

# Column: Bill to prohibit maintenance of union dues passes

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The pace quickened on Capitol Hill this week as state lawmakers debated a wide variety of issues pending before the 2011 legislative session, including a bill to strengthen Tennessee's status as a Right to Work state. Meanwhile, the Senate Education Committee heard several reports updating lawmakers on educational efforts in the state, including the final report on the effectiveness of Tennessee's pre-kindergarten program.



Sen. Jim Summerville

The legislation that strengthens Tennessee's status as a Right to Work state was approved by the Senate Commerce, Labor and Agriculture Committee this week. Senate Bill 1031 amends the state's Right to Work law to prohibit maintenance of membership clauses in collective bargaining agreements.

Tennessee is one of 22 Right to Work states across the nation which prohibit agreements between labor unions and employers making membership or payment of union dues or fees a condition of employment, either before or after hiring.

Recent studies from the Cato Institute and the National Institute for Labor Relations Research show Right-to-Work states enjoy higher job growth and more cost-of-living-adjusted disposable income for workers. The studies reveal that not only is private-sector job growth faster in Right to Work states, but also that Right to Work states' lead in job growth is consistent over time.

Tennessee's Right to Work law, however, currently does not ban maintenance of membership clauses within collective bargaining agreements. These are clauses, which sometimes are included in collective bargaining agreements which mandate that, once an employee joins a union, the employee cannot leave the union until the collective bargaining agreement expires. This means that for the duration of the collective bargaining agreement, the employee must continue to pay dues even if the employee no longer wants to be in the union or is dissatisfied with the union. The bill would not apply retroactively. It would only apply to bargaining agreements enacted after the legislation is becomes effective.