

Will The Ohio GOP's War On Firefighters Flame Out Next Tuesday?

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In declaring war on public workers, Ohio Republican Gov. John Kasich has become the best community organizer in the state.

For Democrats.

Exhibit A: Yesterday afternoon, a man in his late 50s arrived at my home to install a new microwave to replace the one that went kaput in our kitchen. Tim had to step over our new puppy, and within minutes we were exchanging stories about pets, grandchildren, and what our grown kids do for a living. One of his sons is a firefighter in a suburb in the Cleveland area.

"I'm not seeing much of him these days. He's spending every free hour working to defeat Issue 2," he said, referring to next Tuesday's vote on a Republican bill that strips public employees' right to collectively bargain for wages, benefits and work conditions. "He's going door-to-door tonight, and will canvass again over the weekend."

He smiled as he described his son's new-found activism.

"He's telling everyone he knows to vote against SB5," he said. "I'm telling everyone I know, too."

The statewide referendum is less than a week away, and there are thousands of families like that firefighter's mobilized all across Ohio.

Kasich, a former congressman, was elected to office last fall by voters frustrated with a sluggish economy. Within weeks of taking office, he and his minions in the Statehouse decided to demonize teachers, firefighters, police officers, and other public employees by ramming through this legislation and gutting their rights as workers. Their strategy was to make it about the unchecked power of the nasty unions. What the Republicans didn't count on was that their mow-'em-down tactics would unleash a pro-worker fury that we haven't seen in Ohio for decades.

Kasich didn't alienate only public employees. When you go after 360,000 local and state workers, you make it personal for everyone who knows, and often loves, a public employee. And that loyalty to friend and kin trumps partisan politics, which is why [polls are showing Issue 2 going down](#) to resounding defeat no matter which group of voters you ask.

As a columnist for *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, I wrote about SB5 a number of times. What struck me about the volume of response was how many readers identified themselves as conservative voters who felt betrayed by the Republicans. One of the most moving emails, which [I included in a column in March](#), came from a man who wanted to share his letter of apology to his wife, a schoolteacher:

Dear Honey,

I'm sorry.

I am a conservative husband, belong to the Tea Party and I voted for John Kasich. I have been married to a Cleveland teacher for almost 14 years and my vote let her down.

I apologize:

For letting people tease you about having the summer off and not asking them to thank you for the tough days ahead that begin in early August. I know for a fact you work more hours in those 10 months than many people do in 12. All those hours are earned.

For complaining that my Sunday is limited with you because you must work.

For making you think you have to ask permission to buy a student socks, gloves and hats.

For not understanding that you walk through a metal detector for work.

For leaving dirty dishes in the sink [when you awoke] for your 4 a.m. work session. I should know you have to prepare.

For thinking you took advantage of the taxpayers. Our governor continues to live off the taxpayer dole, not you.

For counting the time and money you spend to buy school supplies.

For not saying "thank you" enough for making the world and me better.

I love you.

I first wrote about this husband's letter in March. Since then, I've lost count of the number of people I've met at rallies or call centers -- or in line at the grocery store -- who have quoted his letter at length.

"He speaks for me," they say, often adding they wish they hadn't voted for Kasich.

The Washington Post [reported Thursday](#) that, in the next few days leading up to our election, we're going to see more than \$2 million worth of misleading ads sponsored by right wing groups funded by anonymous donors. These brave citizens don't even want us to know their names. Instead, they hide behind patriotic-sounding groups like "Restoring America," which was recently slapped with a restraining order and banned from running candidate ads in Kentucky [after a judge ruled they had violated state campaign finance laws](#).

Now they're bringing their trash to Ohio, and not because they think they can defeat Issue 2. This is all about laying brick for the road ahead in 2012. They want to do what they always do: Stir up enough hatred to fire up their base in Ohio so they can pick the next president.

Here's what those right wing outsiders don't understand: Things have changed here in Ohio, and even friendly Midwesterners have their limits.

On Tuesday, everyday workers in this battleground state are going to make it clear who's boss.

Hint: It ain't Kasich anymore.

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