Corporate Campaigns:
A View from Capitol Hill

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I am encouraged that corporate campaigns have become a "cutting edge" topic. Three years ago I was an executive at Herman Miller, Inc. in Zeeland, Michigan, and oblivious to the facts surrounding corporate campaigns — the term sounds like the annual fund-raising drive for the United Way or another charity to me.

As a freshman member of the minority party in the last Congress on the House Education and Labor Committee, I didn't hear much about anything but socialized medicine, striker replacement, family and medical leave, and electronic monitoring for the first two years. It wasn't until last winter that I started to hear rumblings about this strategy called "corporate campaigning." As the Chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee of the newly named Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee in this Congress, I quickly learned about the meaning of the term corporate campaigns and why it brought such alarm to the business community.

So far, I have held two hearings on corporate campaigns and Chairman Harris Fawell has held one on the issue of 10(j) injunctions. To my first hearing, we invited Chairman Gould and General Counsel Feinstein from the NLRB as the first panel and a variety of small and large employers for the second panel to recount personal experiences with 10(j) injunctions, salting, mail ballot elections, and corporate campaigns generally. My second hearing, just two weeks ago, focused solely on the corporate campaign technique of salting. Along with Dr. Herbert Northrup of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, we heard from a group of small business people from the construction industry about how salting has affected their economic stability and peace of mind.

After these initial hearings, I am extremely concerned about what has been disclosed. Based on what I have heard so far:

- Organizing nonunion employees into a unified union membership is not necessarily the objective of the organizers;
- Resources are not an obstacle for the unions when it comes to public relations;
- The cost of frivolous complaints and other federal agency charges fall on the business and the federal taxpayer, while the unions have no direct accountability or cost; and
- Jeopardizing jobs and employer viability is ultimately more important than ensuring that workers have good wages, safe worksites, and fulfilling jobs.
I fully recognize that unions' role in society was, is, and will remain very important. Yet, in today's global economy, the guiding principles for employer/employee relations should involve cooperation, mutually identifiable goals, and flexibility, not hostility, threats to the employer's relations with customers, investors, and others, and old-fashioned confrontational tactics.

It is particularly disturbing to me to hear some of the rhetoric coming from the AFL-CIO's new president, John Sweeney, and its new vice-president, Richard Trumka. It seems as though a war has been declared on employers by the unions. I recognize that union membership has dwindled from its high of 35 percent in the 1950s to its current low of 10.9 percent of private industry currently organized today, but maintain that it is a lose-lose scenario to declare war on the job creators. If the union's vision is to win by eliminating all nonunion companies and expanding unionized companies to absorb all of the economy, then perhaps they are on the right track, but it sounds unrealistic and improbable to me.

The Opportunities Committee has spent a great deal of time thinking about our committee's vision and goals for this country and for the federal government's role. In particular, we believe that the American workplace should stimulate creativity, innovation, and opportunity. Employers and employees must be free to develop flexible solutions to challenges that arise.

What must the union's vision be if the strategy is to organize employers rather than employees? It certainly isn't to build a trusting working relationship with employees so that, together, they can improve wages, workplaces, and living standards in the United States. To me, the focus on the company reveals a selfish intent to build sheer union numbers, collect dues, and terrorize employers. Jeopardizing jobs and employer viability is apparently more important than ensuring workers have good wages, safe worksites, and fulfilling jobs.

What is the vision for the future of unions if the majority of their resources are used primarily for harassing employers, public relations campaigns, and supporting political causes? Is it to facilitate employer/employee cooperation in workplace decision-making? Is it to ensure a safer and healthier workplace? Is it to make sure that workers in the U.S. are better educated and trained than anywhere else in the world to secure our place in the global market?

My Committee's involvement is linked directly to the agencies that are impacted by the union and employer relationship. At the beginning of every hearing in my subcommittee, I reiterate the following overarching principles for our work and the programs that we oversee:

- Focus on the appropriate federal mission;
- Work effectively and efficiently;
- Consistently follow congressional intent;
- Establish a framework for policy initiatives that will create an environment for lifelong learning and effective workplace policy; and