Protecting Employees' Right-to-Work

One of our nation's most fundamental liberties guaranteed to all Americans under the First Amendment is the freedom of assembly. Unfortunately, for millions of American workers who are forced to pay union dues as a condition of their employment, this cherished right stops at the workplace.

While forced unionism is a windfall for the bank accounts of powerful labor unions and their allies, it deprives workers of their basic right to choose whether they want to be represented by a union at all. In addition to limiting worker freedom, growing union power among public employees has imposed a tremendous economic cost. The American people must hold their elected officials accountable for giving into the demands of public employee unions to increase pay and benefits beyond what is offered in the private sector, and which are now straining the budgets of federal, state and local governments.

I firmly believe that Congress should allow individual workers to decide the form of workplace representation that best suits their needs. Currently, twenty-two states have laws on the books that protect workers from being forced to join a union or pay union dues in order to work at a given worksite. Compared with forced-union states, the nation's right-to-work states have created more new jobs and businesses. Research shows that from 1993 to 2009, right-to-work states created 15.8 million new jobs in the private sector, 1.3 million more than in forced unionism states. Meanwhile during that same time period, the number of net new private businesses established in right-to-work states was 46 percent higher than forced-unionism states, accounting for 59.4 percent of new private sector businesses.

This growth in new businesses is particularly remarkable as right-to-work states account for only 40 percent of the population. However this is bound to change as more Americans move into these growing right-to-work states. In fact, from 2000 to 2008, approximately 4.7 million Americans have moved to right-to-work states from forced-union states.

While right-to-work states are prospering, private sector unions are faltering. Since 1983, total union membership has declined by 40 percent, while the drop among private sector workers was nearly 60 percent. Last year, only 6.9 percent of private sector employees were union members – the lowest rate in more than a century.

One consequence of this deep decline in private sector union membership has been the drive by organized labor to increase their ranks among government employees. In 2010, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that for the first time in history, a majority of union members work for the federal or state and local governments. This costs taxpayers billions of dollars each year and incentivizes unions to push for tax increases to support larger, bloated government.

As Big Labor becomes ever more desperate to retain their influence and increase their coffers, it is imperative that we protect the right of all workers to choose whether they want to be represented by a union without harassment or undue pressure by either management or labor. To that end, I have signed on as an original co-sponsor of the National Right-to-Work Act so that no American worker will ever be forced to pay union dues or fees against their will in order to work in this country. I will continue to work in Congress to reform our nation's labor laws that will protect the rights of American workers and enable our nation's employers both large and small to do what they do best: create jobs.

Rep. Gary Miller represents California's 42nd Congressional District.