



*A Union of Professionals*

## **RIGHT-TO-WORK LAWS AND EFFORTS TO KILL AGENCY FEE/FAIR SHARE**

- Why do right-wing governors and others push for right-to-work legislation and an end to agency fee (which is a small amount paid by nonunion members who are covered under the collective bargaining agreement)? Because they want to silence workers and take away their voice—that is, their power. They know that when the link between the union and its workers, and between the employer and the worker, is disconnected, they can break the back of unions.
- Over the past several decades, the labor movement has helped create shared, broad-based prosperity. There has been a clear relationship between the strength of unions and the strength of the middle class. From the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s, when union density in America was at its peak, real wages for nonmanagerial employees rose by 75 percent. From 1979 to 2006, when union density collapsed, real wages for nonmanagerial workers rose by only 4 percent. Broadly shared prosperity will remain elusive as long as workers' buying power is limited.
- Today, while the wealthiest 10 percent have reaped the benefits of income gains, the rest are dealing with stagnant wages. IRS data shows that over the past 20 years—from 1993 to 2013—income grew a whopping 62 percent for the top 1 percent of earners, but just 7 percent for the remaining 99 percent. Putting it another way, since 1997, all income gains have gone to the top 10 percent, and, of those gains, the vast majority—70 percent—went to the top 1 percent. What does this show? Workers need a voice on the job.
- The way to beat this inequity is to strengthen our unions. This isn't about building power for power's sake; it's about leveraging that power for children, families and communities.
- When workers have less money in their pockets, they spend less in their communities—and everyone suffers. That feeds the decline of the middle class.
- Right-to-work laws and efforts to kill agency fee stack the deck in favor of the employer, not the worker. Without a union, workers don't have the ability to negotiate for decent wages and working conditions or to promote safety and quality issues.

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The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of 1.6 million professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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