

Michigan on verge of becoming right-to-work state as lawmakers cast historic vote

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By [Tim Martin](#)

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LANSING, MI – Michigan – home of the United Auto Workers and still a union stronghold compared to most other states – is poised to become the nation’s 24th right-to-work state.

As protests raged outside the Capitol, the Republican-led Michigan House approved the first of two historic bills Tuesday that would prohibit requiring payment of union dues as a condition of employment.

House Speaker Jase Bolger said the measure is “pro-worker” -- not anti-union.

“This is not about Republicans versus Democrats,” said Bolger, R-Marshall. “This is not about management versus labor. ... This is not about the past. This is about the future. ... Today is a game-changer – for Michigan, for its workers, and for our future.”

In the first vote, the House made dues payments optional for members of most public-sector unions, 58-51. A second vote doing the same for private-sector workers was to follow.

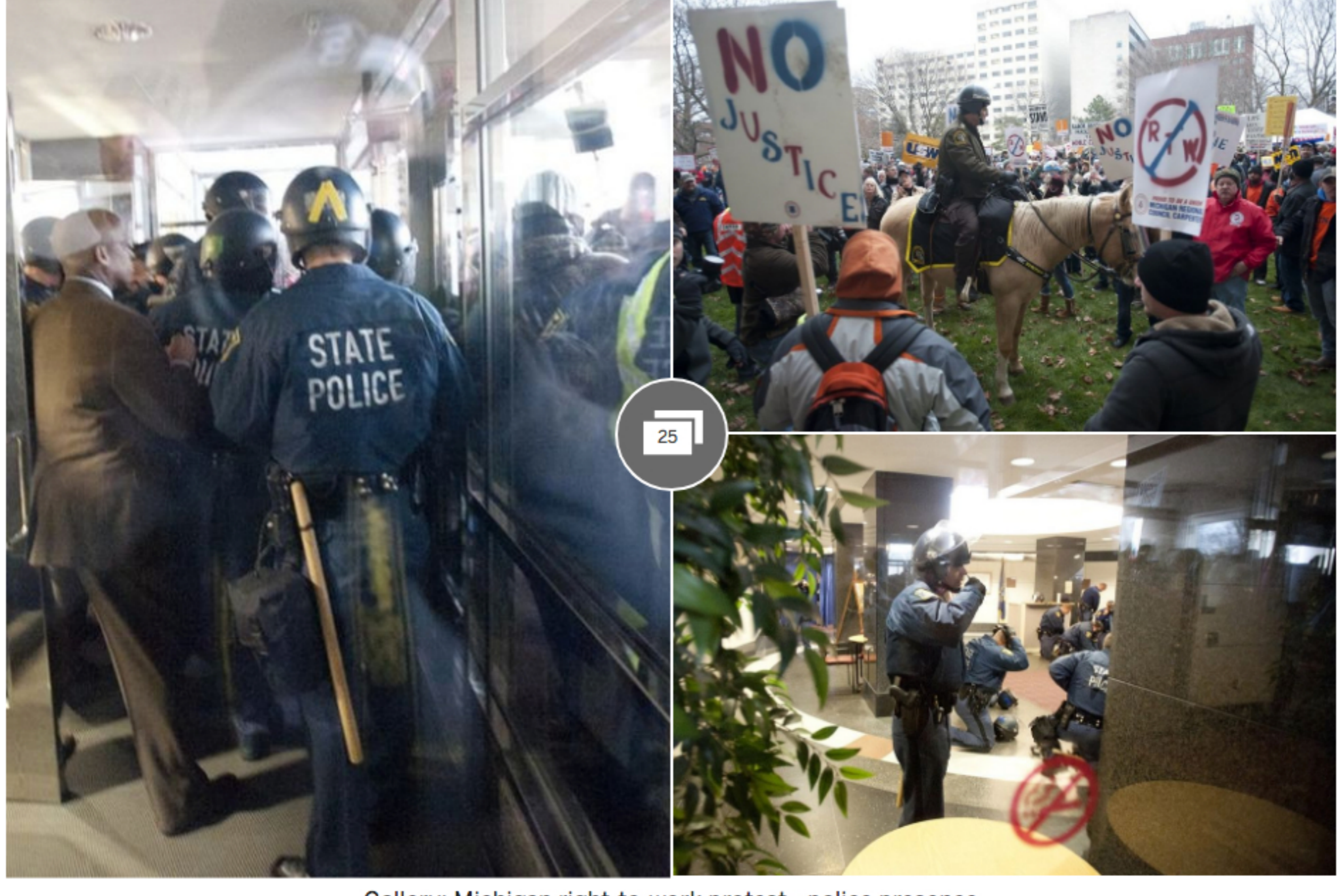
Democrats predicted dire repercussions, as the chanting of protesters outside the House chamber could be heard.

“As we can see from the spectacle outside, this a very divisive issue for our state,” said Rep. Tim Greimel of Auburn Hills, who will be the leader of House Democrats next year.

“This is being forced down people’s throats,” said Rep. Jon Switalski, a Democrat from Warren. “We’re left with a divided state. We’re left with people angry.”

Said Rep. Doug Geiss, D-Taylor: “This is the most divisive issue we’ve had to deal with and it will have repercussions. ... There will be blood. There will be repercussions.”

The Republican-led Senate already has approved the bills, so after certain procedural steps they will be sent to Rick Snyder – who has said he will sign them.



Gallery: Michigan right-to-work protest - police presence

Police officers and firefighters would not be included in the new provisions, allowing them to stay in closed shops. But the right-to-work measures would cover other public- and private-sector employees, making the payment of union dues optional.

[House Bill 4003](#) covers the public sector.

[Senate Bill 116](#) covers the private sector.

Democrats tried procedural moves to slow the process – but were unable to prevent the first bill from being enrolled, meaning it soon will head to Gov. Rick Snyder. They also were trying to delay the second bill.

Democrats also tried to remove an appropriation included in the bill, but failed. The \$1 million is designed to make the measures immune from being overturned by Michigan voters.

Unions worry the bills – jammed through the Legislature without committee hearings in less than a week – would lead to “freeloaders” who continue to receive the benefits of collective bargaining agreements without paying dues.

They fear that will cripple their finances and damage their power at the negotiating table. It likewise could have a ripple effect on Democratic Party candidates and causes that often rely on union money and organization.

Supporters say that becoming a right-to-work state will benefit Michigan’s economy by making it more attractive to certain businesses. Critics argue it would have the opposite impact by driving down wages.

Supporters also say workers should not be forced to contribute financially to an organization they don’t think benefits them or may spend money on causes they don’t support.

Roughly 18 percent of employed Michigan workers are represented by unions, the fifth-highest percentage in the U.S. It would be just the second state in the industrial Midwest and Northeast with right-to-work law, joining Indiana.

Indiana’s move to become a right-to-work state this year boosted momentum in Michigan. The failure in November of Proposal 2 – the union-backed measure that would have prohibited right-to-work while guaranteeing collective bargaining in the state Constitution – gave more momentum to right-to-work supporters

Snyder - who had long resisted pursuing right-to-work bills, citing the “divisiveness” – last week reversed course and bills [began to move](#). He pointed to neighboring Indiana as a reason it makes sense for Michigan to follow suit to stay competitive in attracting business investment.

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