



San Antonio Alamo Area Local Legislative Updates

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Powerful Lawmaker Goes After Federal Employee Union Enrollment

It soon could become significantly more difficult for federal employees to join a union. Rep. Tom Price, R-Ga., introduced the Federal Employee Rights Act, *Government Executive* has learned, a title opponents of the bill say misrepresents the legislation's true intentions. The House Budget Committee chairman's measure would deny federal employee unions the ability to automatically deduct dues from the paychecks of workers who sign up for that service.

The bill also would significantly alter the way a unit of federal workers elects to unionize. Currently, just 30 percent of a unit's employees must agree to form a union. The Federal Employee Rights Act would raise that threshold to 50 percent of a work group. Once a vote to ratify collective bargaining commenced, the legislation would count **any individual who declines to vote as a "no" in the final tally.**

The measure -- **which also applies to employees at the U.S. Postal Service** -- also would codify some practices federal unions currently adhere to. For example, it would prohibit the labor groups from using union dues to conduct political activity; currently, they engage in separate fundraising for that purpose. Price is also seeking to ensure employees vote by secret ballot, something federal groups already practice.

Republicans have in the past gone after federal employee unions' ability to collect dues from paycheck deductions. While feds in unions are obligated to pay dues, their memberships are entirely voluntary. Unlike at the state and local level, federal unions cannot require collective bargaining units to pay dues. Federal employee unions are allowed to maintain some members who collect a federal salary and work in federal offices while spending at least part of their work days conducting union business -- a practice known as official time -- because they must represent non-union members in negotiations.

The proposal is similar to one put forward by Gov. Scott Walker, R-Wis., while he was running for president.

The American Federation of Government Employees condemned the measure, saying it was an attack on employees' constitutional rights.

"This bill aims to silence the already muted voice that federal employees have in the workplace," the group said. "The result will be fewer whistleblowers coming forward to expose waste, fraud, and abuse; higher rates of employee turnover; and greater difficulty recruiting the best and the brightest."