

Recent Press on House Bill 1507: Ending Payroll Deduction

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Don't be fooled by union trick

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“Attacking a straw man” is an old debate technique used by people bereft of a solid argument.

The trick is to reconstruct a point of view in a way that makes it vulnerable to attack.

This technique was on public display in the state Capitol Tuesday, where union activists gathered to protest “paycheck protection” legislation. They argued the measure is driven by big-money conservative groups and, if passed into law, would cripple organized labor.

That’s a misrepresentation, of course. The measure, sponsored by state Rep. Bryan Cutler, R-Lancaster, would only apply to public unions — unions that represent public school teachers, municipal workers and the like. It would not affect any other unions and so could not possibly cripple organized labor.

The reason the legislation targets “public” unions is because they are the only unions whose dues are withheld from workers’ paychecks by the employer and deposited directly into union treasuries. And so the mission of the legislation is twofold: save taxpayers the cost of performing this administrative function by outlawing it; and save workers the cost of funding an organization whose political exploits they might not agree with.

“Their agenda and political ideals are counter to what I believe, and it’s a kick in the teeth every time my dues are withdrawn from my hard-earned paycheck and handed off to some organization that I would never contribute to of my own free will,” says teacher Rob Brough, of the Elwood City School District near Pittsburgh.

It’s no secret teachers and other public employee unions are among the state’s most prolific political contributors. And the folks they help get elected to office are then beholden to the unions, which lobby against most anything that would inconvenience their members — regardless of the impact on the quality of education or other public services. What’s more, since the dues are a sure thing, union leaders don’t have to worry about explaining their activities to members or seeking their support, either philosophically or financially.

Because the funding is automatic and assured, members really get no voice. Who cares what they have to say or even what they think if you don’t have to worry about losing their financial support.

Instead of arguing the merits of fair-minded legislation that simply would give taxpayers some relief and union members a voice, the unions beat up on a straw man. For the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, it’s “wealthy, powerful, out-of-state special interests.” And for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, its shadowy outsiders seeking to do “nuclear damage” to labor unions.

It’s an old trick. Don’t be fooled.

Deducing action on union deductions ban, groups ramp up

Written by [Mary Wilson, Capitol Bureau Chief](#) | Jan 27, 2014 10:26 PM

A rhetorical fight is brewing over whether public employee unions in Pennsylvania should be able to automatically deduct union dues and voluntary political contributions from most workers' pay. A measure banning such deductions, though it hasn't been put on a voting schedule, has become the subject of indignant statements from pro-union and anti-union groups alike.

Its sponsor, Rep. Bryan Cutler (R-Lancaster), assembled supporters of his bill for a press conference in the Capitol Monday. He said the fact that union dues and a voluntary political contribution can be deducted from a public worker's wage is a "glaring ethical problem" for state government.

"Individuals, as taxpayers, would raise the concern of, well, it just doesn't look right. And that, to me, is a problem," Cutler said. He spoke from a stage festooned with campaign ads for President Obama paid for the state's largest teachers union. But Cutler insists the problem is not how unions are spending political contributions, but that automatic deductions make state and local government a "middleman." Nor did Cutler argue that the deductions transfer a sizeable cost to state government, although county commissioners suggested the possibility automatic deductions do create additional work for government workers.

A Republican consultant mused Monday that when other state legislatures have passed similar legislation it has greatly reduced the political money collected by unions. Rick Bloomingdale, Pennsylvania AFL-CIO president, sees the measure in just that light: as an attempt to squash unions' political activity. The union is planning to stage a protest Tuesday of Cutler's bill, and its companion legislation in the Senate, sponsored by Sen. John Eichelberger (R-Blair). Both proposals are still in their respective committees. Gov. Corbett recently voiced his support for the legislation. House State Government Committee Chairman Daryl Metcalfe (R-Butler) said he thinks it could pass his committee right away, but still doesn't have majority support in the full House.

"I think it would probably be close right now, but I think the votes certainly can be there in the House and the Senate," Metcalfe said.

Bill would stop Pennsylvania from collecting union dues from paychecks

Jeff Frantz on January 27, 2014 at 5:41 PM

A **three-page House bill** has started a brawl between Pennsylvania conservatives and unions representing the state's teachers and municipal employees.

