

Testimony by Rod Siegele
House Bill 2023
House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development
January 23, 2013

Our nation was conceived granting basic rights – free speech was one of these. Restricting the political voice of an organization that I have chosen to represent me denies me and my fellow teachers that right.

Teachers are busy. We are involved in the daily pursuit of excellence with our students; teaching, planning, adjusting curriculum, coaching, etc. We can't do everything – not enough hours in the day – and therefore we join the association to speak for us. We make a reasoned choice to dedicate a portion of our dues to KNEA's political action. By that choice, we expect our organization to engage in political activities that advocate for our students in public schools and our public school employees. Those political activities include researching issues, informing us about those issues, and supporting political candidates and public questions. I believe this bill denies me the voice in the political arena that the First Amendment guarantees.

Without specifically saying so, I believe that HR 2023 implies that teachers are coerced into joining the association. We're not. We have the choice to join, not join, or join another organization. When I first started teaching many years ago, I sought out information about the Association, did my own research and joined on my own accord. At the time, many colleagues of mine had to work second jobs just to make ends meet. I thought that through KNEA, we had the best chance of improving our lot.

Lastly, we're all here because we care about Kansas. I'm here specifically because of Kansas students and teachers. We want our kids to have the best education in the nation. But I ask you, is this bill going to help them understand the Diary of Anne Frank, conjugate the French verb avoir, or prove the Pythagorean Theorem? Or will it simply teach them that free speech and involvement in the political process is guaranteed for all, except Kansas teachers.

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