

‘Open for business’: Indiana House OKs Right-To-Work, poised to be 23rd state with labor ban

By Associated Press, Updated: Wednesday, January 25, 3:23 PM

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana’s Republican-controlled House of Representatives cleared the way Wednesday to become the first right-to-work state in a traditionally union-heavy Rust Belt increasingly targeted by non-union foes.

The House voted 54-44 to make Indiana the nation’s 23rd right-to-work state after Democrats ended a periodic boycott which had stalled the measure for weeks. The measure is expected to face little opposition in Indiana’s Republican-controlled Senate and could reach Republican Gov. Mitch Daniels’ desk shortly before the Feb. 5 Super Bowl in Indianapolis.

“This announces especially in the Rust Belt, that we are open for business here,” Republican House Speaker Brian Bosma said of the right-to-work proposal that would ban unions from collecting mandatory representation fees from workers.

But Republicans have struggled with similar anti-union measures in other Rust-Belt states like Wisconsin and Ohio where they have faced a massive backlash. Ohio voters overturned Gov. John Kasich’s labor measures last November and union activists delivered roughly 1 million petitions last week in an effort to recall Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker.

Indiana would mark the first win in 10 years for national right-to-work advocates who have pushed unsuccessfully for the measure in other states following a Republican sweep of statehouses in 2010.

Hundreds of union protesters packed the halls of the Statehouse again Wednesday, chanting “Kill the Bill!” and cheering Democrats who had stalled the measure since the start of the year.

“We did better than anybody ever expected,” House Minority Leader Patrick Bauer told The Associated Press before debate began on the issue, adding that outnumbered Democrats fought the best they could in the divisive labor battle.

Republicans foreshadowed their strong showing Monday when they shot down a series of Democratic amendments to the measure in strict party-line votes. Democrats boycotted again for an eighth day

Republicans handily outnumber Democrats in the House 60-40, but Democrats have just enough members to deny the Republicans the 67 votes needed to achieve a quorum and conduct any business. Bosma began fining boycotting Democrats \$1,000 a day last week, but a Marion County judge has blocked the collection of those fines.

The measure now moves to the Indiana Senate which approved its own right-to-work measure earlier in the week. Gov. Mitch Daniels has campaigned extensively for the bill and said he would sign it into law.

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