

# 'Pondering?'

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Legislators are pondering two bills that proponents say will help the business climate of West Virginia and that opponents say will be the ruination of what businesses the state has left.

Those bills concern the right to work — which means a union shop could not require its employees to belong to a union, or to pay union dues and fees — and abolishment of the state's prevailing wage law. In government contracting, a prevailing wage is defined as the hourly wage, usual benefits and overtime, paid to the majority of workers, laborers and mechanics within a particular area.

And perhaps we go too far in classifying what is happening at the state Capitol as “pondering.” Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives the simple definition of ponder as “to think about or consider (something) carefully.”

We don't think that is what is happening in Charleston.

We don't think that the legislative leadership is carefully considering the thoughts and wishes of constituents, experts or anyone with an opinion other than their own.

On Right to Work, Secretary of Revenue Keith Burdette told the Judiciary Committee that in his negotiations with companies interested in West Virginia, none has said right to work was a factor in their choice. He called right to work a “gimmick,” for recruitment that guarantees “absolutely nothing.”

In response, Senate Majority Leader Mitch Carmichael said the state has nothing to lose by trying something different.

Ken Hall, general secretary-treasurer of the Teamsters Union, said Mississippi — often compared with West Virginia — has had a Right to Work law for more than 55 years, but has not seen the growth the leadership believes will come to West Virginia.

Still Judiciary Chair Charles Trump said, “I'm still convinced Workplace Freedom will be a positive step forward,” he said.

Republicans appear to be in a hurry to pass the bills, so that if Gov. Tomblin vetoes them, they will have time remaining in the session to override it.

Senate President Bill Cole said he doesn't see the real reason for controversy. “We're looking for solutions, we're looking for ways to put people to work in West Virginia.”

We wonder why he thinks results will be different here than they have been in other states.

It is the same with prevailing wage. At a public hearing Friday, it wasn't workers who were asking legislators to keep the prevailing wage so that they could keep employees. It was business owners.

West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy's Sean O'Leary has extensively studied prevailing wage issues. He said studies that use "rigorous statistical analysis" all show repealing prevailing wage doesn't save money, and construction costs here are actually lower than in non-prevailing wage states like Ohio, Virginia and North Carolina.

Yet this bill, too, is on a fast track that seems to leave little room for meaningful discussion.

Republicans' battle-cry has been that Democrats held the reins for 80 years and look where the state landed. They want to try new things. That's all well and good. Change can be good. But change just for the sake of change isn't good — especially when it's made without full consideration of all of the outcomes.

We would advise our legislative leaders to slow down and just listen to what they are being told.

We also ask rank-and-file members not to blindly follow the leaders just because they are the leaders. Seek the counsel of your constituents and find out if these are laws they really believe will help West Virginia move forward. If the answer is yes, by all means, vote your conscience.

Looking before leaping is a cliché, but it's sound advice.