

To: Chair Doherty, Members of the House Committee on Business and Labor
From: Will Lukens, International Association of Machinists District Lodge W24
RE: Comparison of Employer Interference in Organizing vs. Employer Neutrality

March 27, 2013

I'd like to start by describing a local organizing campaign where an employer fought vehemently against a group of workers who were interested in organizing and improving their workplace conditions.

A group of workers from Bowtech Archery, a hunting bow manufacturer located in Eugene, contacted the Machinists Union in October of 2010. This group of workers was unhappy with their employer's lack of communication, subjective work rules, favoritism, wages, benefits and the overall working conditions at the facility. Bowtech had been privately owned prior to Savage Arms, a major national firearms manufacturing company, purchasing it a few years earlier. The Machinists Union represents the workers at the Savage Arms facility in Massachusetts and we felt that the preexisting relationship and collective bargaining agreement in place for several years would allow for a fair opportunity and level playing field for the workers during the NLRB election process. After meeting with several crew members and the organizing committee, together we filed for an election with the NLRB. Within a few days of filing, the company hired a union avoidance firm, LRI, based out of Broken Arrow, OK.

This firm conducted anti-union meetings daily, and on some days up to three meetings. These meetings divided the crew and caused fear and anxiety among the workers. The company was determined to stop any momentum and find out who was behind the organizing effort. Obviously the company showed no interest in remaining neutral in the process making it next to impossible to have a free and fair election. The crew was excited and felt empowered at the beginning of the campaign. But as the captive audience meetings and fear within the workplace ramped up, they started to lose motivation to organize and began to fear for their jobs and being identified by the employer as a supporter. Many workers felt intimidated by the company and the union avoidance firm and its tactics, the captive audience anti-union meetings in particular.

Due to this aggressive effort to erode the initial support for workplace organizing and keep workers from having a free and fair election process, this group of workers and the Machinists Union were forced to withdrawal the request for an election after support was compromised.

Now, contrast Bowtech with this example of a well-known global company and its philosophy on labor relations. There are stark differences in the outcomes, workplace relationships and productivity between these two examples.

When IKEA, the world's largest furniture manufacturer and sales corporation,

opened their first production facility in the U.S. they adopted a traditional confrontational labor relations model. The result was three years of negative media coverage across 25 countries, lost business, decreased productivity, expensive anti-union lawyers, and other workplace disruptions including a work stoppage. Since then in their five distribution centers IKEA has adopted a collaborative model. The Machinists Union and IKEA Executives meet to discuss problems and solutions on a regular basis for both their unionized and non-unionized operations. In the past three union elections IKEA has followed strict neutrality. In their operations in California when a Machinists Union representative shows up to talk to their unrepresented employees, we are invited onto the property.

The result of this approach is that their operations that are represented by the Machinists Union have cooperative labor relations, increased productivity and reduced employee turnover. The time from filing for a union election until adoption of the first collective agreement is now measured in weeks rather than years. IKEA is seeking to be in complete compliance with the UN's International Labor Organization's core labor standards which is a standard significantly above US labor law.

With this stark comparison in mind, we hope this Committee will support HB 3342 and work to level the playing field, at least in the public sector, and keep public employers honest when it comes to interfering in a group of workers' right to form a union and bargain collectively.