NATIONAL RIGHT TO WORK NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 68, NUMBER 02 www.nrtwc.org February 2022

Public Opposition Stalls Biden Power Grab

Union-Label Senate Majority Leader Vows to Try Again This Year

As 2021 drew to a close, Americans were increasingly concerned about skyrocketing inflation, a nationwide employed workforce still smaller by millions than it had been at the beginning of 2020, and shortages of auto parts, building materials, vital medicines, and other necessities.

Meanwhile, Big Labor President Joe Biden and his allies in Washington, D.C., were preoccupied with pushing through the U.S. Senate a massive, multi-trillion-dollar budget bill that would add inflationary pressure to the economy, discourage job creation, and worsen supply-chain bottlenecks.

But thanks to increasingly loud opposition from a wide array of ordinary citizens around the country, including grassroots Right to Work supporters, union-label Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) was finally forced just before Christmas to delay the power grab.

On December 18, Mr. Schumer sent his chamber home without ever bringing the Biden Build Back Big Labor Bill (H.R.5376) to the floor. A day later, Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), a career politician who votes according to union lobbyists' dictates the vast majority of the time, announced he would not support H.R.5376 in its current form.

Right to Work Committee Has Highlighted Handouts To Union Bosses in H.R.5376

All this unfolded as members of the National Right to Work Committee were flooding the offices of their senators and congressmen with postcards, letters, petitions, emails, texts, and phone calls in opposition to the Build Back Big Labor Bill.

Since blueprint versions of H.R.5376 began emerging last year, Committee officers and staff have documented, in numerous radio interviews aired by stations across the country and in a series of letters to Capitol Hill lawmakers, an array of ways in which this scheme would hand new privileges to union bosses.

For example, H.R.5376 spends $1 billion promoting apprenticeships. But rather than make all industry-recognized apprenticeships eligible for the funding, H.R.5376 restricts eligibility to so-called "registered apprenticeship programs," which are typically controlled by Big Labor.

Another H.R.5376 provision would authorize National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) bureaucrats to impose, for the first time, punitive fines of up to $100,000 for every alleged "unfair labor practice." Individual managers as well as companies would be subject to these punitive fines.

Moreover, if H.R.5376 becomes law, Biden-appointed NLRB General Secretary Jennifer Abruzzo is openly planning to impose these stiff penalties on employers simply because they insist their employees get a chance to vote in a secret-ballot election before they are subjected to union monopoly control!

Big Labor Politicians Plot to Undermine State Right to Work Laws

Right to Work President Mark Mix commented:

"For more than half a century, federal

Credit: Gage Skidmore/Wikimedia Commons

President Biden's Build Back Big Labor Bill could soon impose stiff penalties on employers simply because they insist their employees get a secret-ballot vote before they are corralled into a union.

See **Battle** *page 2*

Battle Is Far From Over

Continued from page 1

policy has generally allowed an employer who is presented by union organizers with signed cards extracted from half or more of his or her employees to insist, without further comment, that a secret-ballot election be held before the union is granted monopoly-bargaining power.

"But General Counsel Abruzzo would rewrite federal law to make it virtually impossible for employers to refuse to acquiesce to 'card checks' unless they had absolute proof of forged signatures or other flat-out fraud.

"She would leave them with no ability to protect their employees against Big Labor bullying, intimidation and harassment per se. And H.R.5376 would hand her the cudgel she needs to sway employers to surrender their employees' personal freedom without a fight."

Perhaps the most outrageous H.R.5376 provisions of all rewrite federal tax policy.

One such provision establishes a novel deduction enabling workers who fork over dues to a union to get a substantial share of their money back from the IRS.

Currently, an estimated 400,000 unionized private-sector employees in Right to Work states are exercising their legal right to keep getting paid to do their jobs without bankrolling a union they don't wish to support.

Unfortunately, federal labor-law provisions that empower Big Labor bosses to act as the monopoly-bargaining agents of employees who don't want to join already put them under powerful compulsion to do so anyway. By sharply cutting the dues-money cost of acquiescing to Big Labor pressure to join the union, H.R.5376 aims to weaken further employees' determination to resist the pressure.

