

Balloon Juice

Union Links and Anti-Union Links

by Kay

Wanted to point out a couple of articles that outline the conservative assault on private sector unions. Three reliable Republican mouthpieces: [Fox News](#), the WSJ and CATO. [The WSJ article is particularly helpful because it lists the targeted states.](#)

Along with requiring public employees to contribute more to pensions and health care coverage, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker wants to put his state in the right-to-work column. His proposals have touched off an epic battle in Madison between pro-labor Democrats and Republicans who say they're just trying to balance the budget. And now that battle is spreading.

A long-run solution requires a change in structure, for example, by restricting collective bargaining for public employees and, to go further, by introducing a right-to-work law. There is evidence that right-to-work laws—or, more broadly, the pro-business policies offered by right-to-work states—matter for economic growth. In research published in 2000, economist Thomas Holmes of the University of Minnesota compared counties close to the border between states with and without right-to-work laws (thereby holding constant an array of factors related to geography and climate). He found that the cumulative growth of employment in manufacturing (the traditional area of union strength prior to the rise of public-employee unions) in the right-to-work states was 26 percentage points greater than that in the non-right-to-work states.

In general, the most likely arenas are states in which the governor and both houses of the state legislature are Republican (often because of the 2010 elections), and in which substantial rights for collective bargaining by public employees currently exist. This group includes Indiana, which has recently been as active as Wisconsin on labor issues; ironically, Indiana enacted a right-to-work law in 1957 but repealed it in 1965. Otherwise, my tentative list includes Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maine, Florida, Tennessee, Nebraska (with a nominally nonpartisan legislature), Kansas, Idaho, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Right-to-work advocates say states with those laws on the books are more conducive to economic growth. A recent report in the libertarian Cato Institute's *Cato Journal* written by Ohio University economics Prof. Richard Vedder found that about 4.7 million Americans moved to right-to-work states between 2000 and 2008. The article said pay is higher in non-right-to-work states—but, employing an economic model, Vedder estimated that right-to-work states saw economic growth increase 23 percent faster between 1977 and 2007 than non-right-to-work states. Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell, in an interview with Fox News on Monday, directly attributed Virginia's ease in balancing its budget to the fact that it is a right-to-work state.

If you'd like to see what private sector unions are doing to support public sector unions in Wisconsin, Ohio and Indiana, I suggest you go right to the source, as we're not hearing any voices of labor leaders in media. I thought it was amusing that advocates had to mount a targeted campaign to push for a *single labor leader* to appear and speak on a cable news show, to counter the parade of conservative governors and pundits.

[Steelworkers. United Auto Workers. Teamsters. Service Employees International Union members.](#)

The SEIU site is particularly informative on local events, and will have a live feed from the Ohio statehouse today.

Too, you can always look at photos from the events and see which unions and locals are represented.

I followed the events at the Wisconsin statehouse Sunday night on Talking Points Memo, on my phone. It was completely fascinating reading about the negotiations between union members and police agencies, in real time. I'm grateful that TPM covered it.

Finally, how great is it that conservatives and media invented yet another caricature in the long series of reliable scapegoat-groups, this one labeled "union workers" and pushed Americans to line up and to take a swing, and (so far, anyway) the public seem to be resisting picking up the proffered (rhetorical) stick?