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*Organizing*  
**Disparities in Public, Private Sectors  
Unionization Show Need for EFCA, Biden Says**

Just 7.5 percent of the private sector workforce in the United States is represented by unions, compared with 37 percent of federal, state, and local government employees, Vice President Joe Biden said May 12 at the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees' annual legislative conference.

That imbalance shows the need for the proposed Employee Free Choice Act (H.R. 1409, S. 560), Biden said. The bill, introduced in both the House and Senate March 10 (23 LRW 385, 3/12/09), would amend the National Labor Relations Act to make it easier for private sector employees to form unions through a card-check authorization process.

Overall, approximately 15 percent of the American workforce is represented by unions, roughly half the percentage represented by unions in the 1930s, when the NLRA was enacted to encourage union representation and collective bargaining, Biden said.

Most government employers do not stand in the way of union organizing, unlike the private sector, where many employers have been successful in thwarting union efforts, Biden said, adding that surveys indicate that roughly half of the nation's nonunion workforce would join a union if given the chance. Private sector employers with their tactics have created a "vertical" playing field tilted against union organizers, and the Employee Free Choice Act is needed to make it "horizontal" again, he said.

"There is no way to restore the economy without restoring the middle class. And there is no way of restoring the middle class without unions," Biden said.

**Worker Inclusion in Recovery Urged**

Although productivity in the United States grew 20 percent between 2001 and 2008, the middle class lost \$2,000 in real income during that period, Biden said. The Obama administration will not consider any economic recovery to be complete if workers do not share in the recovery, he said.

"We don't just want to restore the GDP [gross domestic product]. If in the process we're not creating good jobs, we haven't met our obligation," Biden said, pointing out that he is

...serving as chair of the administration's White House Task Force on Middle Class Working Families. The task force, Biden said, has been charged with working with all relevant federal agencies to ensure that their actions improve the lot of the nation's middle class.

"That's why we need to pass the Employee Free Choice Act," he said.

AFSCME President Gerald W. McEntee in his speech to the union delegates emphasized the need for more federal aid to state and local governments.

"The right way is to invest in workers, families, and services, to build them up and strengthen them. The wrong way is to retrench and cut back the very things that families depend on at a time like this, the vital public services in states and cities that keep our families secure and our communities strong," he said.

Other top AFSCME priorities are reforms guaranteeing quality, affordable health care for all and passing EFCA, he said.

Lee Saunders, McEntee's executive assistant, in his presentation said federal funds on average account for approximately 30 percent of state budgets, and "considerably more" in some states. Increased federal funding will make it easier for state and local governments to avoid cutbacks in services provided by public employees, he said.