

Union Czars Bully Volunteer Firefighters

And Measure Pending in Senate Would Further Empower Union Officials

For many years, officers of International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF/AFL-CIO) union subsidiaries have used threats, fines and expulsions to deter the union rank and file from serving their own communities as volunteer firefighters when they aren't on the job.

And the constitution of the IAFF itself explicitly states that a firefighter may be reprimanded, fined, removed from union office, suspended, or expelled for acquiring or maintaining membership in any "rival" organization, "including volunteer fire departments or associations."

In recent years, officers of IAFF subsidiaries in localities like Ft. Wayne, Ind., West Allis, Wisc., and all the major cities in Connecticut have wielded their monopoly-bargaining power to negotiate contract provisions that prohibit all professional firemen, union members and nonmembers alike, from volunteering.

Fig-Leaf H.R.980 Provision Is 'Brazenly Deceptive,' Even by D.C. Standards

Just this February, the legislative director of the IAFF's statewide affiliate in the Nutmeg State was the only witness at a state capitol hearing to oppose legislation (H.B.6927) that would have stricken anti-volunteer provisions from union contracts.

The measure enjoyed strong bipartisan support in the Connecticut Legislature, but ultimately died without a floor vote, apparently because of union officials' virulent antagonism.

This fall, IAFF and other union lobbyists are campaigning hard to push through the U.S. Senate H.R.980, a House-passed bill that would hand the IAFF even more power to punish "two-hatters," unionized firefighters who volunteer as unpaid firefighters in their local communities during their days off work.

(H.R.980 would establish a new federal mandate imposing union monopoly bargaining on state and local firefighters and other public-safety officers in all 50 states. For more details about this legislation, see page one.)

But IAFF President Harold Schaitberger and his lieutenants know from their previous, unsuccessful attempts to steamroll similar legislation through Congress that public concerns

about the harmful impact H.R.980 would have on two-hatters could put an extra spoke in their wheel this year.

That's why union strategists and their congressional allies have tacked onto the bill a fig-leaf provision that purports to "protect" volunteer firefighting, but actually would do nothing to forestall IAFF bosses' intensifying attacks on two-hatters.

The phony provision states that nothing in H.R.980 "shall be construed" to permit "parties subject to the National Labor Relations Act . . . to negotiate provisions that would prohibit an employee from engaging in part-time employment or volunteer activities during off-duty hours."

The fact is, no employees whatsoever are protected by this provision. As it clearly states, it affects only "parties subject to the National Labor Relations Act." State and local public-safety employees are government employees and not subject to the NLRA.

Under H.R.980, if a state passes a new public-safety labor law to comply with the federal mandate for monopoly bargaining, the public-safety employees will be subject to state law, not the NLRA.

And if a state without monopoly bargaining refuses to pass a new public-safety labor law, H.R.980 provides that the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) will regulate labor-management relations for that state's public-safety employees.

Those employees will be subject to regulations issued by the FLRA, not the NLRA. Thus, the provision in H.R.980 that supposedly protects public-safety employees' right to volunteer won't protect them at all.

"The supposedly 'pro-volunteer' provision is brazenly deceptive, even according to the norms that prevail inside the D.C. Beltway," commented Doug Stafford, vice president of the National Right to Work Committee.

H.R.980 'Presents a Serious Threat to Firefighters' Freedom to Volunteer'

"IAFF officials have established a record of installing anti-volunteer provisions in union contracts wherever they can," continued Mr. Stafford.

"And H.R.980 is expressly designed in part to hand IAFF and other public-safety union bosses monopoly control



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Ben Franklin introduced volunteer firefighting in America; Congress may help IAFF czars wipe it out.

over the employee side in contract negotiations in the thousands of localities across America where they don't already possess such control.

"Given these facts, H.R.980 clearly presents a serious threat to firefighters' freedom to volunteer.

"It may be too much to expect Harold Schaitberger and his inside-the-D.C. Beltway operatives to admit that a key reason they want H.R.980 enacted is that it would enhance their ability to crack down on two-hatters and, ultimately, shut down thousands of volunteer departments."

Supporters of H.R.980 Should at Least be Candid

"But American citizens have a right to expect more candor from their elected officials," insisted Mr. Stafford.

"When H.R.980, or companion legislation with similar or identical provisions, comes to the Senate floor, proponents should at least acknowledge that it will cause firefighter union contracts with anti-volunteer provisions, of the sort that are already typical in Connecticut, to proliferate nationwide.

"And then the pro-H.R.980 senators can try to explain why that's an acceptable price to pay in order to institute a federal mandate for public-safety monopoly bargaining."