

IBD Editorials

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Putting The Brakes On The Labor Unions' Free Ride On Employee Dues

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Echoing the union party line, the recently termed-out president of the National Education Association, Dennis Van Roekel, insists that all workers in a unionized industry should be required to pay union dues, their so-called "fair share."

Speaking about the nation's 3 million teachers, he says:

"Fair share simply makes sure that all educators share the cost of negotiations for benefits that all educators enjoy, regardless of whether they are association members."

Sounds reasonable, right? But what Van Roekel and other union bosses fail to mention is that the unions demand exclusive bargaining rights for all teachers, so teachers in monopoly bargaining states have no choice but to go along with the union mandate. They are not allowed to negotiate their own contracts or hire a third party to bargain for salary, perks, etc.

There is nothing "fair" about forcing a worker to pay dues to an organization that he or she does not want to belong to. Yet this is the rule in 26 of our 50 states.

But there was an encouraging note in a recent Supreme Court decision. On June 30, the Court ruled in *Harris v. Quinn* that home health-care workers could not be forced to pay "agency fees" to the Service Employees International Union.

The agency fee is the part of union dues that goes toward collective bargaining and related activities. (As per the Court's 1977 *Abood* decision, workers do not have to support the union's political advocacy.)

Justice Samuel Alito added that for public sector workers, all collective bargaining issues are inherently political. This part of the ruling leaves the door open for the court to take the next step and make public employee union membership optional nationwide.

In fact, there is a case waiting in the wings that could lead the court to take that step. *Friedrichs et al v. CTA* is on a path to reach the Supreme Court within a year or two. This litigation has 10

teachers and the Christian Educators Association International — a union alternative — taking on the California Teachers Association.

The plaintiffs' lawyers are challenging California's "agency shop" law, siding with Alito that collective bargaining is by its nature political and that all union dues should be voluntary.

In the meantime, many workers continue to pay forced dues throughout most of the country. But what many in the monopoly bargaining states don't know is that while they must pay the agency fee, they do not have to support the union's political spending, which invariably goes in only one direction — left.

So if you are one of the tens of thousands of apolitical, centrist, libertarian, conservative or independent teachers, hundreds of your dues paying dollars are going every year to lobbying candidates and causes that you don't support.

In fact, according to teacher union watchdog Mike Antonucci, NEA internal polling has found that its members are slightly more conservative (50%) than liberal (43%) in political philosophy. That said, you may even be a liberal who doesn't want a part of your dues used for politics.

That's why California Teachers Empowerment Network is supporting National Employee Freedom Week.

During this time, 70 organizations across 41 states have come together to let union members know about their right to opt out of the portion of their dues that goes to political spending. Or, if members are in one of the 24 right-to-work states, their right to leave the union altogether.

Recent polling conducted by Google Consumer Surveys, in coordination with National Employee Freedom Week, highlights the significance of this campaign: Nearly 29% of union members nationwide responded that they were interested in leaving their union if given the opportunity. A similar poll found that nearly 83% of the American public believes that union members should be able to exercise this right. California Teachers Empowerment Network and National Employee Freedom Week are here to help them do this.

Unfortunately, to keep their free ride of dues running smoothly, unions have made the opt-out process arcane, providing scant information on how to complete it. Again, that's what makes California Teachers Empowerment Network and National Employee Freedom Week's campaign so important:

They provide the necessary resources for those looking to exercise their freedom of choice, while everyone waits for Supreme Court to make such a decision a moot point.

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