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Opposing points of view: Right-to-work laws can make unions stronger

By **Ted O'Neil and F. Vincent Vernuccio**
Detroit Free Press guest writers

When Gov. Rick Snyder pledged his support to sign a right-to-work law, he said he preferred the term "worker freedom." [Mackinac Center](#) analysts concur and have been spreading that same message for more than two decades.

As Snyder indicated, this is not a Republican vs. Democrat issue or a labor vs. management issue. It is simply pro-worker and pro-liberty. A right-to-work law would have almost no effect on collective bargaining, other than to take away the ability of unions to get an employee fired if they refuse to pay the union dues or agency fees.

The labor movement refers to these people as "free riders" -- or more derisively as "freeloaders." That is patently false. The free rider argument presumes that unions spend all or most of the money they receive on representational activities. Union reports to the federal government and campaign finance records show otherwise.

AN OPPOSING VIEW: Right-to-work undercuts unions' job to represent workers

Nor are unions alone in helping people that do not financially support them. Many trade groups represent entire industries but do not require every business in that industry to pay them. Similarly, groups like the National Rifle Association work on behalf of all gun owners, but not all gun owners are members. People join and support these groups because they appreciate

their work and voluntarily want to contribute to them. Unions are the same. If they represent their members well, even with the option workers will pay them.

Even the [Mackinac Center](#) gives away its research for free. Support comes from donors who want to continue the Center's mission and believe in its product.

Right-to-work opponents also like to make outlandish claims that such laws "bust" unions or take away their ability to function. Again, not true. Unions can -- and do -- exist in right-to-work states. Iowa and Nevada, for example, both have union representation percentages in the mid-teens. Alabama, Kansas and Nebraska are all at 10%. Michigan, with the fifth-highest percentage of union representation, comes in at just under 18%.

Right-to-work laws can make unions stronger by forcing them to focus on their core mission -- representing members in the workplace. Convincing employees who have a choice to join and pay dues means those dues will be better spent on their intended purpose.

Forcing an employee to pay a union an agency fee is at odds with the qualities that Americans have embraced for generations, including liberty and the freedom of association. Under a right-to-work law, unions would still be able to represent workers and organize new workers, but individuals would have the right to say "no, thank you" to fees if they so choose.

Ted O'Neil is media relations manager and F. Vincent Vernuccio is director of labor policy at the [Mackinac Center for Public Policy](#) in Midland.