

Let's enact employee free choice

I read with great interest the recent guest column on employee free choice by Carl Greenberg (May 15-21, 2009, issue). I must say he got it wrong.

Giving working people the freedom to form unions and bargain collectively is key to turning around the economy and rebuilding America's middle class. America's working people are struggling to make ends meet. CEOs have all the power, and our middle class is disappearing. The best opportunity for working men and women to get ahead is by uniting with co-workers to bargain with their employers for better wages and benefits.

But the current labor law system is broken. Corporations routinely intimidate, harass, coerce and fire people who try to organize unions, and today's labor law is powerless to stop them. Every day, corporations deny working people the freedom to make their own choice about whether to have a union. Today, employees are fired in one-quarter of private sector union-organizing campaigns.

Too few workers are able to form unions and bargain because companies routinely block their efforts, and our current legal system is too broken and dominated by corporations to help them.

The Employee Free Choice Act would allow workers, not corporations, to choose whether and how they want to form a union. The act does not take away so-called secret ballot elections. If one-third of workers want to have an NLRB election at their workplace, they can still ask the federal government to hold the election. The Employee Free Choice Act simply gives them another option – majority sign-up.

Elections may sound like the most democratic approach, but the NLRB process is nothing like democratic elections in our society – presidential elections, for example – because one side has all the power. The employer controls the voters' paychecks and livelihood and has unlimited access to speak against the union and workplace while restricting pro-union speech. The employer also has unfet-

tered freedom to intimidate and coerce the workers.

What is majority sign-up, and how does it work? When the majority of employees decide to form a union by signing authorization cards and those authorization cards are validated by the federal government, the employer will be legally required to recognize

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and bargain with the workers' union.

Majority sign-up is not a new approach. For years, some responsible employers have taken a position of allowing employees to choose by majority decision whether to have a union. Those companies have found that majority sign-up is an effective way to allow workers the freedom to make their own decisions, and it results in less

hostility and polarization than the failed NLRB process. Companies such as AT&T, Harley-Davidson and Cingular Wireless have all taken the approach of majority sign-up.

But currently the choice to allow majority sign-up belongs to the company and not the workers, and most companies reject that method, forcing employees to use the failed election process.

Corporate front groups are waging a major campaign to stop the Employee Free Choice Act. They do not want workers to have the freedom to choose whether to bargain through unions for better wages, benefits and working conditions. The Employee Free Choice Act has the support of hundreds of members of Congress in both parties; academics; historians; civil and human rights organizations, such as the NAACP and Human Rights Watch; as well as most major faith denominations and 73 percent of the American public.

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