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Summary:

A new public opinion poll shows Americans overwhelmingly believe workers should have the right to decide whether to join or leave a union without force or penalty. 84% of Oregon respondents agree.

Word Count 584

“Forced union dues are on the political front burner this year because of the recent Harris v. Quinn U.S. Supreme Court decision. It favored...home care workers who don’t want to join a public employee union or pay dues just because their services are paid for with state funds.”

Eight Out of Ten Oregonians Agree: *Let employees choose whether or not to join a union or pay union dues*

By Steve Buckstein

Because of [a deal struck](#) by Governor John Kitzhaber, Oregonians won’t have the opportunity to end forced union dues in the public sector this year. However, a just-released public opinion poll makes it clear that if the [Public Employee Choice Act](#) had been on this November’s ballot, most voters likely would have supported it.

The poll, conducted for [National Employee Freedom Week](#) (August 10-16) asked adults across America:

“Should employees have the right to decide, without force or penalty, whether to join or leave a labor union?”

Nationwide, 82.9 percent of respondents answered Yes. Of the 500 respondents in Oregon, a resounding 84 percent answered Yes.*

These results are significant because Oregon and twenty-five other states require workers to pay so-called “fair share” dues even if they decline union membership and refuse to pay the political portion of union dues. The other 24 states have taken advantage of federal Right to Work law that lets workers choose not to pay any dues at all if they decline to join a union. The federal government also prohibits forced union dues in its own workplaces; yet unions still represent some federal workers, and they represent workers in Right to Work states who voluntarily choose to join.

Forced union dues are on the political front burner this year because of the recent *Harris v. Quinn* U.S. Supreme Court decision. It favored certain Illinois home care workers who don’t want to join a public employee union or pay dues just because their services are paid for with state funds. While the ruling may be narrowly interpreted, it did cause two of Oregon’s largest public employee unions to [stop collecting](#) fair share dues from some ten thousand home and child care workers in this state who have chosen not to join their ranks.

Unions claim that such workers should pay fair share dues because the unions are currently required to bargain for and represent them even if they decline union membership. But that is not the fault of those workers, and the unions haven’t seemed to mind as long as their dues money kept flowing.



Unions also claim that without their representation, workers would see their pay and benefits decline. But, after union stronghold Michigan became the latest Right to Work state in December 2012, [per-capita personal income actually rose](#) from \$38,291 in 2012 to \$39,215 in 2013, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Economic Analysis. That was the ninth highest increase in the country.

Why do workers want to opt out of union membership and all union dues? Some think they have better uses for their own money. Some want to “vote with their feet” against what they see as poor union service or negotiating results. Still others oppose their unions’ political agendas. They simply don’t want to support any organization that doesn’t share their political beliefs, whatever those might be.

The right to work without third-party interference is more than an economic issue; it is a profoundly moral one as well. No one should be compelled to pay union dues in order to hold a job. Hopefully, Oregon will soon grant true employee choice to every worker in our state.

* Last year’s National Employee Freedom Week poll asked union households, “If it were possible to opt out of membership in a labor union without losing your job or any other penalty, would you do it?”

The results were released in this June 2013 Cascade Commentary: [More than thirty percent of Oregon union households want out.](#)

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