

Outside group spending money to save Senate Bill 5

By Jim Siegel

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A secretly funded Republican-friendly group based in Virginia has started spending money in Ohio to urge voters to uphold Senate Bill 5, the new law that would significantly weaken collective bargaining power for public workers.

Barry Bennett, a Republican consultant in Washington and former chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Jean Schmidt, R-Loveland, is the chairman of Alliance for America's Future. He said his group has "a very active mail program and millions of Ohioans will hear from us."

The Alliance is urging a "yes" vote in Issue 2.

"We've been involved in things across the country that involve a basic conservative philosophy – smaller government and trying to get our fiscal house in order," said Bennett, also a onetime aide to former Gov. George V. Voinovich who worked on Republican Mike DeWine's successful 1994 U.S. Senate campaign.

One recent mailer aimed at teachers says: "When teachers' unions strike, our kids become bargaining tools. That's NOT fair!" It goes on to say that Issue 2 prevents teachers' unions from going on strike, and instead forces them to resolve their concerns at the bargaining table.

Opponents of Issue 2 argue that teachers' union strikes are very rare these days, and that many teachers recently have taken little to no pay increases. They also argue that the system, if Issue 2 passes, turns collective bargaining in to "collective begging."

Bennett declined to say who has contributed to his group, which is a 501c 4 non-profit. "We're in full compliance," Bennett said.

Mary Cheney, daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, is a board member for the group. The treasurer is Kara Ahern, Cheney's former political director and a veteran GOP fundraiser.

--Jack Torry, chief of the Dispatch Washington Bureau, contributed to this story