

Now They're Telling Us How to Pay Our Bills

In the new era of the Trump administration and their reliance on 'alternative facts', the New Hampshire House is proud to bring you HB-438, an act eliminating the automatic union dues payment for state employees. The bill states that "no public employer shall withhold union dues from a public employee's wages."

In the past, bills such as this have been called the Empower Employees Act because the legislation would "increase employees' freedom by allowing them to choose to pay union dues, rather than having them taken out of their paychecks before the workers even see the money."

So, our freedom is increased because the dues, that we freely chose to have deducted from our paycheck, won't be deducted from our paycheck before we get to see the money in that paycheck.

It's hard to see how taking away a freedom – our free choice to have dues deducted from our paycheck – actually increases our freedoms in any way. This must be another one of those alternative facts.

Let's be clear: no one's freedom is improved by passing this bill. School employees already have the freedom to choose how to pay their dues. We can elect for payroll deduction, or pay NEA-NH by check, or even sign-up for EasyPay to have dues taken out of our checking account automatically. As an adult, we are free to choose how to pay our own bills and expenses. But Representatives Hinch, Kurk, Packard, Chandler, Carr and Ohm, the sponsors of the bill, believe that the New Hampshire state government should have a seat right next to us as we pay our bills and decide the best method for us.

"Hey, Representative Kurk, I'm getting ready to pay my electric bill. Is it OK to write a check for it or do you want me to use my credit card?"

The bill's sponsors, and many more like them in the statehouse, believe our salary is public money subject to their legislative control even after it is paid to us. Wrong. The instant that money is paid to the employee who earned that salary, the politicians have no say over how it is spent. So please, keep your hands off my paycheck.

Supporters of the bill have said that local governments have no business paying union dues. Well, as far as I know, the school district is not paying my dues, I am. Is the district also paying my taxes?

No taxpayer funds are going to NEA-NH. There are no line items in any school budget for NEA-NH dues. To argue that taxpayers are funding NEA-NH is misleading and dishonest.

Payroll deductions for union dues impose no costs on public school districts beyond the costs the payroll system already creates in allowing school employees to use payroll

deductions to pay taxes and make contributions to health insurance, pension plans, and charitable organizations. Payroll systems are used for a wide range of deductions, and the incremental administrative cost of adding one more deduction is minuscule, if even calculable, negating proponents' arguments that HB-438 will save taxpayers money.

Currently, school districts and local associations have the freedom to negotiate contracts allowing members to make dues payments through automatic payroll deductions. Members must then provide written authorization allowing the automatic deductions to take place. So automatic payroll deductions can't take place until members take at least two affirmative steps: first, collectively negotiate the right to use deductions, and second, individually authorize them.

It is clear that the bill's sponsors and supporters have targeted only one group of employees with their legislation, since no other form of payroll deduction is included in their proposed legislation. If payroll deductions cost the taxpayers so much, then why aren't they all being eliminated?

Clearly cost is not the issue. What we stand for is what is really under attack. Fairness, transparency, and accountability, obtained and protected by collectively bargained agreements are the real targets of HB-438. By targeting dues deductions, these politicians hope to weaken the unions and associations that protect New Hampshire's students and education professionals.

The House majority is continuing its assault on hard-working, tax-paying union members and our collective bargaining rights with this legislation and their repeated attempts to force so-called Right-to-Work on us.

The practice of payroll dues deduction has been agreed to by both unions and Districts, and used for years. This practice is also included in hundreds of local collective bargaining agreements. This is yet another case where majority lawmakers are restricting the rights of school employees and interfering in local control.

This legislation serves no purpose except to punish school employees and the unions that represent them. It creates no jobs, saves no money for school districts, and does nothing to improve education. It is a mean-spirited political attack by majority leadership and a clear infringement of personal liberty of law-abiding citizens of the Granite State.