



You Can't Make Me Join!

By Deborah D. Thornton

The old Groucho Marx line, “Please accept my resignation. I don’t want to belong to any club that would accept me as one of its members,” holds true when we talk about union membership.¹ The more a union wants me to join, the less I’m interested. Fortunately, in Iowa I don’t have to. People in some states are not that fortunate.

The United States Supreme Court recently added strength to the Iowa law through its ruling on *Harris v. Quinn*.² The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in Illinois tried to force home-



health-care workers to join by defining them as “public employees” and requiring them to pay “fair-share” dues. Often unions force workers to pay for their services, such as collective bargaining, even if they do not want to join. In right-to-work states such as Iowa, this is not required. As a result of *Harris v. Quinn*, workers can refuse membership and keep more of their hard-earned money in their own pockets. They are now exempt from “fair-share” requirements.

Even the *New York Times* opines that the ruling was “a blow to unions.”³ This ruling follows the recent actions by the Legislature and Governors of both Wisconsin and Michigan to protect workers’ right to not belong to a club that wants them.

Everyone has his or her own reason for not joining a union, whether it’s a private sector one like the AFL-CIO or the public-sector AFSCME. It does not matter what your reason is – under the First Amendment, people should not be forced to join. This is the fundamental principle that the Supreme Court upheld: the First Amendment right to join any organization one wishes to and the similar right to NOT join a group, especially if joining that group costs you money.

Some of the most common reasons for opting out of union membership are:

1. Union leadership, paid from members’ dues, often enriches themselves on member dues instead of serving members. Historically, union bosses have often spent the dues of rank-and-file union members on themselves or golf vacations to Hawaii or Florida – especially during the winter.
2. Union membership is expensive. Often union membership is over \$1,000 a year. What could you do with an extra \$1,000? Pay off a credit card debt? Take a vacation, though not as lavish a one as the union leaders do? Buy school clothes? Pay for college tuition? Private union membership has decreased significantly in the last few years, as workers understand both that they can keep more of their own money in their pocket and that membership does not protect their job.
3. Poor service. 1-800 numbers are not indicative of good customer service. And an e-mail to a nameless inquiry form often does not get a response. American workers are not happy about paying for poor, or no, service from the union and its representatives.
4. Union leaders play politics with their money. Often union funds go exclusively to ultra-

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liberal causes and candidates which an individual does not personally support. For example, almost 100 percent of the money donated by the Iowa teachers union goes to the Iowa Democrat Party and Democrat candidates. This is hundreds of thousands of dollars every campaign cycle. Without the teachers' union money, the Iowa Democrat party would be bankrupt. Further, 100 percent of all teachers are not Democrats and do not support their liberal causes.

5. Independent associations often offer better benefits and better professional development opportunities for a much lower cost. For example, the liability insurance and legal representation offered by the Professional Educators of Iowa is much lower in cost and provides higher coverage than that of the Iowa State Education Association. For only \$15 a month, the Association of American Educators provides a \$2 million liability policy and legal services. And you are not paying for political exhortations to vote for the chosen candidate.

National Employee Freedom Week is August 10 – 16.⁴ If you don't want to be a union member, follow Groucho Marx's recommendation, and send them a letter saying, "I respectfully decline your invitation to membership."

In Iowa, as a right-to-work state, if you resign from the union there is no risk of being fired, no negative salary action, no reduction in benefits, and your seniority can not be altered.⁵ And the union and its representatives are prohibited from harassing you about your decision. Any union – public or private – must stop deducting dues from your paycheck once you submit your request in writing. However, even here in Iowa, one should send the letter by certified mail with a return receipt requested and send a copy to your company's or school district's payroll department directing them to stop any automatic deductions.

So, thank the U.S. Supreme Court for recognizing that our First Amendment right to join any organization we wish to also applies to not joining an organization – whether a church or a union. Join the hundreds of other workers who are refusing membership and keep more of your own, hard-earned money in your pocket.

After all, who wants their money to go to someone they don't support?

(Endnotes)

¹ "I Don't Want to Belong to Any Club That Will Accept Me as a Member," Quote Investigator, April 18, 2011, <<http://quoteinvestigator.com/2011/04/18/groucho-resigns/>> accessed on July 13, 2014.

² Stephanie Simon, "Harris v. Quinn ruling: Unions Hit, But Not Fatally, by SCOTUS," Politico, June 30, 2014, <<http://www.politico.com/story/2014/06/supreme-court-harris-v-quinn-ruling-108428.html>> accessed on July 13, 2014.

³ Cynthia Estlund and William E. Forbath, "The War on Workers," *The New York Times*, July 2, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/03/opinion/the-supreme-court-ruling-on-harris-v-quinn-is-a-blow-for-unions.html?_r=0> accessed on July 14, 2014.

⁴ National Employee Freedom Week, July 11, 2014, <<http://employeeefreedomweek.com/>> accessed on July 11, 2014.

⁵ "State of Iowa," National Employee Freedom Week, July 11, 2014, <<http://employeeefreedomweek.com/state/iowa/>> accessed on July 11, 2014.

Deborah D. Thornton is a Research Analyst with Public Interest Institute, Mount Pleasant, Iowa. Contact her at Public.Interest.Institute@LimitedGovernment.org.

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