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Councilman Quits Missouri Municipal League Over Collective Bargaining

By TOM BOGDON
Editor

Kansas City Councilman Troy Nash resigned from the Missouri Municipal League, citing as his reason the group's opposition to collective bargaining rights for public employees. Nash also objects to the Municipal League's opposition to allowing some public employees, such as police officers, to form unions.

"After reading the League's January Legislative Bulletin, I was particularly distressed," Nash wrote in a news release.

Nash said the MML Board's consistent opposition to public employee collective bargaining and to allowing some public employees, such as police officers, to be organized into unions is a policy that he cannot adhere to. Rather than focusing its attention on striving to improve the quality of life for citizens of municipalities, Nash said, MML appears to care only about ensuring that city and town expenses are low, regardless of the effect on the quality of service.

Nash, who was elected to the Kansas City Council in the spring of 1999, said in the news release that Americans have the right to be organized into unions in order to have their economic and professional interests protected. Furthermore, he said, when



Troy Nash

employees do organize, the union that represents them should be entitled to enter into binding arbitration with governments and companies, Nash said unions do not do harm, they only represent the will of their membership.

"It is my deep hope that the Missouri Municipal League's Board will reconsider

its policy towards collective bargaining and allowing police officers to join labor unions," Nash continued. "They are entitled to fair representation in their negotiations with governments, regardless of size. Municipalities only harm themselves and their citizens when they refuse to honor the considered and reasonable opinions of public employees."

"Until such time as the League's policy is reconsidered and altered, I must submit my resignation from the organization," Nash concluded. "I cannot possibly belong to an association whose policies are fundamentally opposed to my philosophy of government and the public sector's role in improving the quality of life for citizens. I cannot support policies that serve to undermine America's working men, women and families, and thus I cannot support the Missouri Municipal League."

Bridgette Williams, president of the Greater Kansas City AFL-CIO, commended Nash's action in resigning from the Missouri Municipal League, saying it was a matter of principle.

"I think it's important to note he did this un solicited because it's the right thing to do," Williams said. "We need more elected officials to stand up for working people. And he's not saying that people ought to be in unions, but that they should have the choice. I commend him on taking the posi-

tion he did."

With Republicans in control of the Missouri Senate, collective bargaining for public employees is not high on labor's agenda in the current session of the General Assembly, but Williams believes that the issue is far from dead in Missouri.

"I think there is a real opportunity, especially with term limits," Williams said. "We will have the opportunity to elect individuals who will stand up and fight for working people and their families. Then we have to take a further step and stand up and hold them accountable."

According to Gary Markenson, executive director of the Missouri Municipal League, the organization has a membership of 6,200 city officials from 620 cities and towns. Markenson said the organization has a \$600,000 annual budget financed by dues assessed to members and paid with tax dollars.

Markenson said that the group's Policy Committee recommended the MML's stance on collective bargaining, and that a membership meeting attended by 750 city officials in October 2000 approved it unanimously.

"I don't recall any debate," Markenson said. "Our position is to support existing public employee labor law. I've been with the Missouri Municipal League 30 years and that's always been our policy."