



Across country, public employees fight collective bargaining foes

As spring turns into summer, the fight for and against public employees' rights continues. While political fallout from the anti-collective bargaining legislation enacted over the last several months is driving recall efforts in Wisconsin and Michigan, workers in the Transportation Security Administration are taking advantage of their first opportunity to vote for union representation.

In Wisconsin, activists on both sides of the political spectrum have mobilized to recall as many state senators as they can for the part they played in the fight over Act 10—the so-called “budget repair bill.” Petitions against 16 state senators (eight Democrats and eight Republicans) were sought, but activists were able to get enough signatures to file against only nine (three Democrats and six Republicans). The petitions were turned over to the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board (GAB), where they will undergo review before being ratified so a recall election can move forward.

While the activists supporting public employees outnumber and have been more successful in their petition drives than their opponents, a group of anti-unionists has gathered enough signatures to try to unseat three Democrats it claims acted irresponsibly by fleeing the state and blocking the legislation from being enacted.

Each petition must contain signatures from 25 percent of the votes cast for the office being recalled. Both the state Republicans and Democrats have filed appeals against the petitions, so it is unknown how many will ultimately go forward. The GAB has declared that all elections will occur on July 12, unless there is more than one candidate from each party for the election, in which case July 12 will serve as a primary, with the final election held on Aug. 9.

The recall efforts could prove to be of historic proportions, as there have only been 20 recall efforts of state representatives since 1913 in the 18 states that allow them. Of those 20, only 13 have been successful, with no more than two from any state being recalled at one time.

However, these recalls might be just the appetizer for the main course—the recall of Gov. Scott Walker. The law is structured to give elected officials a one-year grace period before a recall can move forward, so recall petitions against Walker cannot be circulated until early November, and cannot be filed until Jan. 3, 2012. Activists have vowed to make that a reality.

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder doesn't have that kind of time, as activists in his state have had the wording on their recall petition approved by an election commission, allowing them to start collecting signatures. Many in Michigan are upset over a bill that passed the legislature in March that allows Snyder to appoint “emergency financial managers” with the power to terminate collective-bargaining agreements.

Critics have argued that the bill is unconstitutional, as the U.S. Constitution forbids state laws “impairing the Obligation of Contracts,” and could do serious damage to Michigan by discouraging investors from lending money to a state that refuses to honor its contractual commitments. But Snyder has said that he needs this unconstitutional and dangerous authority to make sure Michigan is capable of paying its bills, even as he proposed a massive \$1.73 billion business tax cut.

Michigan Citizens United, the group driving the recall effort, has vowed to amass 1.1 million signatures by Aug. 5 to get the question on the statewide ballot in November.

TSA election

On the federal level, the officers in the Transportation Security Administration had their first opportunity to vote for union representation in March and April, and though the American Federation of Government Employees won the most votes, it did not get a majority, meaning that it will compete in a runoff election with the National Treasury Employees Union.

The vote was a long time coming for TSA workers. When the TSA was formed by President Bush in 2001, they were excluded from regulations giving federal employees the right to union protections. The law gave the TSA administrator the authority to decide whether collective bargaining should be allowed. In February, President Obama's administrator, John Pistole, stated that he would at long last allow collective bargaining.

“During a time when this country's federal workers and their unions are under attack, it speaks volumes that Transportation Security officers nationwide stood strong and voted to have a union,” AFGE President John Gage said after the vote. “By voting for a voice at work, TSOs have demonstrated that when American workers are given a choice—without intensive intimidation campaigns—they want a union.” ☒

Top: On May 15, Florida State Association President Matty Rose (l) and Northeast Florida Branch 53's Dennis Bonilla joined hundreds of activists in Daytona Beach protesting against Gov. Scott's public worker policies.

Above: Philadelphia Branch 157 member Clay Smith (c) and Morrisville, PA Branch 2572 carrier Andrea Goodwin joined a rally against the anti-union budget proposed in Pennsylvania.