Right to Work Supporters Apply Grassroots Pressure

Another H.R.5376 provision creates a new $12,500 tax credit for the purchase of electric vehicles, but the credit is fully applied to vehicles made by American employees only if they are subject to the monopoly-bargaining control of United Auto Workers (UAW) union bosses.

And many of the tax credits for businesses in the bill have Big Labor strings attached. For example, private developers of "clean energy" technologies can only get their subsidies if they submit to federal Davis-Bacon requirements, which increase taxpayer costs by up to 35% and effectively prevent union-free employees from competing for contracts.

Credit: Edward Kimmel/Wikimedia Commons

Unless Right to Work members and other grassroots activists keep turning up the pressure on wavering senators, there is a grave danger Majority Leader Charles Schumer will push through H.R.5376 early this year.

"Throughout the second half of 2021, Committee members kept contacting congressional offices to turn up the pressure on their representatives and senators to vote against the scheme that ultimately became H.R.5376," said Mr. Mix.

"Right to Work leaders, members and supporters were making their opposition to this legislation known well before it even had a bill number.

"Unfortunately, after many wavering Democrat members had their arms twisted by union lobbyists and Speaker Nancy Pelosi [D-Calif.], all but one of the House's 221-member Democrat caucus voted to adopt H.R.5376 on November 19.

"That was enough for the power grab to make it through the chamber, even though not a single Republican representative voted for it."

Joe Manchin Has Vowed to Back Key Forced-Unionism Provisions of H.R.5376

Mr. Mix continued: "But the Senate, which is evenly divided between 50 Republicans and 50 Democrat caucus members, with ties to be broken by Vice President Kamala Harris, has so far proven to be a tougher nut for Big Labor to crack.

"It is only thanks to the success of Right to Work members and other concerned citizens in persuading all 50 Republican senators, including several who often vote with Big Labor, to oppose H.R.5376 that Joe Manchin is now in a position to insist this scheme be changed before he lets it be adopted.

"Of course, Mr. Manchin has supported compulsory unionism throughout his political career and is already on the record in support of several of the key pro-Big Labor provisions in H.R.5376. There is almost no chance that the fundamental anti-worker, anti-taxpayer nature of this legislation is going to change.

"And Majority Leader Schumer has already made it clear he plans to continue pushing for passage of a rejiggered Build Back Big Labor Bill early this year.

"That's why it is absolutely critical that Right to Work advocates in state after state continue to turn up the heat on Inside-the-D.C. Beltway politicians.

"The message to lawmakers is plain: A vote for H.R.5376, or anything resembling it, is a vote to push workers into unions against their will and line the pockets of union bosses with taxpayer money. Any politician who supports this smorgasbord of special-interest plums for Big Labor should expect to face an intense backlash from Right to Work supporters."

Will Big Labor Extinguish Fire Volunteers?

State Monopoly-Bargaining Statutes Endanger American Communities

Volunteer fire departments have been a revered American tradition since Ben Franklin founded one in 1736. But state laws that hand monopoly-bargaining privileges to union bosses like Ed Kelly threaten all such departments.

For decades, officers of International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF/AFL-CIO) union subsidiaries have used threats, fines and expulsions to deter the union rank and file from serving their own communities as fire volunteers when they aren't on the job.

The constitution of the IAFF itself has long prohibited career firefighters who are union members from volunteering.

Moreover, IAFF bylaws codified just last year actually include "volunteering" in a "list of serious charges such as embezzlement, assault on an officer, or membership in a terrorist organization," as former Connecticut IAFF official Frank Ricci has publicly pointed out.

National Right to Work Committee President Mark Mix commented:

"The very idea that a career fireman might donate his time by helping a child who is having an asthma attack or helping rescue a neighbor's home or business from being destroyed outrages union bigwigs like IAFF President Ed Kelly.

"Under the IAFF union's bylaws, the penalty for firefighters who defy Big Labor bosses by volunteering in their field of expertise could be a 'reprimand, fine, suspension from office, or suspension or expulsion from membership.'

"And since volunteer fire departments typically require the active involvement of at least a couple of skilled professional firefighters to function effectively, the IAFF hierarchy's rabid hostility puts their very existence in jeopardy."

Fortunately, the efforts of Mr. Kelly and his predecessors to wipe out volunteer firefighting have not succeeded.

