

Iowa: How to lose collective bargaining in 10 days

For many years, the Iowa State Senate acted as a goalie for public education and unions, stopping any legislation that would strip collective bargaining rights or harm the education system.

But the 2016 elections brought a new reality to the state, with Republicans taking control of the Senate, as well as keeping control in the state House and governor's office.

And when the Legislature convened in January 2017, the new majority set its sights on public education and public employees.

The collective bargaining law in Iowa had been in place for 40 years. It was taken away in just a matter of days.

"This isn't union-busting. (This bill) goes further. It's profession-busting," said Tammy Wawro, president of the Iowa State Education Association, during the bill's debate. "(Iowa legislators) have carved out the heart of what is important and vital to our profession and our ability to have a voice in the direction of our work environment."

The new law limits most public-sector union contract negotiations to only base wages.

Unions are now banned from negotiating with their employers over issues such as health insurance, evaluation procedures, staff reduction and leaves of absence for political purposes.

The law also says that unions cannot have union dues deducted from public employees' paychecks.

Rules about negotiation impasses were also changed, requiring an arbitrator to consider the employer's ability to finance any wage increase. It also puts a cap on how much an arbitrator can raise wages. The wage increase could not exceed whichever is lower: 3 percent, or a percent equal to the cost of living increase outlined in the consumer price index.

Unions must recertify every time they face a new contract negotiation—typically every two or three years. And to recertify, unions need a majority of all union members, regardless of the number of people who cast a vote.

"The Iowa Legislature didn't just change the terms of our bargaining agreement," said Wawro, during her speech at the 2017 Education Minnesota Representative Convention. "They changed Iowa forever."

