



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on May 20, 2011

Tennessee Latest State to Take On Public-Employee Unions

The Republican-controlled legislature of Tennessee has become the latest in a growing number of states to tackle public-employees unions. On May 19, its House of Representatives voted 59 to 39 to remove from teachers' unions significant collective bargaining rights. Though the bill does not affect bargaining for pay or benefits, it does take away the right to bargain on issues such as job performance, classroom assignments, and bonus pay.

The measure will now go to the Tennessee Senate, which earlier this month voted by an 18 to 14 margin to repeal a 1978 law that required school boards to engage in collective bargaining with teachers' unions. The votes in both houses of the state legislature very closely approximated the new Republican majorities in both houses: 65 to 39 in the House and 19 to 13 in the Senate.

Democrats argued that the bill is an attack on teachers, and Tennessee Education Association spokesman Jerry Winters declared, Clearly they don't need to pass anything. The negotiations process in this state is working remarkably well. Though House Democrats offered two dozen amendments to the measure during the long debate on May 19, conservative Republicans voted down each one. In urging the vote on the bill, House sponsor Debra Maggart responded to accusations that it was against education: Unless we complete this piece, all that we have done will be for nothing. ... The union is about self-interest. They are not about promoting what's best for students.

The measure is destined to go to conference committee because the Senate, by voice vote, rejected it in its current form. Tennessee Speaker of the House Beth Harwell is confident that the bill will eventually pass: I think the vote today indicated that we can get it passed, if it's reasonably drawn and reasonably written. Governor Bill Haslam is expected to sign any bill limiting the collective bargaining rights of teachers' unions that reaches his desk. Tennessee is just one of several states whose government was captured almost entirely by Tea Party Republicans who supported reining in the power of public-employee unions especially teachers' unions.

[Idaho](#) has already enacted three different laws this legislative session to limit the power of its teachers' unions. Sherri Wood, President of the Idaho Education Association, expressed distress over the new measures: These are troubling times; all across the nation, political leaders have decided teachers are the enemies." Her group is working to gather signatures on petitions for a state referendum on the new bills, and has also begun a process to recall Republican State School Superintendent Tom Luna, who

The Biggest Bully In Schools?



Teacher Unions.



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helped craft the reforms. Luna was undisturbed, however, noting, “By spending what we currently have differently, we will reform our public education system to invest in Idaho’s great teachers, create the 21st century classroom and put our students first.” Recalling Luna would be a tall order, as he won the 2010 election with 60 percent of the vote.

[Indiana](#) also passed a law in April that removes from its state teachers’ unions the right to collectively bargain on issues such as school calendars, class size, and teacher evaluations. Following the passage of the bill, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Bennett declared, For school administrators across the state, this is a game-changing moment for our schools. Governor [Mitch] Daniels and Indianas legislators have put students first by giving local school leaders the freedom to run local schools. Today, our students won the right to attend schools focused purely on meeting their needs and securing their academic success. Unsurprisingly, Indiana’s teachers’ unions have promised political revenge.

In [Oklahoma](#), Governor Mary Fallin has signed into law a bill that would eliminate the right of teachers to appeal their firing to state district courts. Predictably, the legislation was opposed by teachers’ unions, who complained that they were left out of the process. Senator John Ford, the bills sponsor, commented that school districts presently must pay substantial legal fees just to support in district court a decision to fire a bad teacher. Governor Fallin elaborated:

This is an important measure that brings more accountability to our school system. The vast majority of school teachers are quality educators who deserve our appreciation and our thanks. In the limited instances where a teacher is not performing at a sufficiently high level, however, school boards must be given the power to seek a replacement without the fear of an expensive and lengthy legal battle. We owe it to our children and to taxpayers not to throw up legal blockades that keep ineffective teachers on staff.

Currently, it is nearly impossible in Oklahoma to dismiss an ineffective teacher because of the lengthy and expensive appeals process known as *trial de novo*. Until this bill was passed, an effort to fire an incompetent teacher required not only an administrative right for a hearing to determine the propriety of termination, but after that a brand-new trial in district court in order to discharge the teacher.

The [Ohio legislature](#) has passed and Governor John Kasich has signed into law a measure that would eliminate the right of teachers’ unions to negotiate health care benefits, retirement, and sick leave. It also bans strikes by teachers and ends their automatic pay increases. Kasich praised the legislature, adding, “Re-leveling the playing field for taxpayers gives them the respect they deserve from the elected officials and government workers that serve them.” Ohio teachers’ unions, which had actually assessed an extra \$54 in union dues just to fight the measure, have promised to make the bill a referendum issue on the state ballot.

[The Sunshine State](#) is yet another that has taken on teachers’ unions. Florida Senate Bill 6 bans union dues payroll deductions for activities related to political campaigns or tax exempt organizations engaged in political activity. Andy Ford, President of the Florida Education Association, decried the law, insisting,

These actions are nothing more than retribution directed at FEA and other labor organizations for using our democratic right to support or oppose legislation in Florida, particularly last years SB 6. Of course, we will oppose this measure, which is aimed at silencing our members and punishing them for opposing proposals supported by legislative leaders.



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Florida Republicans have also enacted measures to end tenure for new teachers and establish a statewide evaluation process.

After the powerful stand of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and Republicans in the legislature to rein in their public-employee unions drew national and even worldwide attention, an increasing number of conservative Republicans in state governments across the country are honoring their pledge to voters and moving to limit the power of public-employees unions particularly teachers' unions.

Graphic: A poster created by WWW.TeachersUnionExposed.com



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