

## *Introduction to H.772*

I want to thank the committee and Madame Chair for inviting me in today to speak with you about H.772, the Right to Work Act, and I'd like to thank our Legislative Council, Dave Huber, who helped craft the bill. It is a privilege for me to be with you and to share with you the reasons why I sponsored this bill and to tell you why I think it is important legislation for our state.

Nine years ago my son, Marine Sgt. Jesse Strong, gave the ultimate sacrifice for freedom for our country and for the Iraqi people while he was on a night mission to help protect the polls for the first free Iraqi election. His sacrifice has shown me how precious our freedoms truly are, and what the responsibility and cost of that freedom is for every generation to protect. Knowing personally the deep cost of our freedom, I have a passion to see it made available for all.

H.772, the Right to Work Act, allows freedom of choice for workers in the workplace to associate with, or NOT to associate with labor unions. Our state laws currently recognize the right to join a labor union, but they do almost nothing to protect those who don't want labor union affiliation. The freedom to associate given to us in our constitution also implies the freedom not to associate. Any genuine personal right should include the freedom to refrain from exercising that right. If a worker's freedom to affiliate with a labor union merits government protection – and the overwhelming consensus says that it does – then it should also follow that the freedom not to affiliate with a labor union also merits that same protection.

Today in our state, that right to refrain from associating is not protected. There are 31,000 workers in Vermont who have jobs in a workplace where they may feel pressured to join a union, feel looked down upon if they do not join, and may be

obligated to pay dues or fees to an organization that they do not wish to support. These workers may also fear that if they oppose paying these dues or fees they may lose their job or not be hired for a job that they are qualified for.

People should not be forced to contribute to, or pay dues to, an organization that they do not wish to associate with, whether it is a church, the Girl Scouts, or a labor union. The Right to Work Act opens the door of freedom not to associate by securing the right of workers to decide for themselves without fear whether or not to join or financially support a union.

Studies show that the 24 states in our country that have adopted a Right to Work statute see more job creation, attract more jobs to their state, have more vibrant economies, higher personal income growth, lower levels of poverty, and less dependence on the welfare system. Research also shows that this is not a partisan issue. Both Democrat and Republican states alike have become Right to Work states, two of the most recent states being Michigan and Indiana. If Vermont becomes a Right to Work state, we would be the first state in New England to embrace this legislation and it would give us an economic advantage in these fiscally challenging times.

Vermont is known for its independence and for wanting to lead the way in new protections for the rights of its citizens. Right to Work laws are an increasing topic in states across the country, and we can join that conversation and lead the way in being an example of giving our workers full rights in the workplace.

In the interests of the rights of the working men and women of Vermont, of sound public policy and of basic fairness, it is a good time to create true freedom in the workplace through this type of legislation. I want to thank the committee again for giving me your time and for considering this legislation.