day in day out loyalty and productivity of the men and women who show up for work each shift and do their best. It's what makes me proud of Milwaukee and so many other Wisconsin communities: our strong work ethic and taking pride in the results of our blood sweat and tears. What is interesting is that, given current laws prohibiting anyone from being forced to join a union, here in Wisconsin the vast majority who are eligible to join and covered by a union contract make the choice to join the union.

Based on 2014 data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are 327,000 workers covered by a union contract. Of that number, 306,000 joined the union. That's 94%. In other words, only 6% of people who get the benefit of a union contract decide to not join the union.

Wisconsin not only does not need this legislation, the more you look at the economic impact and damage to our fiscal bottom line in state and local government, who would want this to happen unless you believe in going backwards financially.

Assume that for every union workers or person covered by union contract, there is one matching worker who is not in a union but has an identical job or industry sector. Evidence, not estimates, but real world examples from states that pushed this legislation through, shows an average DECLINE of about \$4,000 per worker in wages and benefits. That is, again, true whether you are in the union or not, covered by contract or not.

As Professor Cowdhury from Marquette testified, this bill would take \$3.89 billion a year out of the economy. Of course, should those dollars flow upward to management or owners, it's redistribution from the workforce to the wealthy worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

This does not even cover the loss to state and local government revenues, or accounting for spin off businesses that pay less or go out of business as they cannot make ends meet. This legislation is damaging, wrong-headed, and quite frankly the wrong direction for Wisconsin to head in.

I urge you to vote no.

Thank you for your time!

Josh Zepnick
State Representative
9th Assembly District

- 00 -