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Organizing: Professors Sign EFCA Support Letter; NAM Members Lobby Hill in
Opposition

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Organizing

Professors Sign EFCA Support Letter; NAM Members Lobby Hill in Opposition

More than 1,100 college professors and scholars signed a letter supporting the proposed Employee Free Choice Act (H.R. 1409, S. 560) and the AFL-CIO said May 7 that the letter will be delivered to Congress.

The AFL-CIO said that scholars across the nation are calling for passage of the bill in letters to Congress, symposiums, rallies, and roundtables this week. The bill aims to make it easier for workers to organize unions by allowing them to choose between signing union authorization cards and holding a secret ballot election.

Meanwhile, members of the National Association of Manufacturers met with lawmakers to discuss their opposition to the bill, NAM said May 7. NAM held a press conference to discuss an array of issues, including EFCA.

Signatures From 1,182 Scholars

The letter contains signatures from 1,182 scholars specializing in an array of disciplines from economics to sociology across 43 states.

“As economists, we understand the key role of collective bargaining in ensuring that workers receive an adequate share of the gains from their rising productivity,” the letter said.

The letter said the decline in the percentage of workers covered by collective bargaining over the last 35 years is a major contributing factor to the gap between productivity and wages. The letter added that the gap has contributed to the current financial crisis, as credit and unsustainable asset appreciation took the place of wage increases.

“As law, labor studies, and business scholars, we understand that more than half of America's non-union workers want a union in their workplace, but are prevented from getting one by a combination of weak law and employer interference,” the letter said.

The letter said that in 2008, fewer than one out of every 800 workers who wanted a union was able to get one through the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)

representation process.

EFCA, introduced in the House and Senate March 10 (45 DLR AA-1, 3/11/09), would amend the National Labor Relations Act to, among other things, establish a procedure whereby the National Labor Relations Board would certify a union as the bargaining representative of employees if a majority of employees of the unit signs valid union authorization cards. The legislation also would allow unions to continue to petition for NLRB-supervised secret ballot elections, if they choose, once 30 percent of the workers have signed union authorization cards.

Supporters of the bill argue that the bill would lead to better wages and benefits for workers. Opponents claim the bill would lead to job-slashing by employers because of rising labor costs.

'Absolute Shock.'

At the NAM conference, NAM board member Dyke Messinger said he was in "absolute shock" over the fact that legislation was introduced that "would interfere with employers and employees."

Messinger, president of Power Curbers, which makes manufacturers slipform machinery, said he photocopied the bill and distributed it to his employees.

"I never sat down with our employees and asked them to take a position," Messinger said. Instead, he said he told employees to let him know if they were interested in discussing the bill with him.

Messinger said several employees raised opposition to the bill because they did not want to have unions dictate employment terms.

Messinger and business groups are particularly annoyed with an arbitration provision in the bill. The measure would allow parties that are unable to reach a first contract within 90 days to refer the dispute to the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. If the FMCS is then unable to bring the parties to agreement within 30 days, the dispute then would be referred to binding arbitration.

"The mandatory arbitration is probably worse [than the card check provision]," Messinger said. "If this passes, you'll see manufacturers looking at whether they want to create jobs in this country."

NAM President and former Michigan Gov. John Engler said a compromise is not possible. "The 'Employee No Choice Act' is not something that lends itself to compromise," Engler said. "The current law represents the middle ground."

NAM met with several lawmakers to discuss its opposition, including Senate Majority

Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.).

By Derrick Cain

To view the letter from the scholars, visit the Political Economy Research Institute's Web site at <http://www.peri.umass.edu/sefca/>.