

NALC members set free for Employee Free Choice

More than 90 Scranton, Pennsylvania letter carriers marched six blocks to deliver nearly 40,000 pro-EFCA letters to Sen. Arlen Specter's north-east Pennsylvania field office.



Delegates to the recent Colorado State Association of Letter Carriers convention held a roundtable discussion on the advantages of EFCA.

Almost 40 NALC members and union staff have been released to work with the AFL-CIO in the push for adoption of the Employee Free Choice Act, the crucial workers' rights legislation that is nearing a final showdown in the Congress.

"Nothing means more for workers than being able to have a union, and nothing is worse than being left powerless, facing the boss alone," said NALC President William H. Young. "EFCA will empower workers and help rebuild the middle class—and that is essential to letter carriers if we're going to maintain our good wages and benefits."

At the AFL-CIO's Executive Council meeting in Miami in March, President Young pledged the NALC's ongoing support for the EFCA campaign and the releases are the result.

"The federation asked for our help then and we have delivered," he said last month. "Time after time, polls show that letter carriers are among the most trusted people in the country. The AFL-CIO knows that it can count on that trust to help spread the message about employee free choice."

If passed in its present form, EFCA would allow workers to form unions by signing cards authorizing collective bargaining representation, provide arbitration for first contracts if negotiations deadlock, and establish stiff penalties for management intimidation and labor law violations when workers try to organize unions.

Last summer, the measure passed the House of Representatives but did not make it to the Senate floor—and even if it had, there was no chance President Bush would sign it into law. The political landscape is different now, although still

treacherous. Certainly, passage in the House with its large labor-friendly majority is assured. The pro-labor majority in the Senate is larger, too, boosting hopes of the bill making it to President Obama, who stated he would sign it. But an aggressive anti-EFCA campaign has some senators waffling.

At press time, 224 representatives and 39 senators were listed as co-sponsors of their respective EFCA bills, H.R. 1409 and S. 560.

Never easy

"It sometimes feels like you need at least 90 senators to get anything passed these days," said NALC National Field Director Seth Hahn, whose responsibilities include helping to steer the released letter carriers to where they can be most effective.

All that is needed to pass a bill in the Senate is a simple majority—that's Government 101. However, invoking "cloture" to cut off debate requires 60 votes.

Fifty-nine senators are generally regarded as "pro-labor"—57 Democrats, plus two Independents who have aligned themselves with the Democrats. Occasionally, one or two of the few remaining center-leaning Republicans will vote in favor of labor interests.

But defections from the ranks of usually stalwart labor supporters, coupled with a multimillion-dollar U.S. Chamber of Commerce campaign against the measure, has thwarted what once looked like relatively quick passage for EFCA in the 111th Congress.

To generate pressure on those lawmakers, President Young assigned more than three dozen NALC members and staffers to states the AFL-CIO identified as EFCA battlegrounds, specifically Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Louisiana, Maine, North Dakota and Pennsylvania.

From I: Region 4 Regional Administrative Assistant Ray Tillman, Regional Field Coordinator Lindsay Burr, Region 4 National Business Agent Roger Bledsoe, Region 4 RAA Al Linde and Arkansas State President David Anderson were in Little Rock to promote EFCA at a rally.



“The federation chose those states because their usually reliably pro-labor senators were either on the fence about EFCA or against it for some reason,” Hahn said. So, for the last several months, 33 carriers and four of Headquarters’ Regional Field Coordinators have worked full-time to build grass roots pro-EFCA coalitions in those states (*see list at right*).

“Among AFL-CIO unions, almost half—that’s right, half—of the releases working on EFCA have been representatives of the NALC,” said President Young. “These letter carriers have really been going all-out. They’re away from their families, working more than full time, six or seven days a week, 10 or maybe 12 hours a day.”

“We owe them a real debt of gratitude,” Young said.

Reaching out

This campaign has taken letter carriers beyond the labor-only audience of election campaigns, Hahn noted. “Our members reached out to environmental and religious groups, too—in fact, to anyone we believed would be as sympathetic to workers’ rights as union members are.”

The released carriers and RFCs enlisted the various organizations’ help to call senators’ offices, both in their home states and on Capitol Hill. They also wrote letters to senators as well as to local newspapers, all in an effort to level the playing field for workers’ trying to form unions.

“We’ve helped set up town hall meetings, plus lobbying and letter-writing campaigns,” Hahn said. “Whatever we could do to drive real grass roots mobilization, we’ve done.”

A major anti-EFCA scare tactic is the claim the measure will hurt small businesses. However, many businesses, large and small, already understand that there are plenty of advantages to having an organized labor force.

