

Fanning the flames for EFCA

Coast to coast, members campaign for labor law reforms

From rocky Maine to far Alaska and back to sunny Florida, NALC members are aggressively promoting the Employee Free Choice Act as a way to strengthen the middle class and give a hand up to working families struggling to escape the depths of the recession.

Even though they already enjoy the benefits of a strong union—or perhaps because they do—these letter carriers are working hard for EFCA because they believe everyone should have the right to join forces in a union without fear and bargain with their employer for better wages, benefits and working conditions.

“It’s the best way to get a toehold when you’re trying to climb into the middle class,” NALC President Bill Young said. “When other workers get ahead, we become stronger, too. That’s why so many of our members are out there, lighting a fire under the politicians who are standing in the way and fighting the propaganda from big business.”

“ I knew what I was doing when I signed my enlistment papers. If my signature was good enough for my country, my signature should be good enough for my government and my employer to honor my desire to join a union. ” —Dorsey Roland, Anchorage, Alaska Branch 4319

One example of that effort is a letter from President Renée Overlock of Central Maine Merged Branch 391 in Bangor to the operator of a local hotel who appeared at an anti-EFCA press conference orchestrated by business lobbyists.

“We were dismayed to learn of your participation,” the March 24 letter begins, adding, “We feel [EFCA] is a long overdue reform of the nation’s labor laws.”

Overlock thoroughly rebutted the bogus anti-EFCA arguments and the

outright lies used to buttress them—including blasting the myth EFCA would take away the workers’ right to a secret ballot election. But the real zinger came in response to the manager’s comment that his employees are “contented and enjoy good pay and benefits.”

“If you are correct, your employees would be unlikely to seek to organize, and [EFCA] would have no impact on your business,” she wrote, except for a positive one: “Working people who earn fair wages and good benefits are more likely to be able to spend on such things as travel and lodgings.”

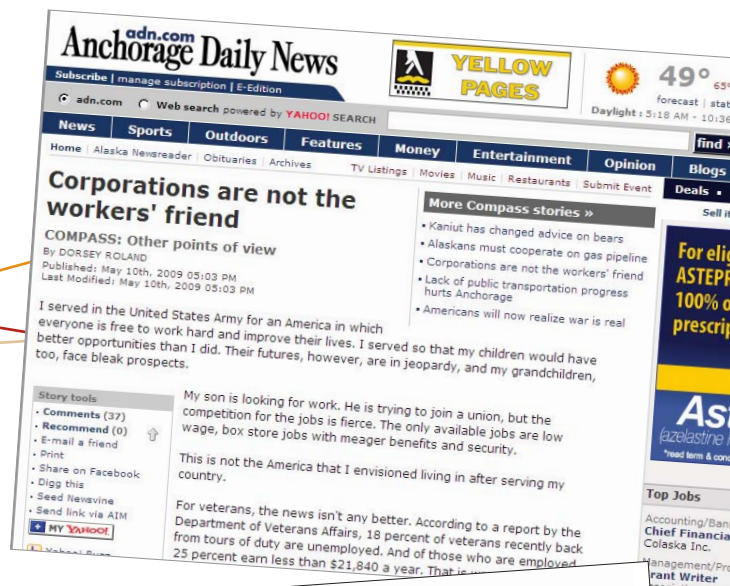
If the hotelier wasn’t convinced by that logic, Overlock had one point left—a sharp stick in the corporate wallet, in fact. Branch 391 was scheduled to host the Maine State Association convention in May, she noted, and, “We would be remiss if we did not inform all Maine letter carriers about your public misrepresentation of a measure we so strongly

endorse,” so they can “make an informed choice” about where to stay in Bangor.

Up north, in Alaska

In Alaska, meanwhile, Anchorage Branch 4319 member and Alaska State Legislative Chair Dorsey Roland was honing an op-ed article with a more personal tack that appeared in the May 10 edition of the *Anchorage Daily News*.

Roland is one of the 31 NALC members released to work with the AFL-CIO’s



grass roots pro-EFCA movement. An Army veteran and 13-year letter carrier, he has been visiting union halls and worksites to encourage union members to write and call their elected representatives—particularly Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski, an EFCA opponent. Roland also has collected hundreds of thank-you letters to Sen. Mark Begich (D) and Rep. Don Young (R), both supporters.