According to a 2020 report prepared by the National Volunteer Fire Council, almost two-thirds of the nearly 30,000 fire departments in the U.S. are still all-volunteer.

So-Called 'Model Contract' Bars Even Union Non-members From Volunteer Firefighting

All-volunteer departments are overwhelmingly located in communities with fewer than 10,000 residents and not a lot of tax revenue at their disposal. Small communities collectively save tens of billions of dollars every year thanks to time donated by firefighters who are willing to volunteer.

Enraged by the unwillingness of paid firefighters and volunteer fire departments to bow to their wishes, IAFF bosses are intensifying their war against "vollies" in states where Big Labor-allied politicians have handed them monopoly-bargaining power over employees.

In more than 30 states, union monopoly bargaining over firefighters' terms and conditions of employment is authorized and promoted by state law. And in the remaining states, there are many localities with monopoly-bargaining ordinances.

In all such jurisdictions, the IAFF hierarchy instructs officers of its subsidiaries to wield their monopoly power to negotiate contract provisions that prohibit all paid firemen, union members and non-members alike, from volunteering.

In fact, the so-called "Model Contract Language Manual" prepared by IAFF lawyers and posted on the union's website includes recommended contract language that bars every career firefighter from volunteering regardless of union membership.

"Wherever this 'model' language is codified into a contract, it will have a potentially disastrous impact," said Mr. Mix. "It will greatly magnify the risk that someone will call the fire department to ask for help, and the call will go unanswered."

This scenario should be especially disturbing to residents of Virginia.

Though an estimated 70% of firefighters in the Old Dominion are volunteers, there is a shortage of them, and it has already hit a critical level, according to the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association.

Matters could get much worse soon. In 2020, Virginia's 27-year-old statutory prohibition on union monopoly bargaining in local government agencies, including fire departments, was overturned by Big Labor politicians in Richmond.

2020 Law Makes Old Dominion IAFF Target

Last spring, the new state law signed by then-Gov. Ralph Northam that gives union boss-friendly local politicians the green light to establish monopoly-bargaining regimes took effect.

"Unless incoming pro-Right to Work Gov. Glenn Youngkin and his General Assembly allies can act with alacrity to repeal the 2020 monopoly-bargaining law and reinstate the ban, IAFF union bosses may soon be exploiting their new special privileges to kill Virginia's volunteer fire departments," said Mr. Mix.

"Of course, revoking this monopoly-bargaining scheme won't be easy, especially since Big Labor Democrat politicians continue to control the Virginia Senate.

"But Mr. Youngkin owes it to the vast numbers of Virginians who supported him largely because of his pledges to stand up to Big Labor to at least try.

"If he does, Right to Work members in Virginia will do all we feasibly can to help him."

Embezzlement Plagues Union Offices Around U.S.

Right to Work Bill Would Help Workers Hold Big Labor Accountable

No employee who is subject to union monopoly bargaining anywhere in America, and who is also bankrolling the union, should feel comfortable in assuming his or her dues money is in good hands.

To understand why, all you have to do is spend a few minutes perusing the "Criminal Enforcement" section of the U.S. Labor Department's Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) web site.

According to records that were still incomplete when this Newsletter edition went to press in early January, the OLMS reported a total of 292 separate criminal-enforcement actions last year.

These reports address indictments, charges, convictions, and other criminal-enforcement actions related to alleged and proven illegal activity by union officials and their hired hands.

Since 2018, roughly a dozen UAW union bosses have pleaded guilty to taking bribes from vendors and/or misappropriating union treasury money. And last November, yet another UAW kingpin was charged with embezzlement.

Victims Are Nurses, Engineers, Bricklayers, Teachers, Film And TV Artists, Musicians . . .

Here are just a few examples from late last year of appalling union-boss crimes against the rank-and-file documented by the OLMS:

* * * On December 2, Verdine Day, the former treasurer of Michigan-based Local 344 of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF/AFL-CIO), pleaded guilty in federal court to embezzling $220,044 from dues-paying firemen and other union members. According to the Detroit *News,* the fraud perpetrated by Ms. Day lasted from 2015 until her retirement in 2019. She spent the loot on flights, cruises, hotels, and restaurant dinners, as well as to cover her personal cellphone and cable TV bills.

