

Saturday, March 28, 2009

OPINION

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Fair labor laws

Re the Our View "Holding off on card check:"

It's this reader's hope that Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis does indeed set the "bipartisan tone" that has been promised by President Obama but hardly in evidence since his oath of office. By applying the labor laws fairly and evenly both employees and employer benefit and Solis is in a unique position to do just that.

As for "card check," I hope she takes a step back and evaluates this union-backed effort which is probably more about enlarging their membership rolls than providing employees with greater protection.

Case in point, the battle between the SEIU and UHW-West currently unfolding in the Bay Area. This break-away UHW-West membership signed

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petitions indicating their desire to leave the SEIU and form a different union. The SEIU has rejected this requested and has promised to fight the UHW-West all the way up to the NLRB. It would seem to me that the SEIU leadership has failed to embrace the core concept of the Free Choice Act and if they are unable to honor their own members' desire to leave and form their own union, then why should we expect employers to be held to a higher standard?

Remember what's good for the goose is also good for the gander.

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OPINION

Sunday, March 1, 2009

Holding off on card check

IT sure seemed like politics as usual that caused the two-month-long delay in the confirmation of San Gabriel Valley Congresswoman Hilda Solis as secretary of labor.

When she finally received confirmation last Tuesday night from the U.S. Senate by an 81-17 vote, it was an overwhelming number, well beyond the number needed to break a filibuster. So what was all the fuss about?

Republicans held up her nomination because they wanted to send the Democrats and the President a message about a proposed labor law that would make it a lot easier for non-union shops to organize. The Republican senators were saying if you thought this was protracted, just wait until you try to get the Employee Free Choice Act passed. This measure, also known as card check, was supported by Obama when he was in the Senate and by Solis, who was a principal co-sponsor. It would enable workers wishing to join a union to check a box on a card instead of holding an election with secret ballots. The fight over card check will be a knock down, drag out battle that will make Solis' confirmation delays seem like a stroll through Camp David.

This is not a fight that the bipartisan-minded president should invite at this time. That's one reason why it would be beneficial for Obama and Solis to hold off on card check. Besides, we're not convinced the need for easier union access is on the front burner, not in today's difficult economic climate and when jobs are disappearing at alarming rates.

If Solis is looking to make changes that would help low and moderate-income workers, then there are other ways to do so. First, she can concentrate on making "green jobs" an official category in the Bureau of Labor Statistics. By doing so, it would give govern-

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ment a measuring stick for creating jobs that also help the environment. This kind of jobs yardstick would mesh nicely with the just-passed federal stimulus bill.

Also, Solis should do what good labor secretaries should do. Make sure the laws are applied equally. Solis is well acquainted with issues of slave labor and horrendous treatment of laborers, having been one of the first to denounce the slave labor/sweatshops that were uncovered by state inspectors in El Monte in 1995.

When it is all said and done, we agree with El Monte Councilwoman Pat Wallach who said this past week that having one of our own in the cabinet of the president will be good for the San Gabriel Valley. "She is one of our own, so we know she will keep us under her wing and keep an eye on us ..." said Wallach, who worked with Solis to rid the town of such slave labor operations in the middle and late '90s.

What having "one of our own" so close to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is not entirely clear. But we know that if an issue were to arise in her old backyard, either in the 32nd District that includes residents of Azusa, Baldwin Park, Covina, Duarte, El Monte, Irwindale, South El Monte, West Covina and portions of Monterey Park and East Los Angeles, or elsewhere in the region, Solis would be all over it.

Solis is someone who understands working people, coming from a blue-collar family in La Puente. It will be beneficial for the working people of the San Gabriel Valley and Whittier areas to know they have a friend in Washington.

By looking out for the working people, especially today when many are losing their jobs or taking furloughs and pay cuts, Solis will send a message to those she cares most about.