

A Vice President Speaks

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If you choose not to vote, why should it count as a "no" vote?

That may sound like an odd question but until June 10, 2010, if you didn't bother to vote one way or the other in an election for union representation it meant your failure to vote was still counted as a no vote. In other words, if you didn't have any strong feelings one way or the other, or you felt intimidated by your employer, or didn't vote for whatever reason, the government would cast your vote for you against the union and for management.

On May 10 that rule was changed by a 2 to 1 vote of the members of the National Mediation Board (NMB) and it took effect June 10, 2010. The lone negative vote was cast by - yes, that's right - the hold-over Bush appointee, Elizabeth Dougherty. Ms. Dougherty, former Special Assistant to President George W. Bush apparently thinks it is alright to treat airline and rail employees different than employees in any other industry. You see, if you work in any other industry a simple majority vote of the votes cast determines whether or not you can belong to a union. Prior to this rule change, we were treated differently than anyone else seeking union protection.

President Obama's recent appointment of the former President of the Association of Flight Attendants, Linda Puchala, to the NMB finally tipped the scale in the direction of common sense and fairness on the issue of union elections in the rail and airline industry. Ms. Puchala joined with NMB Member Harry Hoglander in voting to change the rule.

Obviously, when you consider the issue you have to wonder what took so long. How did such an unfair and arcane rule last for so long? Doesn't the majority of those casting their ballots determine the outcome of our Local, County, State and National Elections? In fact, is there any other situation where complacency and the act of not voting mean you voted against an issue? Imagine what effect that would have on referendum balloting on issues that affect our

daily lives and even the very freedoms we enjoy. A simple majority vote, by way of referendum could, among other things; create a new constitution, a constitutional amendment, a law, or recall an elected official. So, why shouldn't men and women who work in the rail and airline industry have the same right to expect the outcome of their elections to be based on a majority vote?

Anyone who doesn't think that it is important to vote in political elections need look no further. Our previous U.S. President would appoint individuals to positions like Ms. Dougherty who believe we have no right to basic democratic elections while the appointments made by our current President hold a much different view. Obviously, our votes have had an impact.

Of course, like any decision that appears to be pro labor, this change has been challenged by the GOP and big business who came together to proclaim the NMB does not have the authority to make this change. Railroads and airlines have known for a long time they had a huge advantage with the former application and they certainly do not want to be forced to play on a level playing field. On June 25th the Airline Transport Association filed for injunctive relief before the United States District Court, District of Columbia, in an effort to block the new ruling. Their request was rejected effective July 1st but is unknown at this time whether they will appeal.

Walter H. Judd, a **republican** politician and statesman once said, "People often say that, in a democracy, decisions are made by a majority of people. Of course, that is not true. Decisions are made by a majority of those who make themselves heard and who vote - a very different thing."

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