

# Random Notes

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## The Price of Complacency

As in Ohio, public employees in Wisconsin are under attack. And, as in Ohio, Republicans there are justifying dismantling collective bargaining under the guise of balancing the state budget. But, unlike Ohio, Wisconsin public employees have responded to the attack with gusto and in huge numbers. We trust a regurgitation of the measures Wisconsin Democratic lawmakers have taken to avoid a vote on the legislation, and the steps public employees have taken (particularly teachers, regardless of their political party affiliation) to protect the standard of living they've earned through collective bargaining is unnecessary here; we trust that our members and all Ohio public employees have been following the Wisconsin story closely. Clearly, Wisconsin's public employees have responded in a manner that makes ours—to date—appear amateurish.

What explains the difference? Ohio's Collective Bargaining Bill was enacted in 1983. That means most of the state's teachers, police officers, firemen, and other municipal, county and state employees were not among the workforce when there was no bargaining bill. They have no foundation for a "before and after" comparison. Wisconsin, on the other hand, passed its bargaining law in 1959. It's safe to assume that none of the state's public employees were working way back then. So speculation that more public employees in Wisconsin remember how miserable life could be before collective bargaining and hence are reacting so much more aggressively to the attack is a dead end.

Regardless of what might explain the complacency here compared to the boldness in Wisconsin, **it must end now**. Nineteenth century essayist John Jay Chapman wrote, "Everybody in America is soft and hates conflict. The cure for this, both in politics and social life, is the same---hardihood. Give them raw truth." The raw truth about what seventeen Republican lawmakers, including our own Frank LaRose, did last week in Columbus is not hard to comprehend. In a period of less than 1 hour, they dismantled the work of hundreds of thousands of public employees over the last thirty years. They destroyed the efforts of hundreds, perhaps thousands of

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### AN OPEN LETTER TO SENATOR FRANK LaROSE

Dear Senator LaRose:

Thank you for showing up for the Town Hall meeting in Twinsburg last weekend. Most of us doubted that you would, and we all appreciate that you did. It was a very courageous move on your part. I'm the guy who introduced himself to you as a thirty-seven year retiree of the Akron Public Schools and a twenty-seven year president of the teacher's association. I'm writing to mention a few things about SB 5 that I didn't have time to bring up at the meeting.

You're probably wondering why I'm so rabid about the bill, being retired and unaffected by it for the most part. Let me explain myself. First, I've spent much of my life advocating for teachers. I've fought to win teachers a greater say about what goes on in their classrooms, I've worked to improve their standard of living, hoping to make the profession more attractive to

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# Complacency

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politicians, Democrat and Republican, who over the same period enacted then preserved the bargaining bill, recognizing the value of legislation that brought civility and order to labor relations in the public sector. To ensure the success of their vendetta against public employees and their unions, the seventeen Republicans resorted to disgracefully cannibalizing members of their own party who dared to hold an opinion that didn't mimic theirs (*see related story*).

Senate Bill 5 is now being deliberated in the Ohio House. How long it remains there before it is approved and sent to the Governor for his signature—and barring an event that would qualify for the Eighth Wonder of the World, that's what will happen—is anyone's guess. Despite the odds, we cannot give up the fight. If we lose this round, we must be prepared for the next. That will be a petition drive to place the matter on a referendum ballot for the citizen's of Ohio to decide. Depending on when the Governor signs the bill into law, the referendum may take place this November or a year from then. There will be plenty of work for everyone between now and then. A small group of us have been in the fight since the opening bell; we've been knocked to the mat twice, but we're still on our feet. It's time for all public employees across Ohio, and that includes Akron teachers, to join in, put on the gloves and get ready to rumble.

## OPEN LETTER

young people considering a career in teaching. I've gone to the mat countless times to fight against and protect teachers from arbitrary decisions by management that are bad for kids, bad for teachers or bad for the profession. One of my parents was German, the other Italian, and as far as temperament is concerned, I guess I inherited the darker side of the quality from each. I'm always ready for a good fight, and this is no exception.

Secondly, and I'll be real pithy about it, I'm terror-stricken by what Kasich might convince you to do to my retirement benefits.

Senate Bill 5 is bad for Ohio, particularly public education in Ohio. I'm sure you've heard ad nauseum that this legislation is an attempt to destroy public employee unions and I know you deny that it is. Ironically, in many ways I think your vote for the bill actually creates a greater need for unions considering all the unbridled rights you've granted management over its workforce and the abuse the exercise of those  
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“rights” will—not might—lead to. You've made a huge assumption, and an incorrect one, I'm sure time will tell, that management somehow knows how to effectively use all the authority you've handed it. In my opinion, this bill will erode if not destroy the balance between labor and management and the collaboration between the two that collective bargaining has fostered. It will create animosity between labor and management and will inevitably hinder our mutual goal of improving student performance.

Senator, I think you've hurt individual people much more than you could have hoped to hurt unions. I know you take some credit for reducing the insurance premium payment from 20% to 15%. I'm still shaking my head trying to understand the fundamental fairness of asking a first year Akron teacher who makes \$34,000 a year, or a 12-year Master Degree teacher who makes \$64,000, to pay the same for his or her insurance as our Superintendent who makes \$175,000, or any other senior staff member, all of whom make well over six figures.

