

Some say outsourcing bill is watered down

By Alexis Grant Medill News Service

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Some Illinois lawmakers have joined the fight against overseas outsourcing, but critics say they're pulling their punches.

The House is to vote this month on a Senate-passed bill that would require companies doing state work to disclose what portion is done overseas.

It's a watered-down version of a bill introduced by Sen. Carol Ronen, a Chicago Democrat, which would have required that all state contract work be done by U.S. workers.

The bill was passed by the Senate in March.

At least 36 states have similar bills pending, according to the National Foundation for American Policy, a non-partisan think tank.

"It's a political reaction to concerns about jobs" being sent overseas, said Stuart Anderson, executive director.

An analysis of bills to restrict or ban outsourcing by Anderson's group concluded they may violate the Constitution and jeopardize obligations under trade agreements.

"If each state did this, you would have different states making their own foreign policy," he said. "The whole U.S. could suffer trade retaliation."

Anderson said the Illinois bill would likely be constitutional because it would only monitor outsourcing, not prevent it.

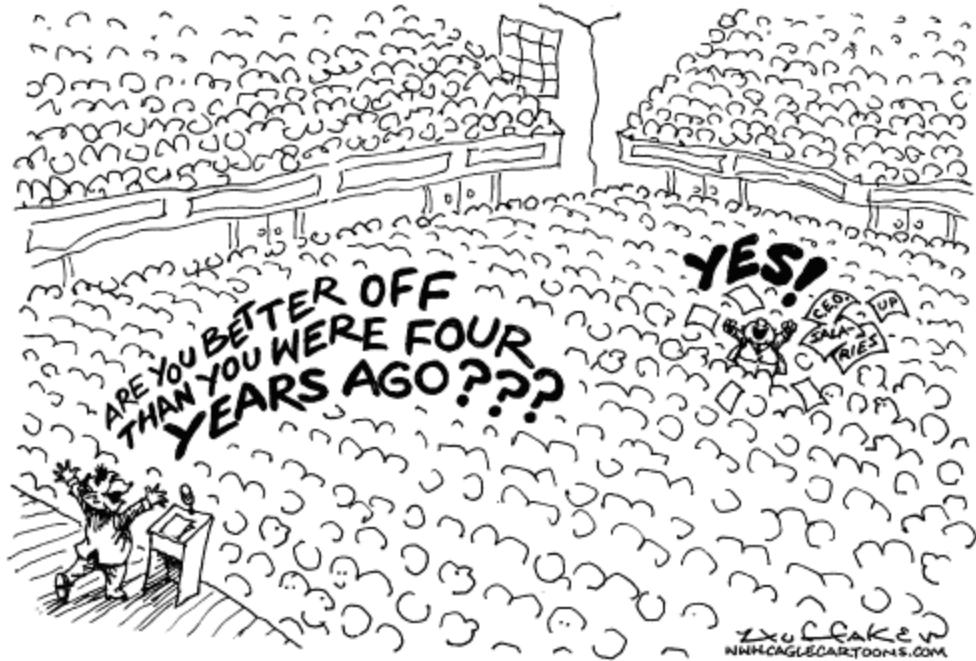
But some union leaders say that's just the problem.

The amended bill "really has no teeth," said Steve Tisza, president of Communications Workers of America Local 4250 in Chicago. "It doesn't mean anything."

Indiana, Tennessee and Maryland recently passed legislation giving in-state companies preference for state work. Bills to keep jobs in the U.S. are also pending in Congress. Other anti-outsourcing bills are stuck in committees.

Some people argue that no amount of legislation will prevent outsourcing.

"The globalization of the economy and the labor markets is a tide that is going to be very hard to put up some wall to stop," said John Challenger, chief executive officer of Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc., a global outplacement firm in Chicago. Erecting trade barriers "may damage our ability to tap into that global economy."



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**Steve Tisza, President
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