



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on March 23, 2012

Georgia Tea Party Activists Allied With Unions in Fighting Anti-picketing Bill

The bill, passed by the state Senate on March 7, would forbid any person to engage in mass picketing at or near any place, including private residences, where a labor dispute exists in such number or manner as to obstruct or interfere with or constitute a threat to obstruct or interfere with the entrance to or egress from any place of employment or the free and uninterrupted use of public roads, streets, highways, railroads, airports, or other ways of travel, transportation, or conveyance.



Anyone violating the prohibition would be subject to a \$1,000 fine for each day of the violation, and a union or other organization that violates a court injunction to cease the demonstrations would be subject to fines of \$10,000 a day. Opponents argue that the bill, if passed, would violate constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and assembly. Tea Party activist Debra Dooley [told Salon.com](#) she wouldn't object to banning protests in "strictly residential" neighborhoods, but argued the language of the bill is broad enough to prohibit demonstrations at other locations as well. Dooley was among those who testified against the bill at a hearing of the House Industrial Relations Committee at the State House in Atlanta on Monday.

"Labor unions have First Amendment rights just like Tea Parties," Dooley said. "I don't see how you can say it's okay for one group to go and protest in front of CNN but a labor union can't."

Dave Jamieson [reported on](#) the online Huffington Post that the Atlanta Tea Party sent out a message to the 50,000 people on its e-mail list Monday calling the bill "a gross violation of the First Amendment." The Tea Party, Occupy Atlanta and environmentalist groups, as well as labor unions have opposed the bill. The legislation was backed by Senate Republicans, including Snellville resident Don Balfour, an executive of the Waffle House restaurant chain and one of the primary sponsors of the bill. The House put off voting on the bill after Monday's hearing, giving rise to opponents' hopes that the measure will remain in limbo when the Legislature adjourns.

Charlie Flemming, president of the Georgia AFL-CIO, told Huffington Post that while Tea Party



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members are “traditionally the Republicans’ allies,” the unions are happy to see the conservative activists coming down on the their side of the issue. “We may have disagreements about labor and other issues but the reality is we all agree this is our constitutional right to stand up speak out and protest,” Flemming said. “I would certainly support their right to do likewise. So I think it’s terrific.” Many of the Georgia Republicans were elected with Tea Party support, and if the bill dies in the House, Tea Party opposition “might be the reason and then again, it might just be the final straw,” Flemming said.

While the bill has the stated goal of protecting residential neighborhoods and guarding the “quiet enjoyment” of local residents, [Zaid Jilani on the able2know](#) website argued that political protests in residential neighborhoods has a pedigree that goes back to the nation’s Founding Fathers. “The Sons of Liberty regularly protested ... the homes of British colonial officials, including the homes of tax collectors,” Jilani wrote. “If Balfour and Georgia’s Big Business titans have their way, these protests would be illegal and (Samuel) Adams and many of the other Founding Fathers would have been arrested.”

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