

Senate committee passes bill repealing prevailing wage over labor's objections

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By Hoppy Kercheval in News | February 03, 2015 at 10:02PM



CHARLESTON, W.Va. — A state Senate committee has passed legislation eliminating prevailing wage in West Virginia. The Senate Government Organization Committee room was packed and overflowing into the hallway Tuesday as lawmakers debated SB 361.

Labor organizations rallied dozens of union construction workers and a handful of contractors to show support for retaining prevailing wage. However, some of those at the meeting were contractors who

want to see the law repealed.

The committee held two separate sessions on the bill, passing it during the second meeting 8-5 along party lines. The bill now goes to the floor.

Under the state's prevailing wage law, the state Division of Labor sets the hourly pay scale for public construction projects. Labor leaders say the wages reflect market rates and that prevailing wage helps level the playing field for contractors, helping them to compete with larger out-of-state companies.

However, opponents argue that the prevailing wages are artificially high, driving up the cost of public projects and costing taxpayers more money.

There were contractors are both sides of the issue at Tuesday's committee meeting. Greg J.F. Allen, president of J.F. Allen Company and Alcon Truonon, spoke in favor of eliminating prev:

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"I don't think the construction industry should be singled out in having a mandated wage when the market will determine what the appropriate prevailing wage ought to be," Hadjis said in an interview with Metronews.

However, John Strickland, president of MCS Construction in Charleston, said the current prevailing wage law enables him to hire better workers for his firm's projects, including the current construction of the cancer center at CAMC.

"I believe in my heart that I would not be able to do this job without the caliber of employees that I get under the prevailing wage," Strickland told Metronews

Affiliated Construction Trades West Virginia director Steve White says he hopes to strike a compromise with the Republican leadership that will keep prevailing wage, but tighten up some of the provisions.

Committee Chairman Craig Blair (R-Berkeley) has been a long time opponent of prevailing wage.



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