



Secret ballots become an open target for Chandler

By Jim Waters

If U.S. Rep. Ben Chandler got his way, my senior class at Wabash High School would never have elected me its president.

Chandler wants to take away the rights of employees to cast secret ballots when voting on whether to allow labor unions in their workplace.

Currently, if a majority of workers sign a card in favor of an election, one is held by secret ballot. However, just because workers sign a card supporting an election doesn't necessarily indicate union support. Often, employees sign the card *allowing* the election, but then vote "no" to a union on their secret ballot.

The difference is: the card signing happens in public, but the actual vote – as it should – remains private.

In fact, can you think of anything more unfair and un-American than taking away the right to vote by secret ballot?

This process served me well. In the election for class president, I ran against a cheerleader – one of the most beautiful girls in school. Lucky for me, no one back then thought of denying voters the right to a secret ballot. She would have scanned the voters to see which guys didn't vote for her, thus eliminating them from the dating pool. I would have lost most of the "guy" votes.

Chandler, who receives tons of union support, apparently is returning the favor by endorsing desperate legislative ploys by anxious labor groups who have seen their numbers — and dues-generated bank accounts — shrink. One can assume that a decline in their mostly negative influence on the political process would soon follow. I'm still waiting on that to happen.

I'm also still waiting for Chandler's answer as to why he voted for the ill-advised "card-check" legislation during the recent session of Congress. His answer – like the proper way to vote – remains a secret.

Someone asked him to explain his vote in front of a room full of civic leaders at Commerce Lexington's August "public affairs" meeting at Keeneland Race Course. My trusty Microsoft "word count" shows Chandler gave a 522-word, rambling response but *never* answered the question. He didn't address the legislation. He didn't even mention it in his response, which can be seen at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCO8yApS_BQ

It's a wacky position to suggest voters should decide on union membership in public, where everyone can see their preference. In fact, I'm not sure which is more bizarre – that position or the fact union bosses argue with a straight face that taking away secret ballots reduces hostility toward – and intimidation of – workers. Huh?

The Web site for an organization calling itself "American Rights at Work" claims that denying workers a secret ballot represents "a more fair and democratic method for men and women to join unions."

They want you to believe that a secret ballot allows employers the opportunity to harass workers into voting against unions. The claim is often made but rarely substantiated.

In fact, credible research refutes this convoluted logic.

Labor expert James Sherk of the Heritage Foundation's Center for Data Analysis reported that of the 2,115 private-ballot union certification elections supervised by the National Labor Relations Board in 2005, unions filed objections alleging improper employer conduct – threatening, intimidating or firing workers – in only 137. The government upheld only 10 of these grievances.

According to Sherk, unions win 61 percent of all organizing elections — not exactly strong evidence employers tilt the playing field against organizers.

On the other hand, even most union workers oppose forcing people to vote publicly. A poll by Zogby International found that 78 percent of union workers believe the current system is fair. They "favor keeping the current system over replacing it with one that provides less privacy," Sherk wrote.

Chandler should join their ranks.

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