

# Evening Capital

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## Our say

# *Forced wages should be banned*

THE STATE SENATE on Wednesday approved a little noticed bill which could save taxpayers a lot of money if it gets through the House of Delegates.

The Senate, by a single vote to spare, approved a bill which would eliminate prevailing wage standards on state financed school construction projects.

The present law requires that construction workers on state projects be paid at the wage levels prevalent in that geographical area. What it really means is that the prevailing wage is really the union wage, thus requiring the state to pay higher union wages on public works jobs even when non-union contractors are performing the work.

Such contractors have said for a long time that they could hire less expensive help and thus come in with lower bids if they were not forced to pay the union scale.

At a time when there is great unemployment in the construction industry, union pay scales that run as high as \$10 per hour or more are simply unrealistic. No one wants anyone to work for a less than living wage. But the state has an obligation not only to build efficiently but to help provide employment for those out of work at reasonable wages that the taxpayers can afford.

Sen. Robert Stroble of Baltimore County, the sponsor of the bill, estimates that the state can save up to 15 per cent of construction costs for school contracts. Maryland has allocated almost \$1.1 billion for school construction since the state assumed school building costs in 1971. Thus, Stroble claims, the taxpayers could have realized a savings of \$164 million if the contractors had not been forced to pay union wages.

The trade unions, always big donors in election campaigns — especially in Baltimore City — have successfully lobbied for years against any attempt to eliminate the prevailing wage clause.

This year the majority of the members of the Senate, including several legislators who have voted pro-labor for years, narrowly approved the bill to eliminate the inflated wage provision.

The building and construction trade union will put heavy pressure on members of the House of Delegates to reject the measure. It will be interesting to see if these legislators vote to save their constituents money or act as pawns of the union bosses.