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Statement by Mike Mansfield - Right to Work Law

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Statement of Senator Mike Mansfield (D) Montana

"RIGHT TO WORK LAW"

Mr. President, a dangerous pattern is emerging in many of our States, including Montana, where advocates of a so-called and misnamed "right to work law" are attempting to perpetrate a huge and expensive fraud. It is indeed unfortunate that the Congress should now be asked to sanction a national right to work law. We in effect are being asked to injure every segment of the population in order to hurt the labor movement in America.

At the outset I want to say that I am unalterably opposed to a national right to work law and I am as strongly opposed to a right to work law in the State of Montana.

It is impossible to strike at working men and women through their labor unions without inflicting near-mortal blows on the farmer, the small businessman, professional people and a whole host of other innocent and unsuspecting victims.

The real aim of these "right to work" laws is to undermine trade unions. Behind the high-sounding false slogan is an anti-labor purpose -- to destroy or to weaken free American trade unions, to discourage responsible unions.

Right to work laws tend to encourage free riders. The vast majority of workers who pay dues which make it possible for the union to bargain for better working conditions and higher wages resent the few free
riders who refuse to pay their share of the cost of running the union.

Proponents of right to work laws claim that union security measures involve coercion by requiring workers to join a union. However, a close examination of this issue reveals that this claim is only a half-truth and superficial. Freedom does not exist in a vacuum and I submit that unions make possible a greater measure of freedom for the American people and that they have contributed towards our strength as a Nation and towards our general economic growth. Under democratic procedures, we take for granted that the will of the majority should prevail and it is, therefore, perfectly just and fair to require all workers in a plant or a shop to contribute to the upkeep of the union which helps all the working people in the collective bargaining unit. It is also important to note that most unions make special provisions to exempt workers from joining a union if they refuse to do so because of religious convictions.

The vast majority of workers in this country want union security and they favor union shop agreements. The enemies of unions, therefore, have to resort to a campaign of misrepresentation and half-truths in order to gain their desired aim to weaken the American trade union movement through State or Federal legislation.

"Right to Work" is a high-sounding phrase. It sounds like the title of a full employment program—jobs for all.

But so-called "right to work" laws give no one a right to work. "Right to work" laws provide no "work". "Right to work" laws provide no "rights".
If we are truly trying to provide work let us turn from these devious union-busting schemes and devote our time to combating the severe economic recession now facing the country. A national "right to work" law will not guarantee a single job to the over 5 million unemployed workers who are now seeking jobs and millions of other who are working part-time.

The Congress has made a good start in its Anti-Recession Program and we should continue to work towards an expanded economy with full employment. We should not be occupying ourselves with issues which will set us back fifty years in the field of labor relations.

I call on all those who would want to weaken American unions by eliminating union shops to join in a real honest movement to achieve the right of every American to the right to work and to a decent, well-paying job. This is the issue facing the American people on the domestic front today.

For several weeks this winter the State of Montana had the tragic distinction of having the highest rate of insured unemployment in the nation. Recently nearly 15 percent of the State's labor force found itself jobless through no fault of their own. There has been no real upswing, there has been nothing to indicate that our economic picture is about to brighten.

Montana's economy has been badly affected. It seems significant to me that the working people, already beset by unemployment and the threat of deepening recession, are being made the targets for a fresh
concerted attack on their welfare and security. A right to work law is no less an issue this year in seven other States where already worried workers face new attacks from the proven architects of dismay and disaster.

The trade union movement in this country is essentially clean, decent and honest. Where instances have been uncovered of digressions from labor's own standards of ethical practices, labor itself has moved swiftly and sincerely to correct these conditions and banish the wrongdoers.

The economic success of the United States, unmatched anywhere in the world is due in large part to the healthy growth of administrative and bargaining skills within the labor movement. It has been a long hard and demanding struggle but starting with the Wagner Act, both labor and management acquired a workable—though admittedly not a perfect—set of ground rules.

If the Congress sanctions the destruction of the rights of unions—if we destroy the bargaining powers of unions—we will be retracing history, back to the dark ages before and in the early days of the Industrial Revolution.

We have known tremendous industrial progress in the past century which has been linked to the progress of the labor movement. The approval of a national "right to work" law will stymie this progress and cause us, in effect to retreat.

The people of Montana overwhelmingly rejected the tired and threadbare arguments for right to work in 1956 and I am convinced they will reject this anti-union measure in 1958.
The 85th Congress of the United States can go on record as an outstanding Congress devoted to the cause of the American people. Let us not go on record as the Congress that scuttled the labor movement and retreated into the past.

Mr. President, I urge that the Senate go on record as opposed to any form of national "right to work" legislation.