

Man settles with union

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A Whitefish man and the Teamsters union have reached settlement that will allow the timber trucker to keep his job and be reimbursed for forced past dues, with interest.

Michael Weller, backed by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, filed a lawsuit in October alleging that the Teamsters union Local 2 forced him to pay union dues without providing a breakdown of where that money was being spent.

In Montana, a state with no right-to-work law, non-union employees of a unionized workplace can be required to pay the portion of monthly union dues that pertains only to the cost of collective bargaining.

However, the union is required to provide the employee with a audited breakdown of how those dues are spent.

Weller charged the union failed to provide him with those financial disclosures, and then threatened to terminate his job when he refused to pay the non-documented "objectors fee," or reduced rate.

Union dues at Weller's workplace, a resin hauling company based out of Columbia Falls, are \$39 a month. According to the union, \$38.31 of that is used for collective bargaining.

IN NOVEMBER, the Teamsters said Weller owed them almost \$350 in back dues he stopped paying in February.

"The portion of dues not used for collective bargaining purposes could well amount to only 69 cents," said John Powell, a spokesman with the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation. "But since the union has failed to provide a full breakdown, we have no way of knowing if this is true."

The union, however, is required by law to provide non-members with the financial disclosures Weller asked for. In the U.S. Supreme Court case *Communications Workers v. Beck*, the court ruled that workers have a right to refrain from formal union membership and to reclaim the portion of union dues not spent on collective bargaining, such as political activities.

In that decision, the court also found that employees have a right to have an independent third party audit union expenditures to verify that the percentage of dues that non-members are forced to pay does not include political spending and other non-collective bargaining expenditures.

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