



## Battle Over Collective Bargaining Is On

Less than an hour after unions submitted more than double the signatures necessary for a proposal that would enshrine collective bargaining rights in the Constitution and nullify a series of laws passed in the last 18 months, business organizations announced an unprecedented coalition to oppose that proposal and several others that could appear on the November ballot.

Department of State officials have until September to analyze the signatures through a random sample to determine whether the Protect Our Jobs organization met the minimum number needed of 322,609.

“It far exceeded anyone’s expectations,” Protect Our Jobs spokesperson Dan Lijana said. “That’s why we submitted them now. We had more than double what’s required by the state.”

The proposal is expected to be the biggest fight on the ballot this year. Already there is worry among House Democrats that union money that usually would go toward helping their campaigns will be focused on the collective bargaining measure.

The union effort has been shrouded in near total secrecy. Leaders of the proposal have refused to say what laws the proposal would void, other than a possible right-to-work law. Since the news conference to announce the proposal, the leader of Protect Our Jobs, Ken Brock, has declined all interview requests. The organization didn’t even announce its plan in advance to submit its 684,286 signatures Tuesday.

Mr. Lijana said he did not know when the organization would begin television advertising and direct mail, saying its efforts had solely been focused to this point on collecting petition signatures.

Unions launched the collective bargaining proposal after seeing an avalanche of new laws passed by the Republican-led Legislature and signed by Governor Rick Snyder eliminating or curbing union rights.

Among the new laws unions found abhorrent:

\*Enabling state-appointed emergency manager to void the contracts of local government and school district workers;

\*Barring several subjects from collective bargaining between teachers and school districts, such as performance evaluation systems and district policy for firing or disciplining employees subject to the tenure law; and

So far, the coalition has not formally decided to support retaining PA 4 although all members of the coalition want to see the law kept in place. The coalition is taking a wait-and-see posture on the other proposals to see if they make the ballot, such as those that would restrict the ability of the Legislature to raise taxes, prevent new international border crossings without a public vote and expand the number of casinos in the state.

The strategy in general was to emphasize to voters to simply vote no on all proposals to avoid cluttering the Constitution. That would allow for a consolidated messaging and fundraising effort instead of trying to fight the proposals one by one.

“It’s a natural extension,” Mr. Holcomb said. “A lot of people have looked at these and thought how damaging these will be for the state of Michigan. It just makes sense to come together in a coalition format and fight them and to really take the message across the state of Michigan.”

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy also denounced the collective bargaining proposal.

“This ballot measure is a radical constitutional amendment that makes government-sector unions more powerful than the Legislature,” said Joseph G. Lehman, president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, which condemned the union proposal although it is not part of the coalition against multiple proposals. “If it passes, unions will set public policy in secret negotiations with their government employers. Lawmakers won’t be able to override anything they decide.”