

EFCA Will Hurt Black-Owned Business Growth

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Last month the National Black Chamber of Commerce hosted an open press event to showcase the deep concern that many African-Americans have about the Employee Free Choice Act and the Project Labor Agreement Executive Order 13502. Speakers at our event represented minority contractors, small businesses and women's interests. Why is our community so concerned?

The Employee Free Choice Act would eliminate one of the most fundamental tenets of our democracy: the secret ballot. By eliminating the right to vote in private, workers would not only be deprived of the right to vote their conscience, but would also be more vulnerable to the intimidation and coercion tactics known to be used by union organizers.

According to the Center for Union Facts, thousands of unfair labor practice cases have been filed against unions since 2000, including 1,417 for coercive statements, 416 for violence and assaults, 546 for harassment, and 1,325 for threatening statements. African-Americans, in particular, have bitter memories of voter intimidation and have a responsibility to stand up against any proposition that will take away their democratic voting rights.

Less publicized but equally concerning to the African-American community is that EFCA would allow government arbitrators to dictate labor contracts if unions and employers cannot reach their own agreement within a 120-day period. Currently, only 2 percent of minority-owned businesses are unionized. The passage of EFCA will further reduce the rights of an overwhelming majority of African-American employers by introducing government arbitrators with final decision-making authority into the collective bargaining process.

This critical issue is one reason why the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators & Developers has joined NBCC in the fight against EFCA. This legislation would drive many hotels out of business, eliminate jobs and ultimately be the end of black hotel ownership.

And speaking of jobs and the African-American community, we already know what Project Labor Agreements do to minority employment. Show me a Project Labor Agreement and I'll show you Jim Crow employment plus a locking out of most African-American-owned firms. In effect, in many industries, a PLA is a license to discriminate against African-American workers.

Take the recently completed Woodrow Wilson Bridge project. We proved to then-President George W. Bush that if there was a PLA plan in Virginia similar to the one implemented in Maryland, it would have reduced African-American labor on the project by 70 percent. When the president banned any PLAs on the bridge, he said, "I want to support small business and stop discrimination in the workplace." That was a great moment for African-American employment and business development.

Or take a look at the construction industry in Philadelphia, where decades of blatant discrimination by 18 construction unions was finally exposed. Before he took action to reverse it, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter (D) called that situation an example of "economic apartheid." In a city where minorities make up 55 percent of the population, 80 percent of unionized construction workers were white males and 70 percent lived outside of the city. In contrast, non-union projects had a 72 percent minority employment rate with 71 percent of those workers living in the city.

From 1997 to 2002, African-American-owned business grew by 43 percent on a national scale. But in Philadelphia, African-American-owned businesses decreased by 10 percent, with a drastic decrease of 60 percent for African-American-owned construction firms. These statistics clearly show how more union-friendly legislation at the national level will further disenfranchise minority workers and minority-owned businesses.

On an even broader scale, take a closer look at the national construction industry and you will see that only 13 percent of America's construction workforce belongs to a construction labor union. With the enactment of Executive Order 13502, almost nine out of 10 construction workers in the United States, regardless of race, will now be unable to work on federal construction projects.

Every worker deserves the right to vote their conscience and vote in private. Most importantly, all employees deserve an equal opportunity to work, prosper and benefit from government contracts. All of these rights are threatened by the misnamed Employee Free Choice Act and by a misguided executive order on Project Labor Agreements.

We believe that enacting EFCA and other pro-union legislation will have a very negative impact on the African-American business community, on African-American employment, and as a result, on our economy as a whole. At a time when we should be focused on greater opportunities and more jobs, voting for EFCA is the wrong choice for the African-American community.

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