

Congresswoman Matsui Statement in Support of the Employee Free Choice Act

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Thursday, March 1, 2007

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Washington, DC – Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-05) issued the following statement in support of the Employee Free Choice Act. The Employee Free Choice Act would protect workers's rights to form unions and bargain collectively. Under this legislation, if a majority of workers in a workplace sign cards authorizing a union, then the union will be certified to represent those employees. Currently, employers can require unions to go through one-sided, time consuming elections as a condition of being certified as bargaining representatives. Such elections become the focal point of employer efforts to frustrate the right of workers to organize.

“I am truly proud to see the Employee Free Choice Act on the floor of the House. This represents a tremendous step forward for working families in this country. I want to thank Chairman Miller for crafting this excellent legislation and for his tireless efforts on behalf of workers.

“A little less than a year ago, Chairman Miller and I held a forum on this legislation in my hometown of Sacramento. We heard emotional testimony from workers about their experiences in the workplace. They had been subjected to coercion and intimidation--and some had even been fired--simply because of their desire to join a union.

“After sharing encounter after encounter, they asked Congress to pass the Employee Free Choice Act. They know that this legislation would protect them from these abuses. It would repair the cracks in the current system. And it would allow them to make a real choice in deciding to join a union.

“It is one thing to talk in the abstract about the policy. It is quite another to see first hand the human face, the real life consequences of that policy. What we are talking about is helping working Americans – the middle class – meet the needs of their families.

“Congress must take advantage of this chance to act. A strong middle class has been the bedrock of expanded prosperity and opportunity in this country.

“And our middle class families are at a critical juncture. They face some daunting challenges. Wages are not keeping up with inflation. Yet, the costs the typical middle class family faces – such as housing, health care, transportation and college – continue to rise dramatically. We risk losing the strong middle class that has been the backbone of this nation.

“Throughout our history, protecting the right to organize has played a critical role in improving the wages and quality of life for working people, and in growing the middle class.

“To preserve the middle class, it is critical that we continue to keep the central promise of our nation’s labor laws — that workers be empowered to make their own decisions about a collective bargaining representative.

“NLRB elections, as they exist today, often do not allow such a choice. And that’s where the Employee Free Choice Act comes in. As Chairman Miller has explained so well, it will take important steps to level the playing field for workers who are trying to organize. It will allow employees to make a real choice to join a union without intimidation. And it will provide for stronger penalties when companies engage in illegal practices. Because the right to organize and form a union is fundamental to ensuring a fair balance of power in the workplace.

“And you know, this is not an anti-business bill, as its being portrayed by its opponents. This is a pro-workplace bill. What I mean is that when you have a card check system, it makes for a successful workplace—for the company and for workers.

“At the forum I held with Chairman Miller in Sacramento, we heard from a second panel of workers whose employer had voluntarily agreed to a card check system. This employer, and the many others that have agreed to a card check system, understand there is a benefit to treating employees with dignity and respect. They understand that when a company lets workers weigh the pros and cons of joining a union—without harassment or intimidation—those workers will be more productive and more committed to the success of the company.

“Frankly, if you care about working families, these reforms are simply common sense. They will make the organizing process simpler, more fair, and most importantly, ensure that the fundamental right of choosing whether or not to join a union rests squarely where it belongs: with this nation’s workers.

“I promised my constituents that I would do everything I could do get this bill passed in the House. So I am proud that it is on the floor today. Members have an opportunity — by voting in favor of this legislation — to stand with the working families of this country. I urge my colleagues to take advantage of that opportunity.”

The House is expected to pass the legislation later this afternoon (Thursday, March 1, 2007).

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