* * * On November 15, a federal jury found that Pennsylvania union kingpin John Dougherty, commonly referred to as "Johnny Doc," had for years furnished bribes to Philadelphia Councilman Bobby Henon. In exchange for a salary, benefits, and tens of thousands of dollars' worth of sporting event tickets, Mr. Henon abused the powers of his office to serve as Johnny Doc's political errand boy. Johnny Doc was found guilty on eight counts of conspiracy and honest services fraud. Mr. Henon was found guilty on 10 counts of conspiracy, honest services fraud, and bribery.

* * * On October 14, Roderick Bennett, the former chief of staff for the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA), was sentenced to 24 months in prison and 12 months of supervised probation, and ordered to pay $155,638 in restitution, after pleading guilty to embezzlement from a labor organization. Prior to his sentencing, Mr. Bennett had furnished to law enforcement and the public LIUNA credit-card statements apparently showing it is common practice for the union's officers and staff to cover personal expenses, including lavish steak-house dinners and international travel, with this card.

National Right to Work Committee Vice President Greg Mourad commented:

"In 2017, after reporting for several months on a then relatively new scandal involving the misappropriation of millions of dollars meant for worker training by crooked union bosses and auto-company executives, the Detroit *Free Press* decided to investigate just how widespread Big Labor corruption is.

"The following January, the *Free Press* shared with its readers its finding that embezzlement occurs at union offices across the U.S.

"The *Free Press* expose, authored by award-winning veteran journalist Phoebe Wall Howard, noted that union theft happens 'in big cities and tiny towns in all corners of the country.'

"The victims," Mr. Mourad continued, "include 'nurses, aerospace engineers, firefighters, teachers, film and TV artists, air traffic controllers, musicians, bus inspectors, bakery workers, roofers, postal workers, machinists, ironworkers, steelworkers, dairy workers, plasterers, train operators, plumbers, stagehands, engineers, heat insulators, missile range workers, and bricklayers.'"

Union Boss Allegedly Drained Roughly $2 Million From UAW Union Local's Bank Account

"Over the past four years," added Mr. Mourad, "the evidence that a number of national unions and Organized Labor generally have an entrenched culture of corruption has continued to mount."

Unfortunately, even the 292 criminal-enforcement actions currently reported on the OLMS website for 2021 alone do not furnish a comprehensive view of just how widespread investigations, arrests, guilty pleas and convictions of local and national union bosses are.

The OLMS website does not currently mention, for example, the November 10, 2021 surrender to federal authorities of

See **Culture** *page 5*

Big Labor Culture of Corruption

Continued from page 4

Tim Edmunds, formerly the financial secretary/treasurer of Warren, Mich.-based Local 412 of the United Auto Workers (UAW/AFL-CIO) union.

It has long been clear that the UAW is a crooked union.

Just since 2018, roughly a dozen national UAW bosses, including two former presidents and two former vice presidents, have pleaded guilty to taking bribes from vendors and/or stealing union treasury money to buy vacation time at private villas, expensive restaurant meals, cigars, liquor, and much more.

Mr. Edmunds, the latest UAW officer to be charged in connection with an ongoing federal investigation of the union, is accused of "systematically draining" Local 412's bank account of roughly $2 million.

Monopolistic Unionism Is the Real Problem

As the Detroit *News* reported on November 16, 2021, Mr. Edmunds allegedly spent the loot to bankroll "high-end shopping sprees at Louis Vuitton, Balenciaga and Apple," as well as to finance "child support payments and Greektown Casino gambling binges."

Prosecutors also say Mr. Edmunds spent large sums of money to buy five vehicles in recent years, including "a 2020 Jeep Grand Cherokee Trackhawk that cost $96,419."

The FBI originally tried to arrest Mr. Edmunds at his home in South Lyon, Mich., on November 4, but he allegedly disappeared and evaded capture for nearly a week as a team of 30 federal agents searched for him.

Mr. Mourad commented:

"When honest, hard working Americans read about the escapades of shady union bosses like Tim Edmunds, they may well ask themselves why such individuals opt so frequently to become union officials.

"Government-authorized monopoly bargaining, which makes private-sector employees in all 50 states almost completely dependent on union officials for their job security and pay increases, is one of the two principal reasons why unscrupulous people are especially drawn to careers as Big Labor bosses."

