

TESTIMONY OF KAREN COX

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

JUNE 14th, 2017

Chairmen Walberg, Ranking Member Sablan, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Karen Cox, and I'm here today from Dixon, Illinois, a small town about two hours west of Chicago and the boyhood home of former President Reagan.

Today, I work at an auto parts storage facility in Dixon, but I was previously employed at a cold storage facility in Rochelle, Illinois. For those of you who haven't worked in cold storage, a typical day involves wearing full body freezer gear and using a stand-up forklift to move pallets into and out of a storage freezer.

My story begins in the spring of 2012. Rumors started going around about a union trying to come into our workplace. To be specific, this was the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union, or RWDSU. I didn't take it that seriously because my coworkers and I were pretty content with our jobs.

Soon we learned we were going to have an election. I wasn't particularly happy about it, but I thought at least we had time to educate ourselves and have a fair vote. But then I came into work one day and was told that the union was in and we were not going to have an election. The company had recognized them through a process called "card check." This bypasses a secret ballot election, eliminating employees' rights to make a

real choice for or against a union. I had never heard of this before, and it angered me. To me, it was un-American, and many of my coworkers agreed.

Several employees had signed cards because they had been told they would just receive information about the union. They didn't know that if the union got enough signatures, 50% plus one, the company could recognize them and they could come in without an election.

I had no experience with labor law and no clue what to do. After several phone calls to the National Labor Relations Board, I eventually got in touch with a lawyer from the National Right to Work Foundation who helped guide me through the process to remove the union from the workplace, which is called decertification. It requires collecting signatures from 30% of the coworkers in a bargaining unit. I had to do this on my own, in break areas only, and during non-working hours.

It was a frustrating process and I dealt with intense pressure from the union. In November 2012 I made the two-hour trip to Peoria and filed the first petition with the NLRB. On my way back I got a phone call from my dad. He told me a union rep contacted him and mentioned something about people losing their jobs and said that I needed to settle my grievances. My dad said, "Watch your back, because that was a threat." I was shocked.

After I filed my third petition in June 2013, we were granted an election. It was held a couple months later in August. However, since the union had appealed, we were unable to see the results and the ballots were locked up until a decision was made on their appeal.

A year later, we were still waiting on that decision, and the union "contract" that they negotiated for us was basically the company handbook--we were paying dues for something we already had. After several more months of waiting, in the spring of 2015, the NLRB finally made a decision. They concluded that we did not deserve the decertification election because, although the union had a year to bargain and had even scheduled a contract ratification before I filed the petition that got us the election, they still had not had enough time to bargain. The ballots were destroyed and we will never know the results.

Today I work at a different storage facility, but my experiences with the union at my last job will be with me forever. I am not anti-union, but I believe that all employees deserve a fair and secret vote on whether or not they want to join a union. That's why I support the Employee Rights Act, which guarantees a secret ballot vote. I want to ensure that other employees don't find themselves in the situation my coworkers and I were in--stuck with a union we didn't have a chance to vote for and that is difficult if not impossible to remove from the workplace.

Thank you for your time today. I'd be happy to answer any questions.