List of released NALC members and staff

David Anderson, Pine Bluff, AR Branch 240
Mike Allen, Central Maine Merged Branch 391
Bob Annala, Colorado Springs, CO Branch 204
Joe Antal, Johnstown, PA Branch 451
Ken Barber, Centennial Colorado Branch 5996
John Beaumont, San Francisco, CA Branch 214
Lindsay Burr, NALC Mid-America Region Field Coordinator
Verle Craven, Greater East Bay, CA Branch 1111
Ron Drews, Denver, CO Branch 47
Rachel Eagleson, Fargo-West Fargo, ND Branch 205
Ryan Gautschi, Minot, ND Branch 1152
George George, Wilkes-Barre, PA Branch 115
Tom Hill, Fayetteville, AR Branch 1004
Ralph Honda, Grand Forks, ND Branch 517
Phil Isgrig, Little Rock, AR Branch 35
Cindy Kirby, Denver, CO Branch 47
Jim Kirkham, Hot Springs, AR Branch 543
Matt Kozlo, Los Angeles, CA Branch 24
Anita Lewallen, Conway, AR Branch 1592
Horace Lewis, Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100
John Marrero Jr., New Orleans, LA Branch 124
Amy Nawrocki, Pueblo, CO Branch 229
Terry Oberly, Lancaster, PA Branch 273
Gregory Preslar, Shreveport, LA Branch 197
Dorsey Roland, Anchorage, AK Branch 4319
Paul Rozzi, Mon-Yough, PA Branch 332
Carol Salandra, Anchorage, AK Branch 4319
Jackie Skene, Centennial Colorado Branch 5996
Meaghan Slater, NALC Northeast Region Field Coordinator
Clay Smith, Philadelphia, PA Branch 157
Mark Terry, Maine Merged Branch 92
Monica Walker, Baton Rouge, LA Branch 129
Sandy Walker, Lake Charles, LA Branch 914
Jim Walzenbach, San Diego, CA Branch 70
Adam Weiss, NALC Western Region Field Coordinator
Jackie White, Los Angeles, CA Branch 24
Casie Yoder, NALC Central Region Field Coordinator

Alaska letter carriers joined with their brothers and sisters of UNITE-HERE to protest unfair working conditions at the Anchorage Hilton.



California Carrier Corps members rallied for employee free choice in front of Sen. Dianne Feinstein's Los Angeles office.

“Part of our released members’ work has been getting small businesses signed on in support of EFCA, too.” Hahn said. “Nearly a thousand small business have now voiced their support of the Employee Free Choice Act.”

The EFCA fight is the first major campaign to be subsidized by the union’s Legislative and Political Fund, which was created last year when delegates to the National Convention in Boston approved a constitutional amendment to convert the union’s strike Contingency Fund into a new fund to be used at the president’s direction to support the union’s non-partisan political and legislative activities.

“This is a perfect use of this new fund,” Hahn said. “It’s exactly the kind of thing it was created for.”

Meanwhile, the United States Chamber of Commerce is leading the fight against EFCA, armed with tens of millions of dollars to spend on advertising and lobbying on Capitol Hill.

“They are a formidable adversary,” President Young said. “We don’t have that kind of money, and neither does the AFL-CIO. We do have the power of solidarity, plus the will and the knowledge that enabling workers to bargain collectively for better pay and benefits helps all working families prosper.”

“And EFCA won’t cost a dime of taxpayer money,” Hahn added, referring to the hundreds of billions doled out for corporate bailouts and approved for economic stimulus projects.

Status report

While letter carriers work with their friends in labor unions and other interested organizations to get EFCA passed,

some senators have floated “compromises” they think will help move the legislation along.

As reported in last month’s *Postal Record*, Sens. Dianne Feinstein of California and Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania have proposed modifying the majority sign-up and arbitration provisions of the bill.

Feinstein envisions replacing “card check” with a system that would let workers signify their interest in forming a workplace union by mailing cards to the National Labor Relations Board for certification, rather than first handing those cards to union organizers.

Meanwhile, Specter—a newly minted Democrat and one-time EFCA supporter—has pressed for modifying the proposed arbitration provision to allow both parties to simply submit their “last best offers” to an arbitrator. The arbitrator would then select either one or pick and choose from each to come up with a contract. The idea is to defuse Big Business’ objections to the more stringent arbitration language in the current bill, which has emerged as a target in the anti-EFCA campaign.

“The business community’s main focus these days seems to be on saying ‘no’ to labor,” said President Young. “However, for almost 40 years, the NALC has negotiated its contracts with the Postal Service, so we have a lot of experience with, and respect for, honest bargaining and compromise. We know that binding arbitration works.”

“We’ll continue to work with the other unions and we’ll keep lobbying all members of Congress to try to get legislation passed that will guarantee workers their free choice when it comes to forming a union.” he said. ☒