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“Right-to-Work” Takes Center Stage

Among the priorities of the leadership in the Missouri Senate for 2011 will be “right-to-work” legislation. This is an issue a growing number of state lawmakers say is overdue.

The history of “right-to-work” goes back to 1935. That was the year that Congress passed the [National Labor Relations Act](#), which gave organized labor the legal ability to fire folks if they refused to join a union. During the 1940s, states began enacting “right-to-work” legislation as a way around the federal mandate of joining unions “or else.” Before the end of the decade, 12 states had “right-to-work” laws.

In 1947, the [Taft-Hartley Act](#) formally recognized states’ rights to ignore the federal provision giving big labor so much power. This led to a situation where organized labor could continue its strong-arming practice, but states could keep saying no to the practice, and it would continue for nearly 20 years.

The 1964 elections proved successful for big labor. At that point, they had more of their own in offices throughout the country and began the process of overriding the provisions of Taft-Hartley. However, their efforts proved fruitless. While a bill to overturn the act narrowly passed the U.S. House in 1965, it never made it out of the U.S. Senate.

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The next attempts were made in the mid-1970s. Coming off mid-term elections following the Watergate scandal, big labor took control of both chambers again. They almost won a victory, but the resulting bill was vetoed by then-President Ford.

During the Carter Administration, a renewed effort to undo Taft-Hartley came out, disguised as union reform. Fortunately, word got out about the underlying goal and the bill went nowhere.

By the mid-1990s, big labor had more allies in the U.S. House and Senate once more, but their renewed efforts were thwarted by last-minute swing votes in the Senate, despite then-President Clinton's vow to sign so-called "pushbutton strike" legislation, which actually would have added to existing law allowing employers to fire those who did not join unions.

It was also during this time that the majorities changed in the U.S. Senate and House. Those who supported "right-to-work" did well in elections, as have all such candidates over the years.

If "right-to-work" is to pass in this state, now is the time to do it. A strong majority of legislators in both Missouri's Senate and House consider this to be top priority legislation in the year to come. Supporters say "right-to-work" cuts red tape and unfair employment practices. If we truly want jobs in Missouri, "right-to-work" is the way to go. I am hopeful efforts are successful that result in more folks working in Missouri, and I look forward to working for you in the upcoming legislative session.

Senator Stouffer serves the counties of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, Macon, Ray, Saline, and a part of Clay.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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