

Vice President Joe Biden
Remarks to the Communications Workers of America
June 24, 2009
Washington, D.C.

[25:40]

The work of the CWA is critical to so many other battles we're facing, like the battle to pass the Employee Free Choice Act. We need to do that folks. We need to do that.

And to repeat myself...

And by the way, this is not an ideological deal. Everybody makes this out to be liberal/conservative. It is not ideological. There used to be a day when business and labor sat down at the table, and they were equals. ...

Even when I began in the '70s, as a young councilman in 1971, when the business rep would look at the corporate rep across the table, you knew he or she respected you. You knew they took you seriously. You respected them! It wasn't, it wasn't this deal...

You know, the National Labor Relations Act says we should "encourage" – paraphrase – "encourage" unions, not mandate them, encourage them. Why? It's good for the economy. It's gotten lopsided, folks.

The guys who were supposed to be wearing striped shirts have been wearing black shirts the last eight years. We don't have referees out there doing it the right way. We're switching out the shirts, because we're switching out the people wearing the shirts.

But folks, this isn't anti-business, this isn't anti-corporate, this isn't anti-anything. It is pro. It is pro making sure that people who have a stake in the game and a significant contribution to make are able to sit at the table, and you don't get to sit at the table if you're not organized, and you don't get to be organized if they can string out electoral processes, if they can drag it out for years. That is not even where most American businesses are.

The good guys in the business community understand this. They get it. But it gets played in the press as this great ideological fight: the liberals and the conservatives. This is about strong economic growth or weak economic growth. This is about the major players – business AND labor – being able to have a say.

Ladies and gentlemen, no one has been stronger in this fight than Larry [Cohen]. Here's I look at it. We just need to restore some balance in the system. That's really what it's about, Larry. It's really about balance. I mean, we get so convoluted in these national debates. It's about balance, balance in the system. It's about...literally, it's an overused phrase, leveling that playing field a little bit. Not giving you any advantage. You don't

deserve any advantage over business. Business owners deserve no advantage over you. No American deserves an advantage over another American. It literally is about just leveling it out.

And by the way, you guys know I've been with you, but sometimes labor's been dead wrong. I'm not here to say that labor has been right about everything we've done. But I tell you what labor is right about. Labor is right about saying that unless we're in the game, workers get the short end of the stick, almost every single time. [applause]

So look, the way it is now, you've got to climb up the hill so many time, you've got to climb over so many roadblocks, you've got to climb over so many technicalities in order to organize, it's just way out of whack. EFCA restores balance to the system.

I wish I had a chance to speak to every American who's not a member of labor or part of the business elite. I think our case is totally reasonable. We get all these scare tactics about what this means – we're going to drive prices up, we're going to drive people out of – hey look. One of those things that has happened, those white collar folks who use to think they didn't need you and didn't realize they had health care because of you? Heh. Okay? All of a sudden they have had what we Catholics call an “epiphany.” They figured it out. They figured it out.

So if we were just able to get a fora [sic] in which we could debate this honestly and straight-forwardly, without all the baggage, without all the hyperbole, this is something I believe right-thinking, decent Americans, Democrat and Republican, if they hear it out, would be supportive of.

Americans don't think you shouldn't be able to organize if that's what you want to do. But if they knew even when you wanted to do it, it becomes virtually, technically impossible to do it, they'd say that's wrong.

So again, sorry to harp on this, this is just about balance, fairness, no advantage, restoring that balance.

You know, it should be pretty simple. If it's a union the workers want, then it's a union they should have. It's that simple. [applause] It's that simple.

And folks...[applause]...thank you. [applause] I don't...Folks...I don't think there's a single leader up here who would say, if in a fair count, employees don't want a union, then they shouldn't have to have a union. This is just about, if you want it, you're entitled to have it.