



Secret Ballots Still Passing the Test

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In April the health care workers of Saint Elizabeth's Medical Center overwhelmingly voted to affiliate with SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, the largest of the health care related unions in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

While we congratulate the newly affiliated workers on successfully exercising their right to vote on whether or not to unionize, we thought we would take this opportunity to highlight this event as an example of how the current process for affiliating with unions is in no need of an overhaul.

Under the so-called "Employee Free Choice Act," only slightly more than half of the employees would need only to sign a card to unionize. The remainder of the employees need not apply. In a country that prides itself on protecting the voting rights of men and women of all race and creeds and basing the decisions of government on the collective will of those voters, the EFCA would end the voting process by which ALL employees of a particular industry could vote whether or not to unionize in a secret ballot process.

Imagine Proposition 2 ½ Overrides being decided in Massachusetts communities by only 50% plus one of the electorate signing a petition one way or the other. Imagine electing our selectmen, school committee members, state legislators, and congressman that way? What if Boards of Directors of colleges and universities or local non-profit organizations began making decisions by signing index cards or petitions?

Sounds crazy, right? Well it happens to be sane enough for the entire Massachusetts congressional delegation and a significant number of politicians in Congress who wish to implement this exact policy. At one time or another, we have all been asked to sign our name to one petition or another. Most times, many of us decline because we wish to know about the things we sign our names to. Under the EFCA, employees would face a significant amount of scrutiny and pressure to sign these positions because the survival of the labor unions depend on it. There would be little patience for employees who would prefer the integrity of a secret ballot process as opposed to being put on the spot to sign their names to cards.

Supporters of the EFCA will tell you that this vote is about hitting back at Wall Street or sticking it to companies that don't pay enough but it is simply not true. The secret ballot process insulates and protects employees from incurring the wrath of union bosses AND employers, regardless of how they feel. The EFCA is about giving mouth to mouth resuscitation to the dwindling number of union employees in the United States.

Nonetheless, employees deserve the right to make their own decisions when it comes to their collective bargaining rights. Over seventy per cent of Saint Elizabeth's employees voted to unionize because they thought it was the best course for them to take. Kudos to them. The process served them well. So why is it that organized labor is working so hard to fix a process that isn't broken?