I am submitting these comments in reference to HF 291 to be entered into the record at the public hearing that is to be held on February 13, 2017. This hearing’s subject is HF 291.

HF 291 and its companion, SF 213 in the Iowa Senate, will have a negative effect on the citizens of the state of Iowa. It is an overreach written by some in the Republican House and Senate that essentially destroys Chapter 20 of the Code of Iowa. Chapter 20, a bipartisan piece of legislation, was written after **lengthy deliberation** and signed into law in 1974 by Governor Robert D Ray who is a Republican. I find it very important to include in my comments part the very first section of Chapter 20 taken directly from Code of Iowa available on the internet at (<https://coolice.legis.iowa.gov/cool-ice/default.asp?category=billinfo&service=iowacode&ga=82&input=20>).

**20.1 PUBLIC POLICY.**

The general assembly declares that it is the public policy of the

state to promote harmonious and cooperative relationships between

government and its employees by permitting public employees to

organize and bargain collectively; to protect the citizens of this

state by assuring effective and orderly operations of government in

providing for their health, safety, and welfare; to prohibit and

prevent all strikes by public employees; and to protect the rights of

public employees to join or refuse to join, and to participate in or

refuse to participate in, employee organizations.

Chapter 20 has served Iowa well over its long history. Bargaining between employees and employers has progressed through the process civilly nearly all the time. I will not deny that there have been some instances of disharmony and stalemate. When that has happened my feeling is that it was the result of untenable positions taken by one or both sides in that particular situation. When that has happened the next step was and is to move to arbitration using a neutral arbitrator. The use of arbitration in instances of dispute has its own long history and works well. One may argue over the rulings made by arbitrators but I do not feel that one can argue the fairness of the process overall.

There have been many talking points and questionable, at best, intensions with regards to HF 291 (and SF 213) and I will address a few of them.

* The word “balance” has been used to imply that the section is unfairly tilted towards favoring employees over employers. I do not see that as ever having been the case and it is NOT, today, the case. There are sections of Chapter 20 that clearly state the rights of employers, the rights of employees, prohibited practices, etc. **My sense is that those writing HF 291 want to gut Section 20 of the Iowa Code and put such a heavy hand on the scales as to destroy the ability of employees to have any say in the conditions of employment.**
* Chapter 20 did NOT appear overnight or with little discussion and negotiation. It did NOT occur without significant very thoughtful investigation and consideration with regards to unintended consequences. Why has HF 291 been shoved so rapidly through the process? This makes absolutely no sense to me as it is such a MAJOR change. Each of our state’s representatives from EVERY district needs to step back several steps and look at exactly what this bill means to the citizens in THEIR districts now and in the future.
* If you are so intent on gutting Section 20 of the Iowa Code why are you not also removing the prohibition against public employees striking? Public workers gave up the right to strike when Section 20 was written. In return, public employers, including the state of Iowa agreed to negotiate on issues as outlined in Section 20 of the Iowa Code. There is absolutely no balance if you remove nearly everything that employees can bargain for but keep THE key issue that would give ANY power to employees.
* Carving out an exception for public safety workers in an attempt to try to divide and conquer is a bald face action that tries to make the value of one employee greater than that of other employees**. All employees should and MUST be seen with equal value no matter their position. To do anything less is appalling.**
* The word “review” has been used to describe HF 291 (and SF 213). Using that word is so disingenuous that it is laughable if it were not so false a use of the word. The changes that HF 291 (and SF 213) would make are so far reaching that is **ONLY** fair to say that it is a complete re-write of Section 20. The changes contemplated would have immediate and very far reaching effects on every employee and every employer covered under section 20.
* I have seen and heard discussions of the bill that always refer to “government employees” as a group and fail to identify them as to who they truly are. “Government employees” in these discussions are noted that way in order to make them “the bad guys”. This has been a Republican ploy for as long as I have been aware of the political climate on the local, state and national level. These individuals are **NOT** bad guys by any stretch of the imagination. First of all, they are citizens of the state of Iowa. They are police officers, firemen, teachers, social workers, nurses, employees in our prisons, employees in our courthouses, employees who work very hard every day to make our state what it is and what it can be in the future. I am sure there are other classifications/descriptions of the groups that I have not mentioned that are a part of this discussion and I do not leave them out except to keep my comments a bit less lengthy.
* All of the individuals affected by HF 291 (and SF213) are your neighbors. They are tax payers. The work they do helps YOU, your family and EVERYONE else in our state.
* Please answer the following question. How many bargaining agreements actually ever reach arbitration? It would appear that in the past year about 2 % of the 469 public worker contracts negotiated in Iowa moved to arbitration. (Iowa Starting Line What Iowa’s “Chapter 20” Is And Why It’s Important To Workers: An ExplainerJanuary 12th, 2017)
* ONLY the issue that is at an impasse is submitted for arbitration, not the entire bargaining agreement. That is a significant point to note. The arbitration ONLY resolves a specific topic. If more than one topic is at an impasse, then those in that condition move to arbitration. Everything else that has reached an agreement stays as is while awaiting a decision from the arbitrator.

Personally, I have never been a union member. Nearly all of my years of work before I retired were in supervisory positions or in areas outside of union representation due to my job descriptions. Those working years were in a company that did and still does have a union. Over those years I saw how good relationships between employees and the employer fostered improvements for everyone involved. Everyone benefited from this. Fairness was recognized and encouraged. That did not mean that when contracts came up for renewal that there were not strong differences of opinion. I experienced the **very rare**, but difficult times that came when a strike was called to try to bring particular issues to the forefront of negotiations. In each case, however, at the end of the day, the issues were settled. Not to everyone’s approval, of course. However, in each case, everyone had a fair voice at the table, everyone was heard, and, differences, however strong, in the end were set aside for the greater good of the organization.

I MOST STRONGLY OPPOSE HF 291 (SF213). There are no valid reasons to destroy what was created in 1974 when Chapter 20 was written and signed into law. It IS NOT “modernization”. It IS NOT dealing with a “different Iowa”. This bill WAS NOT written with Democrat OR union input as far as I can tell. This bill is being shoved down a fast track WITHOUT proper consideration of its unintended consequences. At the VERY LEAST it is mean spirited. It denigrates every public employee in the state of Iowa. It is shameful in its intent and has absolutely nothing to do with “Iowa nice”.

EVERY LEGISLATOR NEEDS TO TAKE FAR MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES TO LOOK AT WHAT THIS BILL, HF 291 (SF 213) WOULD DO TO THEIR OWN CONSTITUENTS AND THE VERY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES THAT IT WOULD CAUSE FOR THEIR OWN CONSTITUENTS AND TO ALL THE CITIZENS OF OUR STATE NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE.

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