



'Card check' or paychecks: You decide

By Jim Waters

Labor unions have been losing membership faster than BP's been losing value in the stock market.

Approximately 8 percent of private-sector employees are union members today, compared with 35 percent in the 1950s. That's why labor unions want to get the dishonestly named "[Employee Free Choice Act](#)" passed.

The legislation also goes by the name "[card check](#)," and it would increase union membership — and the unemployment rate. Under this bill:

- Kentucky workers would lose their right to vote by secret ballot on whether to join a union. What could be more un-American than taking away the right to vote by secret ballot on *anything*, much less a worker's career?
- Kentucky employers would lose the freedom to decide how their companies operate. Instead, government arbitrators who know nothing about businesses or their ability to pay would decide.
- Kentucky employers would become victims of unfair sanctions, subjective penalties and big fines for imaginary violations of the law.
- Jobs would be lost — a lot of them. A recent [study](#) by noted economist Anne Layne-Farrar, director of the LEGC LLC consulting firm, found that up to 600,000 jobs could be lost in the second year following passage of such a bill.

But labor unions would benefit. Layne-Farrar indicates the bill would result in an additional 1.5 million workers becoming union members in the first year after the bill passes.

With union members paying dues of up to 2 percent out of their entire paychecks, union organizers would have big money to spend on their favorite politicians. Those include the only two Kentucky congressmen who voted for a "card check" bill that passed the U.S. House of Representatives on March 1, 2007, but stalled in the Senate.

But considering that more than 15 million Americans are now unemployed — nearly 250,000 Kentuckians — I'm sure U.S. Reps. John Yarmuth from Louisville and Ben Chandler of Lexington will vote differently next time. "Aren't you?" (he asked sarcastically)

Perhaps before casting another vote supporting such a misguided policy, Chandler should reconnect with his district's small business owners.

He should stop by BJM & Associates Inc., a staffing firm that's been helping Lexington residents find jobs for 39 years, and find out what Janey Moores, its founder, president and chief executive office, thinks.

"It's a real power grab being waged by the unions," Moores likely would tell him, just as she told me. "All of the Kentucky business owners and upper management I'm talking with are telling me: 'We're struggling as it is, and if we've got another layer of bureaucracy, if we have more taxes to pay for government to come into our workplace — in addition to being distracted from the things we know how

to do to strengthen or grow our business, we're going to basically sell out or do something else like go home and play with the grandkids. We're not putting up with even more.'"

Moore says the economic future of the commonwealth and country should not be wagered in order to prop up labor unions that have said, "We're too big to fail but we don't have enough money."

The labor unions have squandered funds meant for pensions, Moore said.

"Unions have not invested those pension funds well and now taxpayers are going to be penalized and have to go back and plug up the holes that these union reps and managers have caused," she said. "In the meantime, they've had work stoppages and strikes. They cause dissension among their workers. It's just not the way to get a good-quality product made or to have a dedicated workforce."

Then she issued me this challenge: Name one unionized company "that's doing well."

I couldn't. Can you?

— *Jim Waters is director of policy and communications for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Reach him at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com. Read previously published columns at www.bipps.org.*