National Right to Work Act Would Bar Forced Union Dues and Fees Nationwide

"Compulsory union dues and fees as an employment condition are the second key source of union corruption," continued Mr. Mourad.

"Federal labor law promotes both monopoly bargaining and compulsory financial support for Big Labor.

"Without them, corruption would probably be no more common in labor unions than it is in other kinds of private organizations.

"It is the National Right to Work Committee's longstanding objective to eliminate both of the pillars of monopolistic unionism.

"And strategically, Right to Work officers and members recognize that revocation of the provisions in federal law that authorize the firing of employees for refusal to bankroll an unwanted union will pave the way for elimination of Big Labor bosses' monopoly-bargaining privileges."

Credit: Charles Mostoller, Metro File Photo

Pennsylvania union bigwig John Dougherty was recently found guilty of bribing a city councilman.

This winter, the Committee is fighting to secure roll-call floor votes on S.406 and H.R.1275, otherwise known as the National Right to Work Act.

Once this legislation is enacted, no employees covered by federal labor statutes will face job loss as a consequence of their decision to refuse to pay dues or fees to a union they would never join voluntarily.

"Passage of the National Right to Work Act would strike a powerful blow against Big Labor corruption by empowering the individual employee to cut off all dues payments completely as soon as he or she has reason to suspect union treasury and/or benefit funds aren't being spent properly," explained Mr. Mourad.

"While it is not in itself a total solution, this legislation would go a long way in helping American employees hold Big Labor accountable for how their dues money is spent."

Consider Naming the National Right to Work Committee as a Beneficiary for a Retirement Account!

Continue your legacy of fighting compulsory unionism by naming the National Right to Work Committee as a beneficiary of your IRA, retirement account, or life insurance policy.

Your legacy of support will help keep the fight against compulsory unionism going for future generations.

As a nonprofit, the Committee does not pay income taxes when it sells your assets, so 100% of your gift will go directly to the Committee's legislative activities.

Each and every one of these gifts is a testament to our members' love of individual liberty. Together, their collective strength serves as the bedrock for winning an American future where no worker is forced to pay union dues.

For more information, see "Other Ways to Give" at https://nrtwc.org/donate/other-ways-to-give/ or call Matthew Leen, Vice President of Strategic Programs, at 703-321-9820, or email him at mml@nrtw.org.

Families Fare Better in Right to Work States

Hard Data Show Why Forced Union Dues Should Be Banned Nationwide

As the lead writer on economic matters for the New York *Times*, Binyamin Applebaum is notorious for carrying water for Big Labor and forced unionism.

In a 2019 book and in his columns for the *Times*, Mr. Appelbaum has again and again dismissed out of hand, without offering any plausible explanation why, the longstanding consensus among economists that government-promoted union monopolies foster the misallocation of capital.

Over time, this misallocation lowers compensation for employees as well as revenues and profits for business owners, as economists ranging from Milton Friedman to John Maynard Keynes have understood. Somehow, Mr. Applebaum doesn't get it.

But even he can see that ordinary wage- and salary-earners and their families generally fare worse in the shrinking number of states where forced union dues and fees as a condition of employment are still permitted than in states where the Right to Work is legally protected.

Late last year, Mr. Applebaum teamed up with freelance journalist Johnny Harris to make a 14-minute video looking at the quality of life for ordinary people in the 18 states where Democrat politicians wield the most political power vs. in the rest of the country.

Their conclusion is clear from the video's title: "Blue States, You're the Problem."

Mr. Applebaum and Mr. Harris don't say it, but the fact is that 16 of the 18 "blue" states they castigate for a lack of housing ordinary employees can afford to live in and a lack of opportunities for lower-income workers to climb the economic ladder, among other things, are forced-dues states.

Real Personal Consumption Grew 44% Faster in Right to Work States From 2010-20

Indeed, all of the 10 states where Big Labor extracts forced dues and fees from a higher share of employees than anywhere else -- Hawaii, New York, Rhode Island, Washington, California, Alaska, Connecticut, New Jersey, Oregon and Illinois -- are on the Applebaum-Harris list of "problematic" states.

