

January 22, 2012

## Line of Scrimmage Forms Over Union Bill

By MONICA DAVEY

INDIANAPOLIS — This city is in full preen for its moment in the spotlight, [its first Super Bowl](#). Everywhere, workers sprouted from cherry pickers over the weekend, hanging football banners from signposts, windows, buildings. The constant beeping of machinery backing up filled the air as an 800-foot zip line was built in a Super Bowl Village that is emerging downtown. And right outside the Statehouse, the intersection formally known as Capitol and Washington has fancy new [honorary street signs](#) — Dolphins Drive and Browns Boardwalk.

But inside the Statehouse, people are consumed by something else entirely: a partisan fight over union strength has boiled over. The standoff, three weeks old, is over whether Indiana should become the first state in the Midwest manufacturing belt to adopt legislation banning union contracts from requiring nonunion members to pay fees for representation. And it threatens to linger even as the national attention on the Super Bowl arrives — a possibility that Indiana Republicans want to avoid but that some union supporters seem to be hoping for.

“It’s a forum for this to get out beyond the state of Indiana, for the world to know what’s happening to workers here in Indiana,” said Mike Gillespie, business representative of Local 135 of the Teamsters Union, who stood in a crowd of union supporters inside the Statehouse. He wore a T-shirt that bore the numerals of the Super Bowl, XLVI, with a slash through them, a message people here interpreted in various ways.

At times in recent days, the chants of protesters — who say the legislation, known as a “right to work” bill, will result in lower wages and weakened unions — have echoed through the rotunda: “Occupy the Super Bowl!” Some say they want to hold marches, slow down beer deliveries or hand out leaflets in the Super Bowl crowd, while others have hinted at more drastic measures.

Still uncertain is what form a protest might take, union leaders say. Jeff Harris, a spokesman for the Indiana A.F.L.-C.I.O., said that he knew of no particular plans for protests at the game on Feb. 5 or in the 10 days of formal celebration leading up to it, but that “a lot of moving parts” remained.

And for those who have been preparing Indianapolis for the Super Bowl since it was awarded four years ago, the prospect was worrisome.

Communications Workers of America Local 4250  
3055 Glenwood-Dyer Road, Lynwood, Illinois 60411  
Elizabeth R. VanDerWoude, President (708) 757-4065 (Office)  
[evp4250@sbcglobal.net](mailto:evp4250@sbcglobal.net) (E-Mail)  
<http://www.cwalocal4250.org> (Website)

“We had known from the start that there was a remote possibility that some extreme opponents might try to leverage this, but now it’s being pretty openly threatened,” said Brian Bosma, the Republican speaker of the House, who says the right-to-work legislation will improve Indiana’s ability to recruit new businesses. “It would be a horrible mistake to use the Super Bowl in this way, and I think it would backfire terribly.”

Through the debate, the Super Bowl has always loomed in the background. Democrats accused Republicans, who dominate both chambers of the legislature and control the governor’s office, of trying to rush the measure through in the first days of the session. That way, it would be long resolved by the time thousands of people, including the National Football League Players Association, which has issued a [statement](#) opposing the legislation, began arriving. And Republicans accused Democrats, who hold enough seats in the House to prevent a quorum, of refusing to come to the floor for about six days over the last three weeks, in part to try to stall the discussion until a Super Bowl crowd was on hand.

Republicans outnumber Democrats 37 to 13 in the State Senate and 60 to 40 in the House, and say they have the votes to pass the measure. That would make Indiana the first state in a decade to take such a step and might embolden some other state legislatures to follow suit. But actually getting the measure to a vote has been more complicated.

Here, the back-and-forth has grown remarkably tense as game day grows ever closer. During an annual State of the State address this month by Gov. Mitch Daniels, a Republican who favors the right-to-work bill, protesters hollered in the hallways and some Democrats did not attend. Republicans accused Democrats of breaking promises that they would come to the House floor and began passing \$1,000-a-day fines against each missing Democrat. And Democrats went to court to try to block the fines.

By Friday, to the groans of Republicans, many House Democrats stayed away again, but they said they would return on Monday, as long as an amendment putting the question before voters in a referendum is then considered. The Democrats insisted that their latest absences from the House floor were not intentional delaying tactics, but were needed to wait for details of legal terminology for an amendment that could allow a statewide vote.

“Unless they put more clouds on the legislation, we’ll be there Monday,” Representative B. Patrick Bauer, the minority leader, said in an interview on Friday. The State Senate rejected

amendments on Friday, and Republicans say the bill is now on track to be approved next week — well before the Super Bowl.

But by now, the issue itself seems unlikely to fade by Friday when the flurry of pre-Super Bowl parties begins here in earnest. And that was creating an odd combination of moods: partisan fury inside the Statehouse and cheery anticipation on the streets.

City officials and a city Super Bowl host committee said they were focused on completing the final touches for the celebration — building stages, planning parties, redirecting traffic from blocked-off streets — and were not particularly fixated on the questions hanging over the Statehouse. That said, all were aware of the fight.

“That’s a legislative issue,” said Marc Lotter, a spokesman for Greg Ballard, the Republican mayor of Indianapolis. “If it becomes an issue, we’ll rely on the appropriate officials to address it.”