



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 16, 2011

Tenn. Union Legislation Provokes Union Protesters and Arrests

After union protests in Nashville, Tennessee disrupted a state Senate committee hearing on Tuesday, state troopers forcibly removed seven union protesters from the legislative office in the Capitol building.

The demonstration was in protest of legislation being considered by Tennessee lawmakers that would have an impact on state teachers unions. [The Tennessean](#) explained that the legislation overturns a 1978 law that made the Tennessee Education Association the sole negotiator for teachers in two-thirds of the states school districts.



While most other demonstrators present in the hearing room left after half an hour, the remaining seven locked arms in protest to keep from being removed.

The *Associated Press* writes:

The disruption occurred after hundreds of labor supporters gathered for a midday protest near the Capitol to denounce the bill to strip teachers of their collective bargaining rights. The seven arrested were among those who stood up during the hearing and began chants about “union busting” by the Legislature.

Troopers were then forced to remove the individuals one at a time while lawmakers looked on. Several other protesters shouted shame! at the scene echoing the shouts of the Wisconsin union protesters.

Tennessee Highway Patrol Col. Tracy Trott explained that the behavior of the protesters will not be tolerated in the Legislature. We're going to make sure that the Legislature has an opportunity to conduct their business in a safe and secure way. And whatever we have to do to ensure that, we will.

The seven protesters were arrested and now face charges of resisting arrest and disorderly conduct.

According to Tennessee Senate Speaker Ron Ramsey, though the protesters have a right to protest, they went too far in this case. This General Assembly will not be intimidated by nomadic bands of professional agitators on spring break bent on disruption, he declared, adding, We talk through our differences here. Tennessee is not Wisconsin.

Wisconsin witnessed similar, though oftentimes more dramatic, scenes when union protesters swarmed the Capitol building in Madison in an attempt to prevent lawmakers from passing legislation which removes the political clout of union employees.

Tennessee protester Jacob Flowers, seemingly unaware that the Wisconsin law was indeed [passed](#) and a number of Wisconsin protesters had been [arrested](#), contended that the people of Wisconsin showed what can happen when people act in solidarity with one another.



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Tennessee Republican Senator Bill Ketron, who has proposed at least three labor-related bills before the committee, agreed with Ramseys assertions, observing:

Its part of our constitution to have the right to exercise your voice and your opinion. But there are proper places to voice that opinion. It was totally inappropriate to disrupt the business of the state of Tennessee.

Chattanooga resident Tamara Henderson, who witnessed troopers arresting her 25-year old daughter, compared the scene to people in Mississippi and Alabama who were hosed during the civil rights movement. Thats how I felt, she claimed. Any of you guys got kids? You ever seen your child in shackles?

Rodriquez Lobbins was one of a number of protesters who traveled from Memphis to protest the Tennessee legislation. All we want to do is work and have a say at the table to negotiate our wages, terms and conditions of employment, he claimed. Thats all we want to do, and to take that away and say that we cant collectively ban together, thats almost illegal. Thats the way we feel about that.

Protesters contend that the Tennessee legislation is part of a nationally coordinated effort to rally against unions.

The Tennessee School Boards Association sought the bill, which now has the support of the Tennessee Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Family Action Council of Tennessee, the Tennessee Center for Policy Research, and the Tennessee Tax Revolt.

Ben Cunningham, a spokesman for Tennessee Tax Revolt, explains:

This is primarily a political issue, and the teachers union is, first and foremost, a political organization. Their collective bargaining is a special privilege. It allows them to have more power and money to pursue their political agenda.

Photo: State troopers remove pro-union protesters who had disrupted a Senate Commerce Committee meeting in Nashville, Tenn., on March 15, 2011: AP Images



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