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## John Ketzenberger: Let them battle it out

It's easy for me to say, "Let's you and him fight." I suffer no consequences and, depending upon the combatants, may enjoy the bout.

But that's exactly what I think Democrats in the General Assembly, especially those in the House of Representatives, should do when the so-called right-to-work legislation hits the floor.

You'll recall that last year most of the House Democrats high-tailed it to Urbana, Ill., when majority Republicans on a House committee pushed through legislation that would eliminate labor contracts that require non-members to pay fees for representation.

This crossed a line the Democrats had drawn in the sand at last year's Organization Day when they warned the newly elected Republican majority that attempting to enact right to work was an issue too far for their caucus.

Democrats bolted after the committee meeting, denying Republicans a quorum to transact legislative **business**. A weekend passed and Speaker Brian Bosma pulled the legislation leading nearly everyone, including Gov. Mitch Daniels, to believe the walkout would end and the session could

resume.

Instead, Rep. B. Patrick Bauer, D-South Bend, added a dozen bills to the previously one-item list of those most offensive to Democrats and prolonged the walkout to five weeks. Once Democrats returned, their Republican counterparts passed sweeping education reform measures and redrew legislative maps likely to favor even more Republicans.

Now Republicans are clear about their legislative intention for the 2012 session: Pass a right-to-work bill. The question on many minds during last Tuesday's Organization Day session attended by hundreds of chanting union members: Will the Democrats walk again?

Understandably, there will be a lot of pressure to shut down the session if it means stopping the legislation again. This is to Democrats and the unions what Grover Norquist's no-tax pledge is to Republicans -- a most critical issue.

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Look, shutting down the system is the only sure way for Democrats to defeat right to work in Indiana. Republicans have the votes to do it and a spokesman for the National Right to Work Committee was even bold enough to say so to The Star last week.

I think Democrats **risk** much if they decide to abdicate this time, which is why I offer the opinion that it's better to stand and fight --even if it inevitably ends in defeat.

Union leaders are confident they have broad public support after voters in Ohio overwhelmingly defeated a measure to curtail collective bargaining rights for public sector employees. That won't last long, however, if the Democrats they're counting on to forestall right to work legislation bolt from the Statehouse.

How, you wonder, could it possibly be better to fight and lose the battle than to win by running? Well, it gives Democrats a powerful message on the campaign trail: This is what happens when you elect Republicans. (That argument, of course, has been a winner for Republicans too).

Setting aside any policy arguments, if Democrats are reading the electorate correctly, this is how they win by first losing -- and save themselves costly fines enacted after their flight to Illinois last session. It probably won't put them back into a majority, but it could provide the impetus for it to happen sooner than later.

Hence the theory that it's better to stand and fight (I'd offer the same opinion if the

political roles were reversed, by the way).

Democrats already have introduced a comprehensive legislative plan and they have several other options. The first is to employ rhetoric to redefine the issue. The unions have been adept at this before. This would bolster the chorus of Democratic legislators who would pound home their points every chance they get.

The second is to offer every amendment they can imagine, and the third is to use parliamentary procedures to force Republicans to vote against them. This provides the record that Democrats will use during the 2012 campaign, when every seat in the House and half in the Senate are up for election.

Democrats likely will fail to stop the legislation, which will be tough for the unions to take. The numbers against them are just too great, however, and the public has little appetite for a walkout.

So, let's you and him fight. The public is

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watching.

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