

THE PLAIN DEALER

Ballot language for Senate Bill 5 referendum to be decided today

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By Joe Guillen

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- A state panel is scheduled to consider ballot language Wednesday for the Senate Bill 5 voter referendum, a high-stakes issue that will determine the collective bargaining power of the state's 360,000 public workers.

The wording of the SB 5 referendum on the Nov. 8 ballot has emerged as a contentious issue.

Opponents of the law are urging the GOP-controlled Ohio Ballot Board to avoid voter confusion and approve ballot language so that a "no" vote would represent opposition to the law.

Secretary of State Jon Husted, a Republican who chairs the ballot board, on Tuesday evening released ballot language his staff drafted as a starting point for Wednesday's discussion. The draft framed the referendum so that a "no" vote would count toward repealing the law.

If the majority of voters this fall vote to repeal the law, which reduces public workers' collective bargaining ability, it will not go into effect. The SB 5 voter referendum will be labeled Issue 2 on the ballot.

Supporters and opponents of the law will be able to advocate for the referendum's appearance on the ballot at Wednesday's board meeting at the Statehouse.

Innovation Ohio, a left-leaning think tank, accused Republican Gov. John Kasich and other SB 5 supporters of favoring ballot language that would require a "yes" vote to repeal SB 5 -- a political maneuver meant to confuse voters.

Historically, voter referendums in Ohio have been framed so that a "no" vote would repeal the law in question. [That has been the case for the last 12 voter referendums, dating back to 1912, according to the Secretary of State's office.](#)

"When it comes to referenda ballot language, Ohio history could not be clearer," Innovation Ohio President Janetta King said in a statement released Tuesday. "Voters deserve better than trickery, sleight of hand and political game-playing. They are entitled to a straight-forward, up or down vote this November."

A spokesman for Building a Better Ohio, the organization leading the effort to uphold the law, would not comment on the group's strategy going into the ballot board's meeting. But he stressed the board is not bound to conform to past decisions.

"The suggestion that they have to adhere to some sort of standard or precedent is completely wrong," spokesman Jason Mauk said.

The Greater Cleveland Partnership announced Tuesday it would join Building a Better Ohio in opposing the repeal effort. Chambers of commerce in Cincinnati and Dayton also have vowed to support the law.

We Are Ohio, the group leading the repeal effort, said its argument before the ballot board will focus on provisions in the Ohio Constitution that require voter referendums to be worded so that a "no" vote would go toward repealing the law.

The ballot board also is scheduled to consider ballot language Wednesday for the other two statewide issues. Issue 1 is a proposed constitutional amendment to increase the judicial retirement age. Issue 3 is a constitutional amendment proposed by Tea Party groups that seeks to block the federal health care law in Ohio.

Husted is joined on the five-member board by two Republican appointees, William Morgan and Sen. Keith Faber, and two Democratic appointees, former Sen. Fred Strahorn and lawyer Mark Griffin.

Although they are members of the same party, Husted and Faber have disagreed recently on election issues. Faber strongly supports a proposed law requiring a photo ID at the polls while Husted opposes such a requirement.

Original Article:

http://www.cleveland.com/open/index.ssf/2011/08/ballot_language_for_senate_bill.html