

OFT Local Presidents, Officers and Executive Committee, staff:

Today was an amazing, amazing show of solidarity for workers rights, not only by unions, but from a very broad representation of people from all walks of life in our communities. Today's Rally to Save the Middle Class, a day-long demonstration to oppose Senate Bill, drew well more than 20,000 people to surround the Ohio Statehouse. It is still going on (in case you receive this on your drive here).

Unexpectedly, the Senate committee adjourned today without voting on SB 5. We consider this a small victory. The committee has hearing scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday this week.

Analysis of vote standing: Of the twelve Committee members, eight are Republican and four are Democrats. They need seven votes to pass SB 5. Thus far, they have five solid votes: Bacon, Faber, Jones, Jordan, and Schaefer. Despite our efforts, we have to assume they stand a good chance of getting freshman Beagle. That puts them at SIX. That leaves Hughes and Seitz who have been solid Nos. If they can't get Hughes or Seitz, under Senate Rule 20 the Senate President can replace one of his committee members without notice. Obviously, it would cause quite a stir. They're working very hard to get Seitz.

It goes without saying, thanks to the four Dems who have been absolutely solid -- Schiavoni, Brown, Sawyer and Kearney.

Today's rally generated a much needed intense amount of energy to this fight. Union brothers and sisters stood side by side with numerous non-union allies. In the sea of faces across the Statehouse lawn were faith leaders, parents and children, the unemployed and business owners, our neighbors, and our friends and our family members who showed up to support us and join us in one loud voice against SB 5.

OFT members had a significant presence. Among them were members from:
Federation of Franklin County Children Services Employees, Local 3143
Mineral Ridge Mineral Ridge Education Association, Local 6436
Greenon Federation of Teachers, Local 4370
New Lebanon Federation of Teachers, Local 4468
Toledo Federation of Teachers, Local 250
Cincinnati Federation of Teachers/ACPSOP, Local 1520
Oregon City Federation of Teachers, Local 1080, and
Cleveland Teachers Union, Local 279
Jackson-Milton Educators' Association, Local 4968
Newton Falls Classroom Teachers Association, Local 4864
Cleveland Heights Teachers Union, Local 795
Ontario Federation of Teachers, Local 1703
Berea Federation of Teachers, Local 1699.

OFT members Justin Hons (CTU) and Veronica White (Cleveland Heights) spoke to the crowd about their passion as teachers and the injustice of SB 5. (See their photos and video on OFT's Facebook page - "like" us at www.facebook.com/OhioFedofTeachers)

I am copying below today's Columbus Dispatch article which overwhelming underestimates the crowd (there were far more than double those gathered last Thursday's reports of 15,000).

Lisa K. Zellner | Communications Director, Ohio Federation of Teachers
614 257 4195 | 1251 E. Broad St. | Columbus OH 43205
lzellner@oft-aft.org | www.oft-aft.org

At least 8,500 protest over collective bargaining

Amendments to Senate Bill 5 introduced

Tuesday, March 1, 2011 12:01 PM

Tuesday, March 1, 2011 03:51 PM

By **[Joe Hallett](#)** and **[Catherine Candisky](#)**

The Columbus Dispatch

Binding arbitration for safety forces would be replaced by a procedure giving ultimate authority over contracts to elected officials, according to a key provision of a massive amendment to a bill that would sharply curtail collective bargaining rights.

The 99-page amendment, outlined today at hearing of the Senate Insurance, Commerce and Labor Committee, also removes the right to strike for all public employees and establishes stiff fines for public workers who defy the no-strike ban.

"We're staying focused on reducing the cost of government and making Ohio competitive, and the first place to start is with our own budgets," said Sen. Shannon Jones, R-Springboro, sponsor of Senate Bill 5. "This bill gives power back to the taxpayer and restores flexibility to the management of their hard-earned dollars."

As an estimated 8,500 protesters demonstrated against the bill on the west lawn of the Statehouse, the committee met for about a half-hour to hear Jones outline amendments to her bill. The committee is expected to vote on the bill Wednesday with a vote on the Senate floor likely either shortly afterward or Thursday.

