



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on January 6, 2012

Indiana House Democrats Boycott Right-to-Work Legislation

The latest skirmish in the war over labor has touched ground in Indiana, where Republican and Democratic state representatives are sparring over whether to adopt a right-to-work law which would prohibit union contracts in private-sector work environments to mandate dues or other fees to a union. The highly contentious squabble provoked Democrats to boycott the Indiana House floor on Wednesday, preventing the Republican majority from conducting business.



Dozens of Indiana Democrats barricaded themselves inside a Statehouse conference room for over three hours Wednesday, which marked the first day of the 2012 legislative session. Behind closed doors, the lawmakers tossed around ideas about how to defeat the controversial labor bill, which they effectively snubbed last year as they fled the state for a five-week boycott.

Indiana State Republicans, who need 67 representatives to be present to fulfill quorum requirements, argued that the right-to-work legislation has been thoroughly examined, and concluded that it would make Indiana a magnet for new businesses and jobs. Republican Representative Jerry Torr (above left), the bills sponsor who has been proposing similar labor bills since 2004 asserted that this legislation is about “fairness and freedom” for workers to decide whether or not they want to affiliate with a union.

Last year Indiana Democrats retreated from the state for weeks refusing Republicans the two-thirds attendance they required to conduct business to thwart action on a series of bills which Democrats deemed harmful to Indiana labor unions. Some Democrats assured Wednesday that they would not leave the state, but neglected to comment on whether they would attend the next House session.

In defending their actions, the Indiana Democrats who hold 40 of the 100 total seats charged that citizens have not been given enough time to apprehend the ramifications of the proposed measure. “The thinking is to make sure anything with the consequences that right-to-work has gets proper vetting and that this doesnt get put on a fast track without discussion,” [asserted](#) Democratic Rep. Kreg Battles.

“Whats the urgency?” [added](#) House Democratic Leader Patrick Bauer, who was instrumental in leading last years boycott. “They [Republicans] are ignoring the public input.”

Despite Wednesday’s truancy of the overwhelming majority of Indiana House Democrats, House Speaker Brian Bosma assured that a boycott will not deter Republicans from continuing to fight for the bill. “We will do our very best to encourage them to do what is right, which is to show up at work and



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do what they were elected to do,” Bosma affirmed. “Democracy is about participating, not going on strike.”

Indiana Republicans expressed their discontent over the boycott, particularly considering it took place on the first day back in session. “I showed up today ready to do meaningful work for the citizens of Indiana and feel frustrated that the Democrats are prohibiting that from happening,” [lamented](#) Republican Jud McMillin.

Republican Tom Knollman echoed McMillin’s sentiments. “I came to session ready to work today and it’s a shame that nothing could be accomplished,” he stated. “With it being a short session, we need to be as productive as possible and work toward bettering our state.”

Bosma said there will be a joint hearing of the House and Senate labor committees on the bill Friday, although the House committee may have its hands tied in voting on the measure. While the House Speaker and other Republicans argue that the proposal underwent a thorough examination during a series of hearings last summer, Bauer claimed that Democratic members will filibuster until the Republicans agree to more hearings.

If Indiana formulates the right-to-work legislation into law, it would be the first state to enact such a measure since Oklahoma in 2001, and the 23rd state overall. A Republican success would be a notable victory for conservatives and business groups across the country, after several other states considered right-to-work legislation last year but none passed it.

Beyond the squabble over union rights, Democrats contend that such laws spur lower wages for workers. In an article often touted by Democratic lawmakers, University of Notre Dame professors Barbara Fick and Marty Wolfson alleged that enacting legislation to attract businesses to a state based on low wages weakens living standards for most workers. “Most people would agree that lowering wages and benefits for Indiana workers is not the best way to support economic development in Indiana,” the authors [cited](#).

However, not only is the analysis on wages by Fick and Wolfson absent any concrete data, it does not address the [nine-percent unemployment rate](#) which Indiana residents continue to endure and which would be tamed if more businesses were lured into the state. Similar to the battles over minimum wage laws, some critics note, jobs should be the number one item on the Indiana legislatures list and right-to-work is an effective starting point.

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