

business

Expert: Unions to profit from bill

A CSU professor says changes to a state labor act will make unions "more stable financially."

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The proposed change to the Colorado Labor Peace Act probably will provide fresh streams of revenue to union coffers if the bill is approved, a labor expert said Wednesday.

House Bill 1072 would eliminate a second vote currently needed to form an all-union shop. Such shops allow unions to collect at least some dues from all employees in a unionized workforce - not just union members.

"It doesn't affect the ability for unions to organize, but it does make them more stable financially," said Raymond Hogler, a business-management professor at Colorado State University. "This would increase union income substantially."

Members of the 10 largest unions in the U.S. paid, on average, \$125 in dues in 2004, according to the Heritage Foundation. The Washington D.C.-based think tank relied on data supplied by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Unions aiming to organize workers still must get a majority of workers to sign on, no easy task within many industries, Hogler said.

If the bill becomes law, Hogler said that as existing union contracts expire, forming all-union shops would "be the first thing unions put on the table."

The bill has riled business leaders and groups statewide. Economic-development officials and business owners contend the change could crimp job growth and deter companies from relocating to Colorado.

HB 1072 has passed the House and will be considered by the Senate this week. Gov. Bill Ritter has expressed support.

If Ritter signs the bill, it may prompt powerful business groups to seek a ballot initiative to overturn it, said Barbara Thompson, executive vice president of the Mountain States Employers Council.

"There is a strong desire to counteract the message this sends," she said.

The Colorado Labor Peace Act is the state's policy on collective bargaining. It lays out the rights of employers, workers and labor organizations as they deal with one another. It defines unfair labor practices. Among them: spying on employees or their representatives; blacklisting employees; and interfering with the formation of a labor organization or the rights of members to financially support a union.

The act says employees and their unions cannot demand any stand-in employee be hired; engage in a sit-down strike on the employer's property; or hinder by picketing, threats, intimidation, force or coercion the pursuit of any lawful work.

But the heart of the act, and the piece that raises the hackles of union organizers, is a requirement that must be met to form a union shop where all workers are either dues-paying union members or nonmembers who pay the union "agency fees" used to defray the union's cost for representing them. The act calls for a secret ballot by employees to bring in a union that would represent workers. The union must win a simple majority. A second election is needed to win the right to negotiate for an all-union shop with the employer. That election requires a simple majority of all employees eligible to vote or 75 percent of those who voted, whichever is greater. Unions argue that the additional election is unfair and unnecessary.

"If the workers vote by majority, the majority should suffice," said Ernie Duran Jr., UFCW Local 7 president.

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