"There is no doubt Binyamin Applebaum and Johnny Harris are correct that employees and their families generally fare better in Right to Work states like Texas, Florida, North Carolina and Arizona than they do in Big Labor stronghold states," said National Right to Work Committee Vice President Matthew Leen.

Credit: Johnny Harris

Even Big Labor partisan Binyamin Applebaum can see living standards are higher in Right to Work states.

"The new and updated data on personal consumption expenditures [PCE] in the 50 states released by the U.S. Commerce Department last October illustrate the point.

"Faster growth in jobs and income is clearly the key reason why inflation-adjusted expenditures on housing, health care, food, clothing, cars, gas, and other goods and services are rising far more rapidly in Right to Work states than in forced-unionism states.

"The Commerce data issued in the fall of 2021 show that, from 2010 to 2020, real PCE grew by 22.3% in the 22 states that were Right to Work the whole time.

"That's 44% greater real PCE growth than was experienced in the aggregate in the 23 states that still allow forced unionism today."

In addition to being correlated with faster PCE growth, Right to Work is correlated with higher real after-tax incomes.

Committee Members Won't Be Satisfied Until Every Employee Is Protected From Forced Dues

U.S. Census Bureau data, adjusted for interstate cost-of-living differences according to an index calculated by the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center, a state agency, show that the average after-tax household income in the 27 Right to Work states in 2019 was $64,572.

That's roughly $4,300 higher than the forced-dues state average. (This analysis also uses the nonpartisan Tax Foundation as a source.)

"The economic benefits of Right to Work -- and the injustice of forced union dues -- are so obvious one has to wonder how it is that nearly half of the private employees in the U.S. are still vulnerable to being corralled into a union," said Mr. Leen.

"Committee members won't be satisfied until every American employee is protected from forced union dues.

"That's why, this winter, Committee members across the U.S. are mobilizing support for S.406/H.R.1275, the National Right to Work Act.

"This legislation would bar forced union dues nationwide, simply by repealing all the current federal labor-law provisions that deny the individual employee the Right to Work."

NATIONAL RIGHT TO WORK NEWSLETTER

www.nrtwc.org February 2022

Written and Distributed by:

National Right to Work Committee®
8001 Braddock Road
Springfield, Va. 22160
E-mail: Members@NRTW.org

Stanley Greer Newsletter Editor
Greg Mourad Vice President
John Kalb Vice President
Matthew Leen Vice President
Stephen Goodrick Vice President
Mark Mix President

Editorial comments only: stg@nrtw.org

Contact the Membership Department by phoning 1-800-325-RTWC (7892) or (703) 321-9820 if you wish to:

- **Report address changes or corrections**
- **Receive the NEWSLETTER or request, renew, or cancel Committee membership**
- **Obtain more information**

Because of NRTWC's tax-exempt status under IRC Sec. 501 (C)(4) and its state and federal legislative activities, contributions are not tax deductible as charitable contributions (IRC § 170) or as business deductions (IRC § 162(e)(1)).

Big Labor Lies to Teachers About Their Pensions

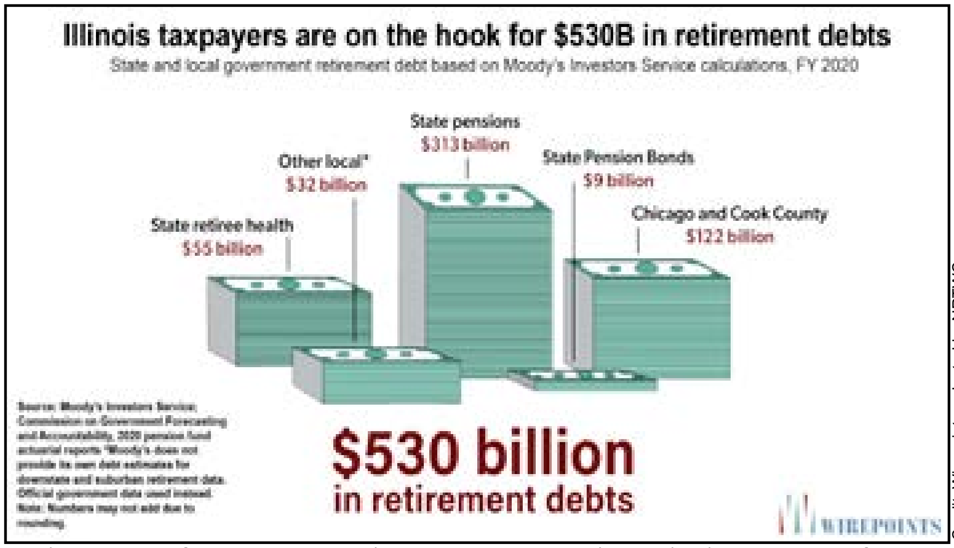
Young Teachers Should Know No Money May Be Left When They Retire

