

Public weighs in on Right to Work bill

by Melissa Toothman STAFF WRITER Feb 15, 2016
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CLARKSBURG — After House and Senate lawmakers voted to override Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin's veto of the Right-to-Work bill, it is set to become law on July 1, making West Virginia the 26th Right-to-Work state, according to The Associated Press.

The bill prevents companies with unions from requiring employees, as a condition of their employment, to pay union dues. However, unions are still required to represent every worker.

Although some House Republicans voted against overriding the veto, members of the GOP generally think the bill will promote business growth, while Democrats argue that the bill has no clear benefit and undermines unions.

When asking for opinions from members of the public, many chose not to respond, citing their wishes not to have their answers made public. However, those who did answer tended to either take a neutral stance on the matter or speak against the bill.

"Not sure which side of the argument I'm on — for or against — but I know now that it is done," said Caesar Goodman of Philippi. "We will find out how it works in this state."

Bob Gawthrop of Grafton, a former union worker, said it's up to the younger generation to decide how they feel about the bill.

"I can see it both ways," Gawthrop said. "I can go either way. ... I can do without it, but there are some things that I don't care for. If a guy comes to work drunk everyday, they shouldn't have to get the union to get him back to work. ... I would say the unions are never going to be as tough as they used to be. ... If you're a good worker and everything, they'll give you a decent wage, I'd say."

Some felt the bill could have negative consequences and were decidedly against it.

"I think it stinks," said Robert Whipkey of Clarksburg. "I don't like it... (It'll) cut out the unions."

One of the potential consequences of the law deals with employee wages, according to some people.

"They're going to make their wages what they want," said Thurm Curze of Elkins. "You can't progress yourself."

There were other people who didn't like the fact that lawmakers chose to override the bill.

“I don’t think it should be,” Greg Mullenex of Elkins said. “I don’t think much about it, but there isn’t anything I can do. I worked in road construction for years, and that would have hurt my pay.”

James Gorby of Stonewood said he’s also against the measure because of its potential consequences to unions and workers.

“It brings wages down,” Gorby said. “It takes away from unions that keep the middle class going. You can’t grow wages. You can’t get benefits. They’ll have you working for whatever they tell you they want you to work for. Then they’ll fire you if you make a mistake or something. They’ll get rid of you without any protection.

“The coal miners’ union was a good example of that,” Gorby added. “We need unions. The old miners who came here were mistreated and paid low wages, and the union was able to get them out of poverty.”

Gorby said he has worked 33 years in a union job and it’s been a tremendous help with wages, benefits and insurance. He said prices have gone up while wages have remained stagnant. He said if he were still in the labor force, he wouldn’t be able to afford what he needed.

“Back in ’92, I bought a new car for \$14,000,” he said. “Now the same car is \$28,000. Wages have stayed flat. There’s no way I could afford to pay \$28,000 for a car. There’s about 26 or 27 right-to-work states now, and because they say they create jobs, they create low-paying jobs. These people probably have to get on welfare.

“Once they’re on welfare and have to draw welfare, that costs the government,” Gorby added. “... We’re becoming a second-rate country in wages because they’ve stayed flat. To compete with these other countries, the politicians need to do something about these jobs going overseas and do something that would hinder them from going overseas. ... If you get on welfare and the government has to pay for food stamps, then the national debt goes up because they’ll have to spend more money. It’s a shame people have to start working for whatever peanuts they can get.”

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