

Taking the High Road

With new power to maintain or eliminate longstanding labor agreements, many public employers – large and small - are standing up for their workers.



In many cities, counties, and school districts across Iowa, public officials are making choices this spring that will have a profound impact on the future of public services and workers' rights.

A 2017 state law gives public employers broad new discretion in union negotiations with teachers, snowplow drivers, school secretaries, and other public workers. Under previous law, public employers were required to negotiate with workers over a specific list of workplace issues; now, the only required topic of bargaining is base wages. Most other topics are considered "permissive" – employers can *agree* or *refuse* to negotiate over other workplace issues. Some employers have taken this opportunity to eliminate every provision except base pay from existing labor agreements, and are refusing to negotiate over other topics. However, many public employers – large and small, urban and rural, Democratic and Republican – are opting to maintain the contracts they have established through years of dialogue, and are continuing to negotiate with employees on a range of workplace issues.

Why are so many public employers preserving collective bargaining?

To Recruit and Retain Quality Employees



"As President of the Lawton-Bronson School Board it was an easy decision to keep all permissive language in the contract. Our teachers negotiated those items in good faith and our board believed it was good faith to allow them to keep them. Our small district may not outpace larger districts in some recruitment areas, but we believe our commitment to mutually respectful decision-making helps recruit and retain quality staff."

-Rick Scott, President, Lawton-Bronson School Board

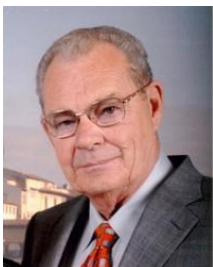
For Quality Public Services

"Quality public services result when workers have input into how things are done. No one knows more than the people on the front line. Why would an employer choose to ignore the things employees care about? If you want a happy, healthy, committed workforce you need to bargain on the issues important to workers."

-Rod Sullivan, Johnson County Supervisor



Because Cooperation Improves Morale and Productivity



"When you cooperate with employees and let them know they are important, you get so much more work for the city dollar; it just pays itself back. If you cut your workers down, that's what you get in return. Think about what it costs to train a new person versus the knowledge our 20-year veterans have. We have great cooperation with our council, mayor, and workers. I don't want anything changed. It has to be a 2-way street."

-Gene Walker, Council Member, City of Evansdale

What are examples of the issues at stake?

Under current law, the "mandatory" topic of base wages must be discussed in negotiations. A few topics are "prohibited" from union contracts (including pensions and health insurance).

Any topic not expressly prohibited is called a "permissive" topic that CAN be negotiated, if both sides mutually agree. Examples could include:

- Hours and work schedules
- Pay increases for current workers
- Breaks and lunch periods
- Incentive pay for certain shifts, duties, years of service
- Vacation, sick leave, bereavement leave, holidays, or other time off
- Grievance procedures for resolving workplace problems
- Due process in discipline
- Health and safety provisions
- ...many other working conditions

Public employers across Iowa are agreeing to keep “permissive” topics in their union contracts.

This map represents a small fraction of the hundreds of schools, cities, and counties that agreed to extend existing union contracts prior to passage of the 2017 law, or have opted to continue to bargain collectively with employees on a range of topics.

