



## California Bill Pushing Greater Union Power Is 'Roadblock to Reform,' Critics Say

By Joshua Rhett Miller

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A pending California bill that would allow unions to directly appoint half of city and county civil service commissions is a misguided piece of legislation that would allow "government insiders to set public policy," critics told FoxNews.com.

The bill, AB 455, passed California's state Senate by a vote of 23-14 on Tuesday and now awaits the signature of Gov. Jerry Brown. If signed into law, AB 455 would allow unions to appoint half of the members of bodies that resolve disputes regarding wages, hours and other terms of conditions of employment. If multiple bargaining units are represented by different recognized employee organizations, the union representing the "largest number of employees would designate commission members pursuant to that provision," according to the bill.

"I think this is absurd," said Chris Edwards, editor of Cato Institute's Downsizing the Federal Government website. "We should not have collective bargaining or monopoly unions in the public sector at all. Why? Because that gives a special place in our democracy to a group of government insiders to set public policy. We should not have the reins of government to special interest groups like labor unions."

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If signed into law, Edwards said the bill would lead to reduced efficiency in public services and would not necessarily be a boon to average workers represented by the unions.

"The heads of labor unions are all about power and they will try to increase their power over state government policy any way they can," said Edwards, who noted that California has the highest-paid municipal workers in the country. "They need to make huge reforms to public sector pay. This would seem to be another roadblock to reform."

The bill's author, Assemblywoman Nora Campos, was unable to comment due to a scheduling conflict, a spokeswoman told FoxNews.com. Several calls seeking comment from the bill's sponsor -- the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), San Jose's largest union -- were not returned on Wednesday. Inquiries to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) -- San Francisco's largest union -- were referred to AFSCME.

Daniel DiSalvo, assistant professor of political science at the City College of New York, said Brown is now confronted with a "tough political choice" given his past support of big labor.

"Let's say it passed and you have half of this board appointed in effect by the unions, the result is in any dispute -- say a worker files a grievance, or someone is trying to fire someone -- this would make it very difficult, make the process much slower and add a huge layer of bureaucracy," DiSalvo said. "It would probably create a more bureaucratic and difficult process."

DiSalvo continued, "If you comprise a board of 50 percent of people nominated by the union and 50 percent nominated by the agency managers, it's pretty easy for the unions -- as long as they maintain unity -- to get a majority. It certainly seems to suggest it would skew things in favor of the union. They'd have close to a basic majority to begin with."

A spokesman at Brown's office said on Wednesday that the governor does not comment on pending legislation until he decides to take action.

San Jose Councilmember Pierluigi Oliverio said the bill sponsored by Campos -- herself a former San Jose councilmember -- simply isn't needed.

"There are no benefits," he told FoxNews.com. "This is purely payback to an interest group. I don't think most constituents know about it or understand all of the details."

Despite those claims, the likelihood of the bill becoming law is "probably pretty high," Oliverio said.

"I wouldn't be surprised," he said. "This really takes away local control of cities to conduct themselves when we have a governor who says he wants to give more local control."

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