

What Is Right To Work?

In 1947, the United States Congress amended the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) to allow states to make a union shop illegal in their state. Michigan law currently says that all workers must equally pay dues (in order to obtain the benefits of the union contract).

Michigan law allows a security clause in the union contract, a provision that all workers covered by that agreement must financially support the union. It establishes that if you receive the advantages of the union wage and negotiated health care and retirement benefits, then you should firmly and equally support the union administration through dues or a service fee. Remember, management and unions together must agree on this. Right To Work laws make such an agreement illegal.

Michigan has never seen the need for right to work laws and continues to stick to the original intent of the NLRA.

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave the best description of such laws: "Right-to-work. . . provides no 'rights' and no 'works.' . . . Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining. . ."

Governor Jennifer Granholm has said, "Those who keep pushing right to work assume we're in this old mind-set of being the cheapest place to do business, but you know what? In a global economy, no place in this country is going to be the cheapest place to do business." Governor Granholm went on to say that there was "a lot of deception and misunderstanding" on the subject.

Bad for Michigan, Bad for Working Families

There are many reasons why right to work is bad for Michigan and its working families:

- Michigan workers have higher annual average pay than workers in right to work states - \$7,600 higher!
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the rate of workplace deaths is 41 percent higher in states with right to work, where unions can't speak up on behalf of workers!
- The percentage of people younger than 65 with employment-based health insurance is lower in right to work states (62.1 percent) than in Michigan (70 percent).
- More workers go without health care in right to work states (15.4 percent) than in Michigan (11.6 percent).
- Right to work states have a poverty rate of 12.5 percent, compared with 10.2 percent in other states. Also, infant mortality rates are 16 percent higher in right to work states.
- Michigan has a tradition of good labor-management relations. MSU, U of M and MSU all have schools that train management and labor leaders.

Who's Behind It?

Right to work is supported by a nationwide conservative organization named National Right to Work with ties to America's extreme right wing, including:

- The Michigan and U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the largest coalition of business in the state and country.
- Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Payer Reform and the anti-union Alliance for Worker Freedom. He is a close advisor to George W. Bush and the extreme right wing of the Republican Party.
- Former Congressman Tom DeLay.
- Moral Majority and its former leader, the late Jerry Falwell.
- Wal-Mart.
- For-Profit Unionbusters - professional consultants or lawyers who profit from their ability to manipulate labor law, advising employers on how to thwart union organizing drives or how to get rid of workers' unions.
- Holland Coors of the Coors beer dynasty. We all know the Coors family has a long history of hating unions.
- Michigan Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop. Bishop is the one holding up Governor Granholm's budget and is calling for wage cuts for union workers and the privatization of union jobs.
- Republican Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, who said: "State lawmakers need to privatize some government services and consider right to work laws to fix systematic deficits to make the state more business friendly."

Myths and Facts

Myth: Right to Work will help Michigan's manufacturing crisis.

Fact: The idea that TRW gives states a competitive edge is untrue, especially in today's global economy. Compare North Carolina, a RTW state with the smallest percentage of unionization in the country, with Michigan. Between 1994 and 2005, North Carolina's manufacturing job loss, both in absolute numbers and the decline in the overall share of manufacturing employment, was far greater than that of Michigan. Oklahoma, the only state to go right to work in 46 years, has now lost over 22,000 manufacturing jobs after RTW took effect.

Myth: Right to Work will help Michigan's economy.

Fact: RTW will hurt consumer spending in Michigan. Because union membership means higher wages, higher unionization within a community means consumers have more to spend. That's good for Michigan's economy and local companies, especially those in retail and service.

Myth: Workers support Right to Work.

Fact: Only a few union workers might want RTW. Some members might be mad they lost a grievance or are otherwise unhappy with their union. The large majority of union members know that a unified organization is stronger and will produce a better deal for workers.

Right to Work Hurts All Working Families

Workers in states with right to work laws have a consistently lower quality of life than in states without right to work. Lower wages, higher poverty and less access to healthcare are all found in RTW states.

Non-Right to Work States vs. Right to Work States

Economic Indicator	Non-Right to Work States	Right to Work States
Average Annual Wages	\$37,732	\$31,832
Average Weekly Wages	\$62	\$549
Percentage of population without health insurance	13.4 percent	16.1 percent
State Poverty Rates	10.2 percent	13.4 percent
Workers Compensation	\$784.64	\$596.48

Unemployment Insurance: The maximum weekly unemployment benefit in 2006 was 18 percent lower in right to work states.

Education: For the 2005-2006 school year, right to work states spent \$2,369 less per pupil and paid their teachers \$8,163 less.

Infant Mortality: In 2000, the infant mortality rates were 17 percent higher in right to work states than in non-right to work states.

Equity and Free Riders

Under a state's right to work law, workers do not have to join the union or pay dues, but are *entitled to the full benefits of the union contract*.

Unions in these states are required by law to defend non-dues paying members involved in a dispute or charged with misconduct at work, but even those employees do not have to contribute dues. Such a provision *does not give workers more rights*, but weakens unions and their ability to bargain for improved benefits and working conditions.

The union, by law, must represent all workers equally. It's an arrangement where everybody pays their fair share. If not, a worker who pays union dues would work next to a worker who is a free rider and pays no dues. How would you like that? They pay no dues but have equal rights to vacation time and to promotions from the whole contract. Both receive the same pay and benefits from a bargained contract, but one gets them for free.

Free riders, those who don't pay their fair share, can even sue the union if they feel they are not represented correctly.