

Testimony of Martin Kich, Ph.D.  
Before the House Higher Education Committee  
Rep. Tom Young, Chair  
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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Martin Kich. I am a Professor of English at Wright State University where I have taught for 33 years. I was the president of the Wright State chapter of AAUP when we went on strike in 2018 and for most of the decade leading up to the strike. Given that concern over faculty striking seems at the core of the collective-bargaining provisions in this bill, I would like to clarify some matters related to our strike.

After months of negotiations that were very close to a complete charade involving endless delays and procedural diversions by our administration, they attempted to impose a contract that included all of their proposals to a fact-finder and completely ignored what little that factfinder had been willing to give us. The factfinder seemed persuaded by their repeated assertions that they were dealing with unprecedented and dire financial circumstances, without much acknowledgment that they themselves had created the circumstances that they were now supposedly going to resolve adeptly. The administration, with the backing of the Board of Trustees, took this obstinate stance of imposing the contract because their hired-gun attorney convinced them that we would never strike largely because--as he blurted out after a SERB hearing--in more than 20 years of negotiating contracts, he had never had a union actually strike.

Our strike succeeded not only because we had overwhelming faculty support but also because we had a tremendous amount of student and community support. With the imposed contract, the administration wanted to render us ineffectual because when they were unresponsive to our efforts over several years to convince them to reconsider and to adjust their spending priorities, we went public with our concerns--and those concerns clearly seemed very reasonable to many people both inside and outside of the university. Instead of investing in instruction, which generates almost all of the university's revenue, the administration and the Board kept looking for other "innovative" sources of income and, in the process, ran through about \$130 million in reserves in half a decade.

In order to settle the strike, our major concession was to agree to dramatic increases in healthcare costs. These increases have been most financially damaging to non-tenure-track and recently hired tenure-track faculty, as well as to most non-unionized support staff for whom the increases had simply been mandated. These increases and many other draconian financial measures, most of which have been related to instruction and instructional support, were "supposedly" needed to restore the institution's financial viability and to restore its reserves. I say "supposedly" not because the economic situation was any better than what the administration described it as being, but because

positions in the upper administration, the institutional subsidy to athletics, and a number of other areas were not cut to any equivalent degree, if they were cut at all. (The number of administrative positions and the institutional subsidy to athletics were, in fact, actually increased.)

I am not a business professor, but I'll go out on a limb and say that if our universities are supposed to be operated as businesses operate, the people ostensibly managing our university demonstrated in a myriad of indisputable ways that they lacked the requisite expertise.

And to cover their lack of judgment, they tried to do to our faculty exactly what the proponents of this ill-conceived bill are trying to do to faculty statewide. To gauge whether this bill is a good idea, you need simply to look at Wright State's enrollment numbers over the past 15 years and especially over the past seven or eight years. Alienating the professionals who have the most direct, most extensive, and most enduring relationships with students is a very counterintuitive way to "manage" a university.

The degree to which meaningful shared governance will produce a better result in specific institutions and circumstances might be open to argument. But it clearly could not produce a worse result than a lack of meaningful shared governance has demonstrably produced.

Finally, this is the first concerted attack on labor rights since Senate Bill 5. Although one might argue that Republicans now control the state government more decisively than they did then, it is also true that Republicans are more dependent now than they were then on the votes of the members of labor unions and voters supportive of labor rights. It seems to be worth remembering that overreach almost always leads to an equivalent backlash, even if the consequences are not immediately evident.