



Unions fighting back against assault on workers' rights

Unions are fighting state by state against actions that would strip away many worker rights and cut essential services. Here's an update, as of press time:

ILLINOIS: The state senate voted to create a new streamlined process to dismiss tenured teachers and set new requirements before teachers are granted tenure. Unlike other states where unions were shut out of the process, the three major education unions in the state helped shape the bipartisan bill.

WISCONSIN: Labor and community activists amassed enough signatures to recall six Republican senators who voted against workers. The recall election is July 12. The recall campaign began after Gov. Scott Walker signed a bill that destroys the state's long tradition of collective bargaining.

INDIANA: Unions continue to protest a new law that restricts collective bargaining rights for teachers. Another law establishes a school voucher program, expands the state's pre-existing tax credit scholarship program and grants a tax deduction for families with children already in private schools. Under the third year of the "school-choice law," any student can get a state-funded voucher for private school tuition, with money coming from public school budgets.

MICHIGAN: Union members — 7,000 strong — protested Gov. Rick Snyder's \$900 million cuts to schools and services and \$1.7 billion tax break for the rich. In Detroit, a governor-appointed Emergency Manager announced he would bid out a third of the district's schools to private operators. He also issued 5,466 layoff notices — one to every school employee. Dozens of schools are scheduled to be closed or privatized in the coming year.

NEW YORK: NYSUT continues to lead the fight for budget fairness. In rallies around the state for middle-class families, your union is advocating that the wealthiest New Yorkers pay their fair share in taxes to fund schools and services. NYSUT is standing against unfair Regents regulations on the teacher evaluation system.

CALIFORNIA: The California Teachers Association held a week of action in May to "stand up and speak out" against the Legislature's failure to protect basic, essential services. The United Teachers of Los Angeles held several events and solidarity rallies after Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa called the union "the biggest obstacle to education reform." The school board issued 4,000 layoff notices the same day. Seven new and existing LA public schools have been given to charter operators, and two others are up for "reconstituting" — firing current staff and forcing them to re-apply for jobs.

IOWA: With Gov. Terry Branstad's support, the Republican-controlled House in May passed a bill limiting bargaining rights. After extensive lobbying by educators, the measure died in the Democrat-controlled Senate.

NEVADA: Labor protestors rally across the state against Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval's call for an end to tenure, salary schedules and extra pay for advanced degrees. He would also lengthen teacher probation periods. Sandoval has proposed massive education budget cuts, including a \$400 million cut for Las Vegas/Clark County schools, the state's largest school district.

OKLAHOMA: Educators protest over the damage a property tax cap proposal would cause to students. The measure, a constitutional amendment, goes to voters in 2012.

TENNESSEE: Calling the effort "a step backwards for Tennessee teachers," the Tennessee Education Association continues to press against a bill that limits unions from negotiating teacher contracts with school boards.

FLORIDA: After protests from active and retired educators, Republican state senators refuse to go along with Gov. Rick Scott's bill to end unions' rights to collect dues from paychecks. Scott's push to end corporate income tax, which would cripple school and public services funding, also ends in failure.

NEW HAMPSHIRE: After union advocacy and testimony by economists, Gov. John Lynch has said he will veto a bill, passed by the state Senate and House, prohibiting contracts that require employees to join a union — a so-called "right-to-work" bill, the first to pass outside the South in 25 years. Republicans have said they will override the governor's veto.

MASSACHUSETTS: As Gov. Deval Patrick urged compromise, thousands of labor activists gathered at the capitol to protest a bill limiting collective bargaining on health care for municipal workers. The bill would allow cities and towns to unilaterally alter or cut health care plans.

NEW JERSEY: The New Jersey Education Association launched a statewide ad campaign and grassroots effort against Gov. Chris Christie's proposed voucher program and cuts to public education. At the same time, Christie supports tax breaks for millionaires.

OHIO: A broad coalition of unions and supporters are working to place a referendum on the November ballot that would overturn a recently enacted law that prevents public employees from negotiating health care and binding arbitration. The coalition vows to collect the 231,000 valid signatures needed by June.

