

## “PROTECT OUR JOBS” BALLOT PROPOSAL IS POLITICAL, ALLEGE MICHIGAN LAWMAKERS



The union coalition that is in favor of the “Protect Our Jobs” ballot says that it is important to protect bargaining to make it certain that the teachers are suitably trained. Unions have so far contributed \$8 million to the ballot question, which would make bargaining mandatory in the state constitution and help remove around 80 laws that targeted organized labor. Some of the methods used to decide which teachers would be laid off bordered on the ridiculous. Whilst some school districts determined layoffs on the basis of seniority, the Ann Arbor Public Schools, took it to the extreme, to use the ‘randomness of Social Security numbers as a tie breaker’ if an identical situation arose and they were indecisive about which teacher to remove. Even as the National Education Association is calling for teachers to become more alert and proficient in their profession, the “Protect Our Jobs” ballot would undo teacher reform laws, backed by former Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Michigan Education Association. Dan Lijana, a spokesman for “Protect Our Jobs,” said that one of the things that the unions were seeking for in the negotiations was time off for state-required teacher training. “People are looking for protection from the corporate special interests and Lansing politicians,” he said. “People want to protect workers’ fair wages and benefits.” He said that continued teacher training was good and research showed that having a skilled, experienced teacher can impact a student’s quality and preparedness, so much so that it will increase his earning capacity, once he enters the employment world. He said that an experienced teacher “can have a measurable impact on student achievement, and that ongoing training pays big dividend for students and communities alike. A slightly above average teacher can increase the present value of future earnings of a class of 20 students by more than \$400,000 compared to an average teacher.” Lijana said that the importance of collective bargaining was that it gave the teachers a platform to voice their opinions and express what they feel is the best way to teach the children. “It allows them to have a say on class size, helps them carve out the time necessary for the ongoing professional development required by law, and gives them input into the content of those trainings. It also helps them get fair wages, benefits and protection from arbitrary decisions by school boards or district officials,” he said. Ethel Johnson, a 30-year-old teacher from Flint, echoed similar sentiments and said that as a teacher she would love to be able to negotiate the size of the class she wants. She said that it helps to monitor the class and pay specific attention to the exact needs of every student. “Studies show a link between student achievement and small class sizes, and I know from personal experience that some students require one-on-one attention,” she said. Lijana said that there was worth in their demand for collective bargaining. Making a stand for his statement he said that ACT and SAT scores were the poorest in States, South Carolina, Georgia, Texas, North Carolina and Virginia, where collective bargaining for teachers is not permitted. Analysts say that if the “Protect Our Jobs” initiative is passed, union contracts would become more authoritative and influential than state laws. They would make it practically impossible to remove bad teachers. MEA President Iris Salters said in January 2011, “No one wants or can afford ineffective teachers. That’s why the MEA’s plan calls for streamlining the process for fair dismissal of ineffective tenured teachers, making it less costly and less time-consuming.” Salters said in January 2011. Patrick Wright, senior legal counsel for the Mackinac Center, said teacher reform laws would be made irrelevant. “Union contracts would take precedence over the laws,” Wright said. Those who are opposing the ballot proposal say that all the money that is being collected is an attempt on part of the unions to circumvent the Legislature, following Democrats’ losses across the nation in the 2010 elections. Rich Studley, president and CEO of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, said on Wednesday that unions had faced humiliation when their attempts to recall Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, failed. It is worth noting that both Governors had pushed school reforms. He alleged that the money would be used to try and defeat Gov. Rick Snyder as he seeks re-election in 2014. “Rick Snyder scares the hell out of the union bosses,” Studley said. “The public employees are angry that he reformed tenure and made them contribute more toward their health care. This is partially about giving Rick Snyder a black eye and halt his agenda of reinventing Michigan.” “This effort is a jobs killer and bad public policy,” he said. “It’s part of a strategy to stop Michigan from being reinvented.”