Firefighters, teachers, nurses, labor unions and others arrived this morning for the demonstration. By 10 a.m., they were chanting, waving signs and showing their opposition to the bill. The rally is expected to continue until 6 p.m.

The Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board is estimating the crowd at 8,500. They don't keep formal records of protest crowds, but anecdotally, spokesman Gregg Dodd said, there is consensus this is largest crowd of its kind in at least 15 years.

Columbus firefighter Lt. David Blair said that for him, the issue is more than money.

"For me, it's about safety. Our fire gear is subject to negotiation. If they take away the tools to do our job, people will perish," he said.

The committee chairman, Sen. Kevin Bacon, a Minerva Park Republican, said he is confident there are enough votes on the committee to move the collective bargaining bill to the Senate floor, even though all four committee Democrats and at least one Republican, Sen. Bill Seitz of Cincinnati, are opposed.

Seitz declined to name other Republicans on the committee who might oppose the bill, although a local firefighter union leader, Jim Gilbert, said he had talked with Sen. Jim Hughes of Columbus and said he was undecided. Hughes could not be reached for comment.

Seitz said he did not know whether Senate leaders would replace him and other potential no-voting Republicans on the committee.

Jones, who said there are enough GOP votes to pass the bill in the Senate and move it to the House, explained her amendment amid objections from committee Democrats that they had not had enough time to review it.

One key provision that Gov. John Kasich has insisted upon would replace binding arbitration for police and firefighters, the process in which a neutral third-party arbitrator is empowered to impose a settlement.

Binding arbitration would be replaced by a process in which a fact-finder agreed upon by both sides presents his or her findings. If an agreement is not reached within 14 days of publication of the findings, then the last best offers made by the government employer and the union are presented at a public hearing. At the end of the hearing, the government employer is required to accept either its last best offer or the union's.

Such an arrangement, Gilbert said, would almost certainly lead to a pre-ordained outcome in which the employer would approve its last best offer. But Jones said that public participation in the process would ensure that the union employees are treated fairly.

Although police and firefighters are already prohibited from striking, the amendment would eliminate the right to strike for all public employees. Those who go on strike anyway would have pay deducted at the rate of twice their daily rate of pay for each day of the strike. The penalty for violating a court injunction against a strike is a fine up to \$1,000, up to 30 days imprisonment, or both.

Jones' original bill would require that public employees pay at least 20 percent of the cost of their health care insurance premiums, but the amendment reduces the amount to 15 percent.

The amendment also reinstates pay ranges for all public employees except police and firefighters, but eliminates automatic pay increases based on factors such as seniority and requires that any raises granted within the pay ranges be based solely on merit.

Teachers' salaries could still be bargained outside the proposed law's pay ranges, but any pay raises for teachers would have to be based on merit. Under the bill, teacher performance is measured by considering the level of license held by the teacher, whether the teacher is a "highly qualified teacher" as defined in law, which includes factors such as student performance and other criteria.

Teachers would be allowed to negotiate an initial contract of up to three years, with subsequent contracts ranging from two to five years.

Seeking to monetize the passion created by Senate Bill 5, Kasich and the leader of the Ohio Democratic Party today e-mailed fundraising requests to supporters.

Kasich's included a link to his campaign fund, saying he is trying "to give more power to the taxpayers of our state." State Democratic Chairman Chris Redfern's e-mail noted that it takes 17 votes in the Senate to kill the bill and asked for contributions of "just \$17 to our efforts to get to the 17 votes we need."

Also yesterday, eight separate police and fire unions, organized under a group called Protect Ohio Protectors, sought to put pressure on GOP senators by publishing their comments supporting collective bargaining in a half-page Dispatch ad. The senators' quotes about protecting the right of public safety forces to collectively bargain were taken from 2010 and 2008 Fraternal Order of Police questionnaires.

Among those quoted in the ad were committee members Bacon, Sen. Tim Schaffer of Lancaster and Sen. Bill Beagle of Tipp City.

Bacon stressed that the bill protects collective bargaining rights and said he does not consider it inconsistent with his support for those rights.