

## The Post Editorial

### Counties not ready for new unions

What little remains of a valiant effort to give more public employees in Colorado the right to collectively bargain should be tabled and tried again next year.

Retrospectively we know from Colorado WINS — the 2020 bill to unionize 30,000 state employees — that the sky will not fall if other public employees are finally granted the right to gather their collective efforts toward negotiating better wages, benefits and working conditions.

But while the sky did not fall with the passage of House Bill 1153, the three-year employment contract signed in 2021 did cost the state quite a bit of money, according to The Colorado Sun the 3% raises for three years, associated benefits and a \$15 minimum wage will cost taxpayers about \$115 million.

State employees would have likely seen raises anyway, so those wage wins likely can't all be attributed to the new union. Nor are we arguing that state employees were not due a pay hike. The bill itself was estimated to require an additional 45 state employees at a cost of \$6.6 million to navigate the new employment system.

Additionally, the new union is taking about 1.5% of employees' salaries so it can function, although individuals can opt-out and resign from the union if they cannot afford that amount of money.

The 2022 bill, which was still in draft form Friday afternoon, would only apply to county employees in Colorado. Originally, the bill was expected to include a much broader range of employees, giving those working for cities, public hospitals, public universities and others the right to collectively bargain. However, it seems likely that only counties will remain after an intense lobbying effort from other entities and opposition to some unspecified parts of the bill from Gov. Jared Polis and other Democrats and Republicans.

Colorado's cities are guaranteed local control under Colorado's Constitution, and Home Rule means that cities are left to handle matters of municipal concern. Because nothing is of more concern to a municipality than the city budget, we are sympathetic to concerns that mandating collective bargaining rights for employees may infringe on city rights.

Tony Frank, the chancellor of the Colorado State University System, argued that while he knows some employees including adjunct professors across the state need better wages and benefits. Frank said Colorado's universities are already operating on scant state dollars, and these types of budget changes will result directly in either in other funding cuts or tuition increases.

So in the end county governments, as entities that operate closely with the state, will be left holding the purse.

Counties are arguing that granting employees collective bargaining rights will cost them millions. Counties, which are primarily funded by property taxes, will see their revenue rise quite a bit as assessed values throughout the state skyrocket in coming years, however, we agree that if the state is going to dramatically change labor laws it should be a less prescriptive process.

The draft bill that The Denver Post received includes a whole host of very specific requirements if a county entity — think sheriff and fire departments — opt to unionize.

Most concerning is the inclusion of a requirement that disputes be settled through binding arbitration.

We've seen both the good — increased wages and benefits for essential employees who save lives — and the bad — entitled and impossible to fire bad apples — of public unions in this state.

Let's proceed with caution.