

The hard work begins” following right to work passage

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. — While supporters of West Virginia’s right to work legislation are looking forward to new opportunities to grow the state’s economy, opponents say they’re disappointed with how the debate over the bill was carried out.

“Not only would they vote to pass right to work, but it’s the manner in which some of the people like Senator (Robert) Karnes (R-Upshur,11) and others attacked workers,” said Ken Hall, General Secretary Treasurer of the Teamsters Union of South Charleston. “It’s not something that our members are going to forget.”

On Friday, West Virginia became the 26th state to pass a right to work bill following an override vote from both the Senate and House of Delegates as a result of Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin’s veto.

The Senate overrode the veto on a 18-16 party line vote while the House voted 54-43 to do the same.

According to the measure called the West Virginia Workplace Freedom Act, a person is not required to become or remain a member of a labor organization, pay any fees to that organization or pay any charity or third party in lieu of those payments that is equivalent to dues or charges required of members of a labor organization.

Hall was a guest on Monday’s MetroNews “Talkline.” He said one of the biggest upsets was that supporters of the bill were dishonest about labor unions.

“Anything that I’ve said about right to work or in opposition of it, I’ve tried to make it based on facts and I’ve said that from the very first day,” he said. “What concerns me is they outright lies that we’re told here and repeated.”

But supporters, like Steve Roberts, president of the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce, are moving past the heated debates and planning ahead in hopes to gain momentum with what the legislation can do for West Virginia.

“We do have hard work to do,” said Roberts who was also a “Talkline” guest. “We have a new tool to use, but we still have to have a plan to go get these companies that are looking for good places to expand and, goodness, West Virginia is a great place to expand.”

The plan would focus on economic development in the state, he said.

“What I’m talking about is not a planned economy. I’m talking about a plan for outreach to the companies that have an opportunity to expand and will expand in West Virginia if we tell them

what we have to offer,” Roberts said.

The law takes effect July 1, but Hall said it will be a defining moment in West Virginia politics come the General Election.

“My state of mind has changed,” he said. “I’ve sort of switched from right to work is wrong to we’ll remember in November.”