Roland began his article by noting that he had served in the Army “so that my children would have better opportunities than I did. Their futures, however, are in jeopardy, and my grandchildren, too, face bleak prospects.

“My son is looking for work. He is trying to join a union, but the competition for the jobs is fierce. The only available jobs are low-wage, box store jobs with meager benefits and security.

“This is not the America that I envisioned living in after serving my country.”

The NALC member explained that EFCA is important to stop “corporate America’s assault on working people,” an all-out war that has been steadily eroding wages, pensions and health care for decades. “This fleecing of America cannot continue unchecked,” he declared.

His article included this compelling response to the opponents of so-called card check organizing: “I knew what I was doing when I signed my enlistment papers. If my signature was good enough for my country, my signature should be good enough for my government and my employer to honor my desire to join a union.”

Back east (and south)

Diagonally across the country, West Coast Florida Branch 1477 member Leo Murray is working to keep carriers engaged in the Free Choice fight.

While some may think EFCA isn’t important for public employees, and especially not for those who work for the union-dense Postal Service, Murray, a state legislative liaison, begs to differ. He adds an interesting argument about

labor organizing and the current recession to the mix.

“This bill makes all of us stronger, whether you are a union member or not,” Murray said. “We may have not gotten in the economic situation we are in now if it had been easier for people to join unions and collectively bargain for a living wage.”

Back in Maine, Steve Sanford, vice president of Maine Merged Branch 92 based in Portland, was one of hundreds of veterans who spoke out for EFCA in a cross-country event in early May organized by the AFL-CIO.

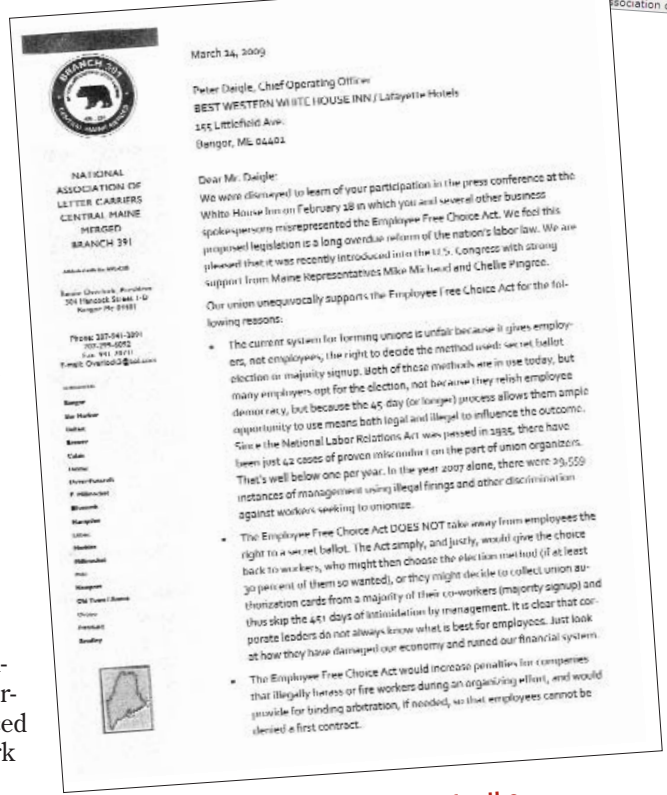
Sanford served in an Army tank crew during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield. Today, his concern is that vets are coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan to an economy in shambles. Unemployment among returning vets is running near 20 percent, and many are being forced in to low-wage, non-union work—the same plight faced by Alaska carrier Roland’s son.

For today’s veterans, instead of having the opportunity to form a union and bargain for good jobs and wages like World War II vets did, the men and women returning from military duty today can look forward to working two jobs at minimum wage—if they can find them.

Sanford appreciates his job as a union carrier because it provides “stability” and “protection from arbitrary discrimination.”

“The biggest thing for me, as a veteran,” he said, “is that [EFCA] gives us a decent chance at a good job when you get out of the military.” ✉

For more information about the Employee Free Choice Act, visit aflcio.org.



Top: Dorsey Roland’s op-ed for the Anchorage Daily News. Several other NALC activists have had pro-EFCA letters and articles printed in their local papers. Bottom: René Overlock’s letter to a hotel manager protesting his appearance at an anti-EFCA news conference.