

Testimony of

Wayne W. Seybold
Marion, Indiana

Before the

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions

On

“Ensuring Collective Bargaining Rights for
First Responders: H.R. 980.”

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Good afternoon, my name is Wayne W. Seybold and I am the Mayor of Marion, Indiana. I would like to thank the Chairman and members of the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify today.

Marion, Indiana, a community of approximately 32,000 citizens, has faced numerous economic challenges within my first term of office. With the closing of one of our largest manufacturing plants, everyone within our community was touched by it in one way or another. At that critical moment, the private/public sector, not-for-profit and labor unions stepped up to the plate to turn our community around.

The City of Marion’s collective bargaining units were a part of that team that were willing to make sacrifices for the betterment of the community. My first negotiations with the units started by my indication that pay raises were not an option at that time. One would think that the negotiations would have ended at that point. However, our units expressed their understanding and agreed to partner with us.

Since our first negotiation, the City and our Collective Bargaining Units have maintained an incredibly positive relationship. In order for employer management relationships to be productive, there must be trust and mutual respect. Both must be willing to keep lines of communication open. More specifically, public safety, employer/employee cooperation is essential. They are the front line defense for our communities, and deserve the right to discuss workplace issues with their employer.

An example of a success story is best depicted by our relationship with the Marion Fire Department. After being hit with years of political backlash, this group was anything but trusting in the beginning. They came to the table asking for a lot more than we could agree to, but instead of getting frustrated they asked if they could come back with a potential win-win solution for everyone. Understanding that our way is not the only way, nor always the best way, we encouraged them to do their homework. They came back with their presentation, which was very creative and impressive to say the least. Instead of raises, they opted to have the City pay more of their share toward their pension. An agreement was reached, approved by the Union, and submitted to the council.

While we may not always agree, one thing we now know is that there is a sense of trust and respect that has evolved. This type of relationship gives the employees a sense of ownership and importance. By promoting such cooperation, our community enjoys a more effective and efficient delivery of emergency services. Because of our relationship with our collective bargaining units, we have built the city's cash reserves up from nearly nothing to almost seven million dollars. Everyone benefits when there is a good relationship between employer and labor management team. We are proud to stand alongside and support our local and state firefighters in ensuring that they have the opportunity to bargain for workplace issues and resolve issues regarding the duty of bargaining in good faith.

The Marion Fire Department has assisted in numerous fundraising activities with their "Fill the Boot" program. This program has provided monetary assistance to numerous not-for-profit organizations. This assistance allows these entities to continue to provide services to those who need it in the community. The Grant County Cancer Society benefits from this program in a great way. The money raised allows for important research and development strategies. The program has also assisted the local humane society raise money to properly care for the vast number of abandoned animals. The local humane society is in dire need of a new facility, and the Marion Firefighters have agreed to donate their time to help build it. The willingness to give up their personal time to help build the new humane society will be of great benefit to taxpayer's money.

The Marion Fire Department is constantly searching for new and innovative ways to help relieve the burden of the taxpayers. An example of this is the way the firefighters showed initiative to apply for grants to purchase equipment. In this effort, over the last three years, the department was awarded over \$200,000.00 in grant money.

Marion Firefighters are a group of very dedicated professionals who are committed to the citizens of Marion and Grant County. Any assistance that you could provide would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time and attention to this very important matter. I would be more than happy to address any questions the subcommittee may have for me.