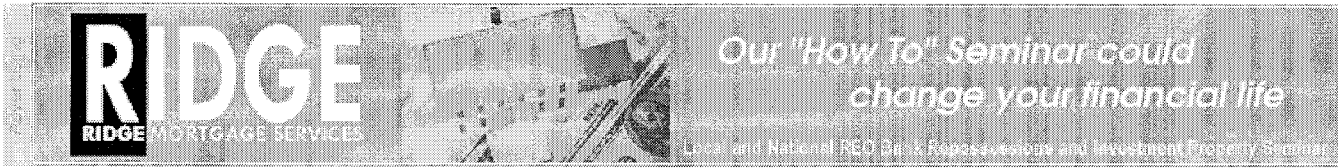


# / Local News / Washington AP Wire



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## Union to state: Stop firing workers who don't pay dues

03/30/2006

By CURT WOODWARD / Associated Press

State government's largest union, admitting a mistake that helped prompt a federal lawsuit, wants the state to rehire employees forced out of their jobs for refusing to pay union dues.

The Washington Federation of State Employees also plans to cover those workers' missed pay and benefits, and is asking the state to stop firing other public employees who have not paid union dues or a similar mandatory fee.

The union's changed course mirrors demands made by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, the Virginia-based union critic that claims the union's fee-collection scheme is unconstitutional.

"When something happens and people make accusations like that, you go back and reevaluate," union spokesman Tim Welch said on Wednesday.

In a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Spokane this month, Right to Work argues that the union violated workers' rights by failing to give a proper accounting of how dues and other required union fees would be spent.

The union's new request, sent to the state late Tuesday, says notices to workers about the fees contained "technical errors" — namely, the union did not include an auditor's statement that its accounting was correct.

"We need to correct this mistake and give everybody the benefit of the doubt, and we'll start from scratch," Welch said Wednesday.

But Stefan Gleason, the Right to Work group's vice president, said the union should return all union fees to workers who paid under the old system.

"Every employee in the state who was not already a member of the union should get their money back until the union follows the due process," Gleason said. "They're not entitled to any of the money whatsoever."

Such "agency fees" are allowed under state law and the union's contract, and are charged to workers who do not want to join the union but are still affected by the group's contract negotiations.

Nonmembers can pay an amount equivalent to full union dues — presently 1.37 percent of their salary — or a reduced amount that deducts for political spending some workers do not support.

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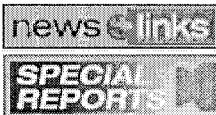
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