

Commission discusses development, involuntary payments of county employees

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 01 February 2019 10:22



The McKinley County Board of Commissioners held the second reading of the county's Right to Work ordinance at the Jan. 22 regular meeting. It was previously discussed at the Jan. 3 special meeting.

The ordinance relates to the promotion of economic development and commerce by regulation of certain involuntary payments required of McKinley County employees. Commissioner Bill Lee spoke for the item.

The State of New Mexico has not decided on a type of bargaining chip that unions have during bargaining, Doug Decker said in a Jan. 24 phone call. In some areas, they have a closed shop or a mandatory dues deduction.

"The ordinance says we're not going to force anybody to have a payroll deduction unless they choose to have it," Decker said, during the call. "This will allow them to choose whether they want to join the bargaining unit or not."

When a union organizes a collective bargaining unit, they have all the qualified employees from that unit be potential dues-paying members. Such as the Sheriff's Deputy union, where all qualifying union members are in the collective bargaining union. Employees have to make a

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choice to join the union and then pay their dues, usually through a payroll deduction.

A closed shop or union shop means that once you're in the bargaining union, the members of the collective bargaining unit are forced to pay a portion of the dues because they have that job.

Passing the ordinance would allow the employees the right to be able to choose if they want to join the unions, Decker said.

A similar ordinance was passed by Sandoval County in 2018. By adopting it, workers in Sandoval County are not required to pay union dues, but the union representatives can serve as negotiators between workers and their employers.

In addition to the reading, there was a public hearing and opportunity to speak on the item from members of the audience. Several people stood up to voice their concerns about the ramifications of the ordinance, including the impact on local workers' unions and job opportunities.

Anthony Burrola was one of these people, discussing how it will affect local workers. He said that every employee in the region desires fair pay, pensions, and a safe working environment.

"[The workers] deserve it, so let's not just settle for less," Burrola said.

Other speakers mentioned adopting the ordinance and proceeding with it would be good for the state and its workers. Some said it could lead to more opportunities for fair employment, and fewer chances to be underemployed.

Several people also brought up the local unions and how they are not providing what they have promised to their members, and how that could be influenced by choosing to adopt the ordinance.

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Sandoval County Commissioner Jay Block was present at the meeting to voice his input on the item, and he shared how New Mexico has routinely ended up near the bottom of national rankings of states with the lowest employment and wages.

“[We are] tired of people suffering from low wages and underemployment,” he said during his window to speak to the commission.

The argument was made by several speakers that denying the employee’s ability to join in the bargaining process would decrease their voice, and anything that will decrease the workers’ voice cannot be good for either the workers or the state.

After the citizens finished speaking, Commissioner Bill Lee addressed the room.

“To me, this all seems like a matter of having the right to choose [to join],” Lee said, specifically about the local unions. “If they are good, then you should be able to support them. If they are not, then you should be able to not support them.”

Lee said that moving forward and finding new ways to address employment and wages in the state is good because “the status quo is not working.”

The item was approved with a 2-1 vote.

By Cody Begaye
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