

EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT ENDORSED BY PROFESSORS; NAM IN OPPOSITION

More than 1,100 college professors and scholars sign a letter supporting the proposed Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) (H.R. 1409, S. 560) and the AFL-CIO says the letter will be delivered to Congress. The AFL-CIO says that scholars across the nation are calling for passage of the bill in letters to Congress, symposiums, rallies, and roundtables. The bill aims to make it easier for workers to join unions by allowing them to choose signing union authorization cards or holding a secret ballot election.

The letter contains signatures from 1,182 scholars specializing in an array of disciplines from economics to sociology across 43 states. The letter states that 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 adds that the gap has contributed to the current financial crisis, as credit and unsustainable asset appreciation took the place of wage increases, and that in 2008, fewer than one out every 800 workers who wanted a union was able to get one through the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) representation process.

“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. 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 states.

The EFCA, introduced in the House and Senate on March 10, would amend the National Labor Relations Act to, among other things, establish a procedure whereby the NLRB 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.

Meanwhile, members of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) met with lawmakers to discuss their opposition to the bill. NAM President and former Michigan Gov. John Engler says a compromise is not possible. “The ‘Employee No Choice Act’ is not something that lends itself to compromise. The current law represents the middle ground.”

The letter is available at <http://www.peri.umass.edu/sefca/>.

(Source: BNA, *Daily Labor Report*, No. 87, May 8, 2009, p. A9.)