

Union battle moves from Wisconsin to California

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

Labor unions and business interests have been quietly raising millions of dollars and testing campaign messages for months, girding for a brawl over a November ballot measure that could fundamentally shift political power in Sacramento.

Now, on the heels of an election that saw unions handed a major defeat last week in Wisconsin, the opposing camps in California soon will launch a campaign battle likely to consume \$50 million or more in political spending.

"Unions have just two channels of influence," said Daniel J.B. Mitchell of the Anderson Graduate School of Management at UCLA, "collective bargaining and the political side, so this initiative is extremely important to them."

The measure, which has not yet received a proposition number, would ban both unions and corporations from contributing directly to candidates, although both sides could still freely spend money on their own independent efforts.

Another provision forbids both sides from using money gathered from payroll deductions for political purposes. It promises to gut the power of labor unions because they raise nearly all of their money for political and other purposes via payroll-deducted dues from their members' paychecks.

Corporations, by contrast, raise the bulk of their campaign money from donations given by top executives and drawn from company treasuries.

Last year, public-sector and general-trade unions contributed \$2.7 million to California political candidates and causes,

according to campaign finance tracker FollowTheMoney.org. Business interests, from the telecommunications industry and hospitals to computer firms and beer companies, gave \$4.3 million.

“The public has got to read between the lines on this thing,” said Ken Murch, chief negotiator and lobbyist for the California Association of Psychiatric Technicians. “The deception is that this levels the political playing field. It doesn’t.”

Proponents include conservatives such as former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan and former Univision CEO Jerry Perenchio, who has given \$250,000 to the measure. They contend it handcuffs business and labor interests equally by applying the same contribution limitations to both sides.

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