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Right to Work in Michigan

Lawmakers consider a law to help the lagging state economy

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Unions lost big in Michigan in November when voters rejected Proposal 2, Big Labor's plan to canonize collective bargaining in the state constitution. Now they are facing a backlash with the happy possibility that Michigan could become the 24th right-to-work state.

Lawmakers have been preparing to introduce a right-to-work bill in the state legislature, and the labor cavalry is heading to the Wolverine state. According to the United Auto Workers website, the union will rally Thursday in Lansing to spook lawmakers out of going through with the bill.

Target No. 1 is Governor Rick Snyder, who held a press conference on Tuesday to say that right to work was on the agenda for "thoughtful discussion." That's a shift for Mr. Snyder, who has tiptoed around the topic since he was elected, saying it wasn't a battle he was looking for. Unions took his soft touch as a sign of weakness and pushed Proposal 2, which would have given them a virtual veto over all union-related legislation.

Meanwhile, the economy has languished. Michigan is the fifth most unionized state in the country and the birthplace of the UAW. According to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, Michigan has lost 7,300 jobs since January, while next-door Indiana, which became a right-to-work state earlier this year, has been on the upswing.

According to the Indiana Economic Development

Corporation, the state has a record number of businesses choosing to expand or set up in the state, including Amazon and Toyota. The 220 companies will create some 21,000 new jobs and invest \$3.6 billion. The growth has come despite a decrease in the average tax incentives offered by the state to \$8,900 from around \$37,000 in previous years.

Republicans hold a 26-12 majority in the Michigan Senate and a 64-46 majority in the state House. According to a recent poll by Mitchell Research & Communications for a right-to-work advocacy group, 51% of Michiganders support a right-to-work law while 41% are opposed.

That's important because if a right-to-work law passed the legislature, unions could still try to repeal it on the ballot, as they did this year with the emergency manager law, which let the Governor appoint emergency financial managers who could redo collective-bargaining agreements. By the time a similar fight could be waged against right to work, voters could have had more than a year to see the law's economic benefits.

AFL-CIO El Supremo Richard Trumka has said that politicians who oppose Big Labor would "pay a steep political price" but it's not turning out that way. In Indiana, Republicans picked up nine seats after the right-to-work law passed and lawmakers who made the law a key part of their agenda won by wide margins. If that's the price they pay, Michigan's politicians should be all in.