

Kasich out of tune with W.Va. GOP on ‘right to work’

By David Gutman



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Ohio Gov. John Kasich, a Republican, said he’s seen no evidence that not being a right-to-work state has kept businesses from locating in Ohio. West Virginia Republicans, under the leadership of Senate President Bill Cole (right) are pushing

for a right-to-work law in the Mountain State, arguing that it will attract businesses.

Surrounded by Republican legislators who are pushing for West Virginia to pass a “right-to-work” law, Ohio’s Republican governor said last week that a similar move was not necessary in his state.

There is no indication that businesses are staying away from Ohio just because it has not passed a right-to-work law, Gov. John Kasich said. “No, we don’t see that in our state, I don’t have any evidence of it,” Kasich said. “Now, if we have major unrest I think it causes a problem, but without major labor unrest, we’re up 300,000, almost 300,000 jobs and I don’t find that to be a big issue in our state.”

Right-to-work laws allow employees in unionized workplaces to opt out of paying union fees, even when they are represented by union-negotiated contracts. Employees, if they choose, are already exempt from joining unions and paying for a union’s political activities.

Republican lawmakers in both houses of the West Virginia Legislature have introduced bills to make West Virginia a right-to-work state.

Hundreds of union members and others showed up at the Capitol in the middle of a snowstorm last week to protest right-to-work and other legislation that the new Republican majorities are pushing in the Legislature.

Backers of the legislation argue both that workers should have the freedom to opt out of paying the fees and that passing the law will help attract companies to locate in West Virginia.

“We want to do what enables the private sector to create jobs and put people back to work,” the Senate bill’s lead sponsor, Majority Leader Mitch Carmichael, R-Jackson, told the Charleston Daily Mail.

Americans for Prosperity, the political advocacy group founded with donations from conservative donors Charles and David Koch, has pushed relentlessly for a right-to-work law in West Virginia. In automated emails to legislators, the group says that the legislation signals to the business community “that our state is a good place to do business.”

Kasich has not found that to be the case in Ohio because, he said, “we have basically labor peace in our state.

“I’ll just give you an example,” he said. Kasich said that when a huge energy construction project was considering coming to Ohio, they met with the state Building and Construction Trades Council, which coordinates local unions, to “assure them that that project would be done on time; it would be done in a manner that everybody would be proud of.”

Kasich is part of a crowded field of Republicans mulling a presidential run. He was in Charleston to push for a balanced federal budget.

West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin, a Democrat, has pretty much the same view as Kasich on right to work.

“The reality is that companies do not cite that as a significant issue when considering whether to invest in West Virginia, and the state continues to see new and expanding businesses locate here,” Chris Stadelman, Tomblin’s spokesman, said. He said that Tomblin does not expect a right-to-work bill to pass this session.

Senate President Bill Cole, R-Mercer, has advocated for right-to-work and was standing next to Kasich when the governor gave his remarks.

“He’s taking the high road,” Cole said. “I’m not out to break a union or to do any of that stuff, I’m just out to try and free up any avenue that brings economic growth to West Virginia.”

Ohio’s Legislature, which is also controlled by Republicans, has considered right-to-work legislation in recent years, but it has never come close to passing.

“But what works in Ohio may,” Cole paused. “We’re the same but we’re different.”

There are 24 right-to-work states in the U.S., including every state in the deep South. Among West Virginia’s border states, only Virginia is right to work.

“We need prosperity and we need to put people to work, if ultimately right to work aids that then I’m completely behind it,” Cole said. “Michigan passed it, I mean it’s at least something that people believe is a way to go forward.”

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