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State workers settle union suit

By ADAM WILSON

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A group of state workers settled a lawsuit against its union Tuesday, accepting a symbolic payment of \$1 for each of the approximately 5,000 employees affected by the issues raised.

□ "Everything that the workers targeted in the complaint in the way of violating their rights has been remedied," said Justin Hakes, a spokesman for the National Right to Work Foundation, which represented the suing workers.

The Washington Federation of State Employees already had asked the state to rehire six workers terminated for refusing to pay union dues, sent out a new audit of its finances and adjusted the amount it charges workers who object to the union's political action.

The union made an offer to end the settlement two weeks ago, saying drawing out a court battle would be costly and pointless.

"Had the lawsuit gone forward, that would have been a very public distraction. It would have been a distraction in terms of time and money," union spokesman Tim Welch said. The federation can now focus its resources on contract negotiations, which are under way with the governor's office, he added.

The Right to Work Foundation, a national opponent of mandatory union fees, claimed its work had embarrassed the largest union of state workers in Washington.

The settlement was a victory for workers, but they are still "vulnerable" to compulsory union fees without a Right to Work law, which would ban them, Stefan Gleason, vice president of the foundation, said in a prepared statement.

"These workers have won the battle but not the war," Gleason said.

The quick end of the lawsuit, filed in March, shows it was more about scoring public opinion points than any intentional wrongdoing by the union, Welch said.

"It gives them a hollow victory. But when you get right down to it, they sued us with a lot of fanfare and then settled for a tiny fraction of what they asked for," he said.

The group had demanded a return of all dues paid by all 38,000 workers covered by the contracts that began in July, he noted.

The lawsuit alleged the dues were illegal because the union did not send out a certified audit of its finances last year, showing how much money is spent on workplace representation and how much is spent on social and political activities.