

# The Detroit News

THE FINAL WORD

## **Editorial: Free workers by passing federal right-to-work law**

When labor unions were still relevant, Labor Day was a holiday of union-sponsored parades and picnic a chance to pause from the daily grind and celebrate the strength of solidarity.

But today, most people won't even think about labor unions as they go about enjoying what for all practical purposes is the last day of summer. That's because most American workers don't belong to a union and never have. Nor do they want to.

Just 12 percent of employees in the United States are union members. That's down from 20 percent in 1983 and is falling steadily. The loss of manufacturing jobs certainly has hurt Big Labor.

But so has its inability to connect with workers employed outside of factories and government offices.

Today's worker is more independent, more mobile and more comfortable interacting with his or her employer as an individual, rather than as part of a collective bargaining unit.

Still, too many workers are trapped against their will in unions they were forced to join by state and federal laws that support compulsory union membership and automatic dues deductions.

With Congress now under Democratic control, efforts have stepped up to strengthen those laws and undermine the ability of states to pass right-to-work legislation, which allows workers a choice in whether or not they join the union. Currently, 22 states have right-to-work laws.

Michigan should join them. Freeing workers from compulsory union membership would send an important signal that Big Labor no longer dictates policy and controls politics in Michigan.

The economies of the right-to-work states are growing far faster than the rest of the nation. That alone should be incentive for the state to modernize its labor laws.

As for Congress, instead of limiting the ability of states to protect workers from union conscription, it would do better to pass the National Right to Work Act that has been introduced several times, but without success.

Workers who want to join a union should have that right. But workers who don't want to join should have their rights respected, too.