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OUR EDITORIAL

Editorial: Home caregivers say good riddance to union

Now that they aren't trapped in SEIU, vast majority of Michigan home health workers opt out of membership

Two new Michigan laws settled a seven-year dispute over whether home-based caregivers should have had to pay dues to the Service Employees International Union. Now that they have a choice, union members have exited in massive numbers, evidence most of them didn't want to be part of the union in the first place.

That's a fitting end to this story. A federal report filed by SEIU Healthcare Michigan earlier this month shows that around 44,000 members have left the union, meaning 80 percent of the union's members have opted out. At the end of 2012, the union had reported more than 55,000 members.

These individuals had no business being in a union. They are largely family members and friends who stay at home to care for loved ones. But a scheme orchestrated under the Granholm administration "organized" these caregivers in a mail election many of them didn't participate in or even know about.

A decade ago, the SEIU went after the Medicaid checks of Michigan participants in the federal Home Help Program, which gives elderly and disabled individuals the option of receiving care in their homes instead of an outside facility.

Since the money first passed through the state, the Granholm administration and the SEIU created a "shell" employer for the caregivers and labeled them state employees — even though they don't get benefits from the state and weren't on the state payroll.

Forcing these caregivers to pay dues greatly increased membership for the SEIU. Over seven years, the SEIU funneled more than \$34 million from the assistance checks of the elderly and disabled.

The union offered no benefits to these caregivers, as the SEIU couldn't bargain for their wages or benefits and had no say in their working conditions. But that didn't stop the union from taking \$6 million a year from these often financially strapped individuals.

In April 2012, Gov. Rick Snyder signed legislation barring the unionization of home-based caregivers because they are not state employees. Yet the SEIU finagled its way into collect-



(Todd McInturf / The Detroit News)

Home health care workers are no longer forced to contribute to labor unions.

ing dues for months after that by extending the home health care contract. Later that year, the union sought to repeal the law with a ballot proposal that would have locked the forced unionization into the state constitution. Voters soundly defeated that proposal.

Union members were finally released on March 1, 2013, when the law took effect. And Michigan's right-to-work law, effective that same month, added extra protections against such forced unionization.

The roughly 11,000 who remain in the SEIU are employees at private medical facilities who joined the union through traditional organizing drives, according to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, which drew attention to the plight of these home health workers and continues to fight for the return of some of the money taken from them.

The thousands of home health care workers who are no longer paying dues should never have been forced to do so. One benefit of right to work is that it will prevent that kind of stealth unionization from happening again.