

THE WINDSOR STAR

Bill C-377 protest underway at Jeff Watson's Essex office

Sarah Sacheli - December 11, 2012

ESSEX, Ont. — It was a protest that fell on deaf ears.

About a dozen people – CAW executives and heads of local charities – stood outside the locked door to MP Jeff Watson's Essex constituency office today while the worker inside ignored their pleas to open up.

“We want to talk to you about Bill C-377,” Dave Cassidy, CAW Local 444 financial secretary, shouted through the door. Cassidy left the same message on voicemail, calling the office from his cellphone outside the locked door.

The protesters showed up before the office opened and watched the lone worker walk uncomfortably past them, unlock the door and go inside.

The protesters left about two hours later, not having spoken to anyone other than each other and the reporters who turned out to cover the event.

Bill C-377, up for a vote in the House of Commons today, requires unions to file new paperwork with the Canada Revenue Agency. Under the amendments to the Income Tax Act, the salaries of executives and any other expense over \$5,000 will be reported and available for public scrutiny.

The Canadian Bar Association and the Privacy Commissioner of Canada have criticized the private member's bill. The Canada Revenue Agency says it will cost the government \$10.6 million in the first two years alone to implement.

“This bill has nothing to do with transparency,” Cassidy said. “This is nothing but an attack on unions, an attack on us.”

No one in the government has proposed similar requirements on churches, Cassidy said.

Several heads of local charities attended Watson's office Tuesday to show their opposition to the proposed legislation.

“There will be a tremendous cost involved,” said local businessman Ted Farron, who raises money for Windsor Regional Hospital, the Windsor Amateur Boxing Club and the local medical school.

He foresees funding decisions made at the local level having to be handled instead by the CAW national office to make sure the new regulations are adhered to.

“It will just hold things up.”

Farron recalls hosting a national boxing event at Brentwood and nearly having to cancel at the last minute. Boxing Canada, on its final inspection, had said the apron around the ring wasn't regulation. The club didn't have the \$15,000 so the CAW Local 444 came to the rescue.

Dave Batten, founder of the Mio Manz Charities, said he'd hate for money that would normally go to charity be paid out to accountants instead.

"The CAW has supported us for 20 years. We wouldn't be around without them."

With the CAW's help, Mio Manz started up a local chapter of the Sunshine Foundation which grants wishes to sick children. Next year will mark the third time the group has taken 80 kids and their caregivers to Disney World. In between the big excursions, they give away trips, computers, guitars – anything sick children ask for.

Co-founder Eddie Mio said the new government bill will interfere in union donations. "Why does the government need to stick their nose in it?" Mio said. "The money this is going to cost, give us that cash. We can do a lot with it."

Contacted in Ottawa Tuesday, Watson called the charities' concerns "terrible fear-mongering" by the unions.

"They've been sold the line by the unions that this is going to cost charities."

He said the bill has been modified and the public will learn what its new form is tomorrow. He couldn't quote the amendments, but said the reporting requirements will be less stringent than what the B.C. MP who proposed it intended.

"It's not going to be the kind of microscopic transactional reporting that was in the original Bill C-377."

Watson said he supported the bill in its original form and would have introduced a similar one himself.

"It's what union members want," he said.

Watson said the bill is similar to tax legislation that exists in the United States. "The wheels haven't fallen off the bus there," he said.

He said he has met with CAW representatives three times and called Tuesday's protest a "political stunt" being played out by the CAW at constituency offices across Ontario.

"They knew I wasn't there."

ssacheli@windsorstar.com