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LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

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POLITICO

Michigan strikes right-to-work law detested by unions

Unions flexed their muscles in the state after facing setbacks over the past decade that resonated nationally

By NICK NIEDZWIADK
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In a major victory for labor unions, Michigan on Friday, March 24, 2023, became the first state in more than half a century to repeal a right-to-work law.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed legislation passed by the Democratic-controlled Legislature, overturning a 2012 GOP law that allowed workers to choose not to join unions or pay union dues as a condition of employment, even if the union represents them in negotiations.

“Michigan workers are the most talented and hard-working in the world and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect,” Whitmer, who was the Democratic leader in the state Senate at the time the right-to-work law was enacted, said in a statement.

“For us, being the home of labor and getting attacked 10 years ago was a gut punch to workers across Michigan,” state Sen. Darrin Camilleri, the sponsor of MI SB34 (23R), told POLITICO. “We are a state so steeped in union activism and union history that we knew this was a policy that our constituents wanted for the last 10 years as well.”

Even with the move, more than half the states in the country have right-to-work laws on the books.

The Michigan Legislature’s repeal is the first since Indiana did so in 1965, before reverting in 2012. (Missouri voters in 2018 blocked a right-to-work law passed by Republican lawmakers.)

Along with the right-to-work repeal, which applies to private-sector workers, Michigan lawmakers passed legislation MI HB4004 (23R) that would apply to public-sector jobs in the event the U.S. Supreme Court revisited its 2018 *Janus* decision, which held that requiring non-union public employees to pay agency fees to unions was unconstitutional.

Democrats also passed a measure reinstating prevailing wage requirements for publicly funded construction projects MI HB4007 (23R) previously repealed by the GOP.

“That’s the difference between having a legislative majority that has your back and wants to expand workers’ rights, as opposed to being in the minority and having a legislature that was to suppress workers’ rights,” Ron Bieber, the head of the Michigan AFL-CIO, said in an interview. “Michigan in 2023 is not the same as Michigan in 2012,” Bieber said. “Michigan in 2023 is not the same as Michigan in 2012,” Bieber added.