I've got to be honest with you though. The insurance thing is trivial compared to how other parts of the bill will hurt people. For example, consider a mid-career teacher who is raising a family, saving for college tuition, planning for retirement security. To improve her expertise in the classroom and stay current with best practices, this typical teacher has likely returned to school to earn an advanced degree and year after year has participated in time consuming and sometimes costly professional development activities. I'm sure you consider the personal and professional course this teacher is pursuing and the time and money invested in it worthy and admirable. Before your bill, and even before collective bargaining, Ohio law gave this teacher a level of job security to protect her from arbitrarily being laid off. Subjecting her, as your bill does, to layoff on the basis of, among other items, teacher performance evaluations (by, in some cases, incompetent building leadership), or perhaps because she earned that Masters Degree and is just too expensive, or because of “any other criteria established by the Board” is unjust and unacceptable.

I've had my fill of mea culpas from teachers, policeman and firefighters who voted for you and contributed to your campaign, or who didn't make an effort to contact you before the Senate vote. I'm dealing with my disappointment over that by constantly reminding myself they had no reason to believe you'd support a bill that affects their livelihood so adversely. You never said during your campaign that you'd support an attack against teachers. After the bill was introduced, you told a crowd in Barberton that you opposed it.

I noticed the tweet on your public profile congratulating Alif Mabrouk and the people of Egypt for winning back their  
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## Republicans Throw Their Own Under the Bus

In a move that underscores the growing chasm between moderates and the party's extreme right, first year Republican Sen. Kevin Bacon (Minerva



**Senator Kevin Bacon**

to the bill and his continued participation on the committee would have killed it. Seitz opposed parts



**Senator Bill Seitz**

of the bill including the provision that allows management to impose its will on the final terms of the contract when fact-finding and mediation fail. Said Seitz, "That violates the fundamental principle that one cannot be simultaneously a judge and an advocate in his own cause." He added, "It's somewhat ironic that the final chapters of this story are written as Senate management exercises its management rights over fellow elected state senators." Seitz's logic, compelling to us, was apparently lost on the rookie Bacon and other party leaders.

Before the full Senate can act on a committee-passed bill, it must first pass through the Senate



**Sen. Tom Niehaus**



**Sen. Scott Oelslager**

Rules Committee, which happened to be chaired by another one of those troublesome fly-in-the-ointment-independent-thinking type Republicans. Not to be outdone by Bacon, Senate President Tom Niehaus (R, south central Ohio counties) summarily

dismissed Rules Committee Chairman Scott Oelslager (R, North Canton) and his 25 years of legislative experience. When questioned about Oelslager's ouster, Niehaus said it was done for voting purposes! Ah, demagogueryocracy!

## Bill Heads to House Commerce and Labor Committee

The House of Representatives' Commerce and Labor Committee began deliberating SB 5 Tuesday. The bill was scheduled to be introduced at 4 p.m. As of this writing, hearings were scheduled to take place minimally Wednesday and Thursday.

The House is not expected to act on the bill for at least three weeks. However, the speed with which it moved through the Senate has us very cynical of talk about three or even two weeks.

Two first year local Republicans are on the House committee. **Kristina Roegner** represents the 42<sup>nd</sup> Ohio House District, which includes Cuyahoga Falls, Hudson, Munroe Falls, Silver Lake and Stow. She lives in Hudson. She defeated incumbent Mike Moran in last November's landslide. **Todd McKenney's** 43<sup>rd</sup> House District covers Franklin, Green and Springfield townships in Summit County and Brimfield, Rootstown, Edinburg, Suffield, Randolph and Atwater townships in Portage County. McKenney defeated incumbent Stephen Dyer in November.



**Rep. Todd McKenney**



**Rep. Kristina Roegner**

Rep. McKenney is sponsoring a "Teacher Talk" get together Saturday, March 12, from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. at the Waterloo Restaurant. Teachers are encouraged to attend and voice their opinions on SB 5, and to call or email Roegner to urge them to vote against the bill. They can be reached at [district43@ohr.state.oh.us](mailto:district43@ohr.state.oh.us) (McKenney) and [district42@ohr.state.oh.us](mailto:district42@ohr.state.oh.us) (Roegner).

# How SB 5 Will Hurt You

Senate Bill 5 is a massive piece of legislation. The bill is very complicated and has a lot of internal contradictions and open questions. The list below is by no means exhaustive, but it includes some of the most drastic changes that will affect teachers directly if it becomes law.

- Your health care plan is no longer subject to collective bargaining. The law says a board may pay up to 85% of the cost of the premium. A board could pay less.
- Your contract can be modified any way the board sees fit if the district is in “fiscal watch.”
- Your salary schedule and step increases are gone. Your compensation will be based on your licensure, whether or not you’re highly qualified, student performance and your principal’s evaluation of you, and on “any other criteria established by the board.”
- You may accumulate only ten sick days a year instead of 15. The board has total authority to develop policies and rules for use of leaves, including the use of accumulated sick days.
- Seniority is only one of several factors the board must consider before laying you off. One is your quality of performance as determined by your building principal. Another is “any other criteria established by the board.”
- The board has unlimited authority to outsource jobs, for example, psychological services.
- No restriction on the number of students assigned to a classroom or to a teacher.
- No restriction on principals to designate a teacher’s workload.
- Board is allowed to refuse to bargain existing contract language once our current Agreement expires.
- No restrictions on the board to assign personnel to buildings.

## Open Letter

freedom through patience and determination. I have plenty of both and will fight the injustice of Senate Bill 5 until it is gone. I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can correct this situation.

Sincerely,

Bill Siegferth  
Immediate Past-President  
Akron Education Association

## The Fight Against 5 – In Pictures

