

VOTE EXPLANATION ON SB 916, JUNE 12, 2025

Senator Jeff Golden

I was originally drawn to SB 916 by the framing offered by its supporters: it would “level the playing field” for future strikes. They believe that management’s resource advantages empower them to wait out strikes indefinitely and starve workers into bad contracts. When it comes to private sector strikes, I see a lot of evidence for that, especially when large powerful corporations are involved. I would strongly support a responsible proposal to address that problem.

What makes this bill irresponsible in my view is its extension into the public sector. Analysis of past public sector strikes just doesn’t point to an unlevel playing field. Public employers typically don’t have surplus resources to wait out workers, and can’t accept the deterioration of essential services that long strikes bring; they’re as subject to time pressures as strikers are. You see bargaining leverage on both sides. If anything, this bill is likely to CREATE an uneven playing field in the public sector.

All of us legislators know County Commissioners, City Councilors, School Superintendents and Board members in our Districts. *These are the bosses we’re talking about here.* Are these people who are inclined to take advantage of workers for personal gain, or are they doing their best to keep providing quality services through tough budget challenges? We all know the answer to that.

This bill will make those challenges tougher. None of us yet know how much tougher, but the added financial liability on public employers is clear (as well as the non-economic costs of interrupted service, especially when student learning is disrupted). When bill advocates brush these costs aside and tell us that the impact will be minimal, because they’ll rarely if ever use the new tool 916 gives them, they’re not exactly complimenting our intelligence. It stands to reason that the low number of past strikes they point to will rise.

Municipalities and school districts in serious economic distress have come to us for assistance this session. In almost every case we’ve told them we’re not in a position to help. That leads me to pay more attention to foundational precept of medicine: *First do no harm.* I voted against SB 916 because it seems more likely than not that it will harm our public service partners.