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Opinion Editorial

We Must Put the "Card Check Bill" in Check

By
Representative Colleen Meyer

Here we go again. Private businesses could find it a lot more difficult to operate in the future if House Bill 2974 becomes law. The Senate has passed House Bill 2974 known as the "Card Check Bill" and it is headed to the Governor's Office for her signature. Under this bill, workers will no longer be able to determine if they want to be represented by a union through an election process using secret ballots. The "Card Check" bill will give unions the ability to pick off employees one at a time. They will intimidate workers into signing individual cards indicating they would like to join a union. Unfortunately, some hardworking employees will sign the petitions, not because they are in favor of a union shop, but because of persistent union requests, peer pressure tactics or simply not wanting to be harassed anymore. When the Union organizers have collected enough signed petitions to equal 50% plus one of the company's employees, the union will inform the employer that they are the legitimate negotiating entity for the company's employees and the company will have no recourse. The "Card Check" bill does not level the playing field, as unions are fond of saying, it gives them the upper-hand.

Under current law, if 30% of employees of a company sign a petition stating they are interested in joining a union, The National Labor Relations Board will arrange for an election and the employers will have time to make their case and listen to the employees' concerns. The issue to join a union or not will then be decided by a secret ballot. If a majority of employees vote in favor of union representation, then the company is required to recognize the union as the official negotiating entity. However, if House Bill 2974 becomes law, the secret ballot goes out the window.

The timing for this bill could not be worse. The cost of living in Hawaii is skyrocketing while our economy is slowing down. On Thursday, ATA Airlines ceased operations. This past Monday, Aloha Airlines laid off 1,900 employees, last week Molokai Ranch laid off over 120 employees, NCL is reducing its cruise ship fleet in Hawaii from three ships to one, and even attractions like Sea Life Park have recently laid off employees.

This bill sends a strong message to businesses that Hawaii is not a business friendly place. According to the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), Hawaii ranked 45th out of 50 states in economic outlook and we ranked 50th out of 50 on the sales tax burden levied on our citizens. The Alliance for Worker Freedom gave Hawaii an "F" in its 2007 National Report Card.

Instead of passing legislation that will scare off potential businesses, we should look into labor reform, such as Right-to-Work legislation. Statistically, almost half of the states in the country (22 in total) have Right to Work laws, while only six states have card check laws. A Right to Work law secures the right of employees to decide for themselves whether or not to join a union individually, not as a collective group. Right to Work laws

protect the freedom of private AND public sector employees to keep and hold jobs without being required to pay union dues.

2008 is an election year and the Democrats want to "curry favor" with the unions to receive their support in the upcoming contests. It is also convenient that the Legislature passed this bill early, so when the Governor vetoes this bill, the Democrat super majority will be able to override the Governor's veto during the regular session and avoid the criticism that often is raised when the Legislature calls a special session.

Over the past two decades, union membership has declined nationally, but not so in Hawaii, where 24.7% of our workforce is unionized. That's the highest percentage in the country. If you compare Right to Work states with those that have "Card Check" laws, the Right to Work states are outperforming the Card Check states. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the states that have the highest percentage increase in Gross Domestic Product over the last few years are states with Right to Work Laws. Those states that have "Card Check" laws or high union membership do not perform well at all. Michigan ranked 48th of 50 and New Jersey was ranked 36th. It is a shame that the Majority Party is putting "political points" and union interest before the economic well being of the people of Hawaii. I urge the voters of Hawaii to contact their state representatives and senators and tell them not to override the Governor's veto.