

Right-To-Work harms NH workers

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One of the things we admire most about the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is the cooperative working relationship between union workers and management, which both groups say is essential to achieving the yard's nationally recognized standard of excellence.

This is the ideal, workers and managers being accountable to one another and striving together toward a common goal.

We have historically opposed so-called Right-To-Work legislation, which would make it harder for unions to negotiate for best health and safety practices, as well as livable wages and benefits.

Right-To-Work is one of those Orwellian turns of phrase that sounds like a good thing but is actually an assault on New Hampshire's working men and women. One RTW bill has already passed the state Senate and a similar House bill had a committee hearing Wednesday, where it was resoundingly rejected. As the bills now head to the full House for a vote, we once again stand with our state's firefighters, police officers, teachers, nurses and broad array of unionized private sector workers in opposition to this union busting legislation.

New Hampshire has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. Businesses have repeatedly said their challenge is finding enough qualified workers to fill thousands of jobs that are now vacant. It's fine for the governor and legislative leaders to say they want to make New Hampshire business friendly, but part of that has to include being worker friendly. Right-to-Work creates a hostile work environment and will diminish efforts to attract desperately needed workers to the state.

Nobody in New Hampshire can be forced to join a union. That's the law.

However, because federal law requires unions to represent all workers covered by a contract, unions and employers negotiate agency fees which non-union workers pay to cover the cost of collective bargaining that sets their wages, benefits, work rules and health and safety protections.

Employers agree to these agency fees because it allows them to negotiate with a single entity instead of individual employees and reduces conflict between those who are paying their fair share and those who are freeloading.

New Hampshire's proposed Right-To-Work legislation would give employees the option of receiving all the benefits of collective bargaining without paying for them.

As one man testified in the House yesterday, this would be like joining your local chamber of commerce and accepting the services it provides and then simply deciding you'd rather not pay. That wouldn't fly at the local chamber and it shouldn't fly in unionized workplaces either.

American unions came into existence as a response to dangerous working conditions and the exploitation of workers. In states that have been fooled into passing Right-To-Work legislation, job fatalities are higher, wages are lower, health insurance enrollment is lower and investment in public education decreases, according to the federal Bureau of Labor statistics.

In the Live Free or Die state, the Legislature should stay out of private contracts between businesses and their workers. In the public sector, the contracts include final approval by voters or their elected representatives, an additional layer of accountability.

Frankly, when our lives are on the line we want our first responders to be adequately staffed and equipped and we want them to have a seat at the table when that level of adequacy is decided. We want our teachers to be held to high standards but also to have some protections from the ever changing political winds. We want our manufacturers to have safe working conditions and livable wages.

So-called Right-to-Work continues to be wrong for New Hampshire.