At a news conference Monday, Rep. Bryan Cutler, R-Lancaster County, said his proposal to end government deducting union dues from workers paychecks was common sense. Unions use a portion of dues -- about 10 percent -- for political ads and lobbying, and members can make voluntary political contributions deducted from their paychecks. Knowing a portion of the money is political, the state shouldn't touch it, Cutler said.

"I'm not refuting the group's rights to engage in this kind of activity," Cutler said. "What I am questioning is the appropriateness of the government collecting political money." Not surprisingly, the unions see it differently.

"What is this really about?" asked David Broderic, spokesman for the Pennsylvania State Education Association. "I think what this is really about is preventing people from making voluntary payroll deductions and have the effect of silencing the voice of middle-class Pennsylvanians."

On Monday, Cutler was flanked by Republican lawmakers and county commissioners. Some were hidden by enlarged union political ads, paid for with members political donations and a portion of their dues. The ads bashed **Gov. Tom Corbett** and Mitt Romney, and endorsed Barack Obama -- though Cutler also distributed a flyer he said showed unions going after Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, a Democrat. Neither his bill, HB 1507, or the Senate companion has any Democratic co-sponsors.

Still, those backing the legislation stressed that it is about ethics.

"There are people who used to work in this building who are now sitting in prison someplace for mixing political activity with official resources," said Sen. John Eichelberger, R-Blair, who is sponsoring similar legislation.

"It is very, very inappropriate for us to continue an activity, when we know government resources, taxpayer funded, are being used to collect political money. I don't care how they use the political money, that's not the point."

Cutler said the unions should have the capacity to collect money from their members, who presumably agree with the union goals.

"If it does not cost us a significant amount of money, why can't the union assume the cost themselves," Cutler said. "We should not be the middleman or the collection organization on behalf of these organizations."

Cutler's bill would only affect new contracts going forward, meaning if passed, governments would still collect dues under the current contracts. Nothing about the bill, he said, would change the state's collective bargaining agreements or the legal relationship between employees and unions.

Some state or local government employees have to join a union as a provision of taking a job. This bill would not change those regulations, Cutler said. Future contracts would have to include discipline procedures between the state and the union for how employees who do not pay dues are handled, Cutler said.

Lancaster County Commissioner Scott Martin said that given the chance, many organizations would want the government to take over collecting dues or other fees.

"We are picking winners and losers," Martin said. "You think other businesses would like their cost of businesses being covered, and have someone else collect (dues) and not have to send out invoices and things of that nature? To me, it's common sense and evens the playing field."

But Broderic, from the teacher's union, says that ignores the reality. Public employees often choose to use payroll deductions to make contributions to the United Way or other charities. It's convenient for the employee without burdening the employer.

Broderic noted that political donations are voluntary, and union members have the option of not allowing a portion of their dues to be used for political purposes.

The unions see the bill as a political tool, though Cutler said Monday he is not being pushed by outside groups.

The State Employees International Union of Pennsylvania put out statement on behalf of Rita Treager, a union officer and a Registered Nurse at a county nursing home, half an hour after Cutler's press conference ended.

"This is nothing more than a politically-motivated re-election scheme by Governor Corbett to retaliate against nurses, teachers and social workers who are fighting his cuts to schools and services in their communities," Treager said.

In his statement, PSEA President Mike Crossley charged that the bill acts as a de-facto attempt at limiting specific campaign contributions.

"This legislation is blatantly unfair – it applies to teachers, nurses and public safety workers but does not apply to big business interests – insurance companies, big banks and financial companies, all of whom are involved in politics," Crossley said.

The fight is only heating up. The Pennsylvania AFL-CIO will hold a rally protesting the bill Tuesday morning.

Conservative organizations like the Commonwealth Foundation touting its merits since the beginning of the year. Corbett has said he will sign the bill if it becomes law, but Scott Ott, a Lehigh County Commissioner, called on Corbett to go further.

"I would challenge the governor to move beyond this passive position to actively and publicly work to make sure it gets to his desk," Ott said.