

United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)

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STATEMENT OF UE NATIONAL OFFICERS ON IOWA'S UNION-BUSTING BILL

Republicans in both houses of the Iowa state legislature introduced a bill aimed at destroying public sector unions and the rights of public employees in that state. The legislation is designed to render collective bargaining meaningless by making it illegal to negotiate most of the subjects now covered by contracts, and to cripple unions financially by eliminating the dues check-off process under which union members voluntarily pay to support their union's activities. UE's national officers are committed to providing whatever resources are needed to help our Iowa members fight this bill and to preserve our fighting union if the bill is passed.

The bill, which Republicans seem determined to ram through in just a few days with almost no debate or public input, is meant to rob 184,000 Iowa public employees of basic labor rights. That includes more than 6,000 Iowa public workers represented by the UE in 17 bargaining units. The pending bill (known as House Study Bill 84 and Senate File 213) attempts to gut the existing state collective bargaining law, Chapter 20 of the Iowa Code. Chapter 20 passed the legislature in 1974 with bipartisan support and was signed into law by Republican Governor Robert Ray. The purpose of the law, as it says in its introduction, is to promote harmonious and cooperative relationships between government and its employees. But the current governor, Terry Branstad, was one of only a handful of Republican members of the legislature who voted against Chapter 20, and he has remained hostile to public employees and their unions throughout his long political career. His dream of crushing organized labor was frustrated because, until the recent election, Republicans did not control both houses of the Iowa legislature. Now that they do, Branstad and his followers have launched a blitzkrieg attack on workers.

Branstad's bill is the most extreme, outrageous attack on collective bargaining rights we have yet seen. It is worse than the 2011 attack on unions in Wisconsin under Scott Walker and worse in many ways than public employee law in North Carolina and Virginia, where voluntary dues deductions and grievance procedures are permitted.

For all public employees except "public safety employees" (police and fire), the bill makes it illegal to negotiate healthcare, transfers, job evaluations, procedures for workforce reductions, subcontracting, or anything related to seniority. Unions will not be permitted to negotiate payroll deduction of union dues, even though Iowa has long been a "right-to-work" state and all employees who sign up to pay dues do so voluntarily. This provision is clearly designed to cut off unions' operating revenue so that it is difficult for our locals to function. It will go into effect immediately upon passage. Incredibly, unions will not even be permitted to negotiate a grievance procedure to enforce the contract.

The only topic on which unions will retain bargaining rights is wages, and even then wage bargaining shall be largely meaningless. If the employer and union don't reach agreement, the dispute will be resolved through binding arbitration (as occurs under current Iowa law.) But the new

law will allow the arbitrator to grant a wage increase of no more than 3 percent or the percentage increase in the consumer price index, *whichever is less*.

Every union representing public employees will have to win a recertification vote one year before the expiration of each contract. The majority of employees in the bargaining unit must vote to retain the union (not just a majority of those voting – a standard that neither the governor nor a single member of the legislature could meet in their own elections). Furthermore, the union must pay the state in advance for the costs of conducting elections, which is yet another attack on union finances. Our members in Iowa are fighting back, and have besieged their legislators both in Des Moines and at events in their districts. In addition to providing our nine Iowa locals all resources necessary to conduct the fight against this bill, we and our Iowa leadership are evaluating every option on how to continue the struggle for workers' rights under what may become much more difficult circumstances. Our Iowa members deserve and will receive the support of the entire UE.

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