For years now, many of the government retirement funds set up across the U.S. to ensure the pensions of K-12 employees and other public servants are safe have been in serious trouble.

Forced-unionism Illinois is an especially egregious case.

The Prairie State's pension crisis is arguably the worst in the nation. According to the Illinois Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability, the state Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) is only 38.6% funded.

Unfortunately, information supplied to rank-and-file educators by union officials who themselves are largely responsible for this vast pension shortfall does not even acknowledge the very real possibility that the TRS could run out of money before many current teachers retire.



Credit: Wirepoints, adapted by NRTWC

Facing a host of unpayable public debts and a steadily shrinking number of people in their working years, Illinois politicians may soon have no choice but to curtail Big Labor's special privileges.

Big Labor Bosses Benefit, But Schoolkids, Taxpayers, And Most Teachers Get Hurt

"Theoretically, the massive shortfalls in the TRS and other Illinois government pension funds, estimated to add up to a flabbergasting $530 billion, could be fixed by slashing non-pension spending or by hiking taxes," said National Right to Work Committee Vice President John Kalb.

"But more than 25% of state revenue already goes into pensions and retiree health care. And Illinois' aggregate state-local tax burden as a share of income is already higher than in 40 out of the 50 states.

"Working-age Illinoisans, especially those who have children at home, are already fleeing the state in droves because onerous business taxes are suppressing job growth and exorbitant property taxes are making housing unaffordable. And every net taxpayer loss puts Illinois' government pension funds deeper in the hole.

"As a practical matter, shoveling the billions and billions of additional taxpayer dollars into the TRS it would take to make teacher union bosses' pension promises keepable is not a viable option.

"And even if it were possible, it wouldn't make sense to add insult to taxpayers' injury and divert even more education dollars away from the classroom, where it is at least possible to make a positive difference in students' lives, to prop up a retirement system that shortchanges most public educators.

"A 2021 analysis by Bellwether Education Partners ranked Illinois at the bottom of the U.S. for teacher pensions, largely because, as horrifically expensive as the TRS is, it offers meager at best benefits to educators whose teaching careers are shorter than 30 years -- that is, the vast majority of them."

Monopoly-Bargaining Repeal Is Critical Part of Solution In States Like Illinois

While Illinois is in especially bad shape, failing public pensions are the norm in states that have widespread union monopoly-bargaining control over employees in the government sector and lack state Right to Work laws.

A November 2021 survey of Moody's Investors Service retirement debt estimates published by Wirepoints, a Wilmette, Ill.-based nonprofit, highlights the close connection between increased special privileges for government union bosses and greater public retirement debt.

Wirepoints contributors Ted Dabrowski and John Klingner found that nine of the 10 states with the greatest unfunded state pension liabilities per household have labor laws authorizing and promoting union monopoly bargaining over public employees' pay, benefits, and work rules and lack Right to Work laws.

On the other hand, 10 of the 11 states with the lowest state-level pension debts per household have Right to Work laws. And most of the 11 either do not authorize government-sector union monopoly bargaining, sharply limit its scope, or flat-out prohibit it.

"To become fiscally viable, Illinois and a number of other states surely need to reform future accruals for government pension benefits for employees who have already been hired, as well as those who haven't been hired yet, as Wirepoints recommends," said Mr. Kalb.

"But even when the so-called 'pension protection' constitutional provision in Illinois is amended so such reforms can be made, union bosses will still be able to use their monopoly power under state law to block these needed reforms from actually being adopted. Therefore, to save Illinois, it will also be necessary for lawmakers to remove union bosses' monopoly-bargaining power."

With Fiscal Catastrophe Staring Illinois in the Face, Real Reform May Be Possible

Given that Big Labor has dominated Illinois politics for decades, prospects for genuine, dramatic reforms in the state capital may seem slim.

