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Right to work fails in NH House, 200-177

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Republican Gov. Chris Sununu says he is “deeply disappointed” the House voted to kill a proposed right-to-work bill.

Sununu set the policy as a priority of his first term and met with representatives before the vote to try and ensure its passage.

“While it is clear that some House members did not understand this opportunity to unleash the untapped potential of our economy, I know that we can continue to work collaboratively on initiatives that will drive new business into the state,” he said in a statement.

Other Republican leaders might not be happy with the outcome, but are relieved the fight is over.

“To put it behind us and move forward is what’s best for the Republican caucus,” said House Speaker Shawn Jasper. He had backed the bill, but warned on Wednesday it could fail due to the opposition of some Republican members. “We have to start moving forward, there has got to be some healing.”

Top state Republicans had spent the days before the vote trying to sway opinions toward right-to-work. On Wednesday, leaders at the GOP state party suggested they may not help Republicans who oppose the bill in the next election cycle.

The last-minute lobbying, however, proved fruitless.

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"It's a good day for New Hampshire," said Rich Gulla, who heads the largest union of state employees. "We're ready to get down to business now that this is behind us."

Greg Moore, a proponent of right-to-work who heads the state chapter of Americans for Prosperity, said the vote is a setback, but not the end.

"I have experienced first-hand the right-to-work wars here in New Hampshire, so we get ready for the next one," he said.

12:00 p.m.

New Hampshire will not become a so-called right-to-work state today, or next year.

The Republican-led House voted to kill the union-targeted legislation Thursday afternoon, ending weeks of high-charged debate. While many expected a close vote, the final tally was much wider, at 200-177. The body then voted to ban consideration of right-to-work for the rest of the session, effectively killing it for the next two years.

The bill's defeat deals a blow to Republican Gov. Chris Sununu, who had labeled the policy a priority.

Top state Republicans had spent the days and hours before the vote trying to sway opinions toward right-to-work, without success.

A handful of Republicans spoke against the policy during floor debate and enough joined with House Democrats to defeat right-to-work.

"This bill is a direct attack on our livelihood," said Republican Rep. Sean Morrison, a firefighter from Epping.

The right-to-work bill would have prevented public and private sector unions from charging fees to nonmembers for the cost of collective bargaining.

Critics say right-to-work erodes organized labor and reduces worker protections, while supporters say it helps to attract business and gives workers more freedom.

In a floor speech, House Majority Leader Dick Hinch pled with members to back the bill.

"This is not union busting," said Hinch, a Merrimack Republican. "This gives individuals the choice to participate and contribute, or not, based on their own best judgment."

Republican state lawmakers have tried unsuccessfully for decades to pass right-to-work.

With the GOP now in control of the House, Senate and Governor's office for the first time in a decade, many saw this year as the bill's best shot at passage.

But it faced hard pushback from union members, who showed up by the dozens at legislative hearings to testify against it.

On Thursday, union members crowded the hall outside the House chamber and gathered outside the State House holding signs.

More than half the states in the country have right-to-work laws on the books, but none in New England.

11:00 a.m.

Republican Rep. Frank Saporeto, who has opposed so-called right-to-work bills in the past, will remove his vote from the mix and preside over the debate from the speaker's chair.

"I have never done it in in 20 years," said Saporeto, of Derry, referring to taking the gavel. "Presiding over it you have certain advantages... you're in control of debate and decorum."

Saporeto ran unsuccessfully last year in the competitive Republican speakers race.

In a rare move, House Speaker Shawn Jasper plans to leave the speaker's podium during the vote and take a seat on the floor to participate.

Jasper backs the so-called right-to-work legislation, which prevents unions from charging nonmembers fees to cover the cost of collective bargaining.

The bill is scheduled to come up for a vote in the House shortly. Its fate is uncertain because a handful of Republicans oppose right-to-work.

9:15 a.m.

Dozens of union workers have gathered outside the State House this morning holding signs in opposition of so-called right-to-work legislation.

"This bill is deceiving in name," said Aaron Sturup, a 26-year-old from Derry who is a member of a carpenters' union. "It enables other workers on the job to get our benefits without having to pay for it."

More than half the states in the country have right-to-work laws on the books. The policy bars unions from charging non-members the costs of collective bargaining.

The House vote today on the union-targeting legislation is expected to be razor thin, and will largely depend on which members show up. An overnight snow storm could alter attendance. Speaker Shawn Jasper has warned the bill might fail the GOP-controlled chamber due to long-standing opposition from a handful of Republicans.

If it passes, New Hampshire would become the first state in New England with right-to-work. Republican Gov. Chris Sununu has made the policy a priority and says it will help attract businesses to the state.

Sturup, a coffee in hand, helped set up signs outside the State House before 8 a.m. Most lawmakers enter the building through the front door and will pass by the demonstration.

The vote is expected to take place at 11 a.m. In a rare move, Jasper plans to leave the speaker's podium during the vote and take a seat on the floor to participate. He will hand the gavel over to Republican Rep. Frank Saporeto, he said.

"There are people with a false narrative that I am not committed on this," Jasper said. "To put an end to that I am coming down."

(This story will be updated. Allie Morris can be reached at 369-3307 or amorris@cmonitor.com)