But with fiscal catastrophe already staring Illinois legislators in the face, a significant share of them may soon come to recognize that the time is up for a number of erstwhile sacred cows, including forced union dues and government-sector union monopoly bargaining.

March 2021 Big Labor Bailout Already Flailing

Beltway Didn't Hold Union Dons Accountable; Put Onus on Taxpayers

A year ago next month, Big Labor President Joe Biden signed into law a gargantuan COVID-19 "relief" package featuring a host of provisions that had nothing to do with COVID-19 or its economic impact.

Perhaps the most outrageous component of the so-called "COVID-19 Relief and Response" package was an $86 billion down payment on a long-standing objective of top union bosses in the transportation, construction, grocery, music, and certain other industries.

For years leading up to the enactment of this boondoggle, union kingpins had been trying to come up with a politically acceptable way to foist on taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars in unfunded promises that Big Labor and its designees had made to private-sector employees.

Union-Label Democrats: Hand MEPP's Even More Money Than Congress Authorized

According to the latest available Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC) data, the total underfunding of Big Labor "multi-employer" pension plans (MEPP's) had skyrocketed to $757 billion as of 2018.

More than 95% of the 10.9 million participants in MEPP schemes are in plans that are less than 60% funded, as pension specialist Aharon Friedman pointed out in a November 2021 commentary for the *Hill*.

And the primary reason for rampant underfunding is that MEPP's have wielded their political influence with Big Labor-"friendly" politicians and bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., to get away with basing their pension promises to employees on wildly optimistic hypothetical investment returns.

"The monstrous $1.9 trillion spending bill President Joe Biden signed into law last March 11 featured an $86 billion giveaway to notoriously mismanaged MEPP's like the Teamsters Central States fund," said National Right to Work Committee President Mark Mix.

"And union officials and the businesses who colluded with them for years and years to underfund worker pensions won't ever be required to pay back a dime.

"Worst of all, far from being the 'solution' to the MEPP morass that Joe Biden, Senate Budget Chairman Bernie Sanders [Vermont], and other union-label politicians claimed it would be, this massive bailout has set the stage for even bigger bailouts in the future."

Mr. Mix explained: "$86 billion is a lot of money. But it represents just 11% of the $757 billion MEPP's have promised in excess of what they are able to pay, based on the contributions they are taking in and reasonable expected returns on their investments."

Big Labor politicians lowballed the cost to taxpayers of bailing out MEPP's in several ways.

One way they did this was by excluding many severely underfunded plans that were not in imminent danger of going bust from the bailout.

A second was to pretend that, after pouring taxpayer money into failing MEPP's for decades, Congress would take away the piggy bank and not give them any additional funding after 2051.

Yet another was to assume a high rate of return on investments that MEPP's could not achieve without taking substantial risks with taxpayer money that are impermissible under normal PBGC guidelines.

Last August, Majority Leader Charles Schumer (New York) and other Senate Democrats fired off an angry letter to the PBGC, demanding that even more money be funneled to insolvent MEPP's than the $86 billion Congress had authorized to enable them to stay afloat without taking unacceptable risks!

Legitimate Retiree Rescue Would Have Included Putting Failing Plans in Receivership

"Before it is over, union boss-owned politicians' scheme to bail out MEPP's with taxpayer money will cost hundreds of billions of dollars more than the originally advertised figure of $86 billion," predicted Mr. Mix.

"Since MEPP-covered workers, whether they are voluntary union members or not, are not culpable for the misdeeds of Big Labor pension managers, a federal bailout of MEPP's may have been unavoidable.

"But a legitimate rescue would have incorporated real reforms, like putting failing plans in receivership and ending the pro-union monopoly federal labor policies that are largely culpable for spawning the MEPP debacle.

"Instead, thanks to President Biden and his allies in Congress, American taxpayers are getting the worst of both worlds: an extraordinarily costly bailout, combined with zero reform of how MEPP's operate."

Credit: Jackson Lanier/Wikimedia Commons

Less than 12 months ago, Big Labor D.C. Beltway politicians like Senate Budget Chairman Bernie Sanders (Vermont) transferred $86 billion from taxpayers to Big Labor pension plans and set the stage for future bailouts.