

# GOP's attacks on NLRB about politics, not the economy

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Republican senators are retaliating against the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) for doing its job.

In April, the NLRB issued a complaint against Boeing Co. for moving a planned production line for its 787 Dreamliner from its unionized Puget Sound, Wash., plant to a nonunion facility in South Carolina. The complaint says the move was in retaliation against the Washington workers for exercising their federally guaranteed right to strike and to prevent those workers from striking in the future.

In a videotaped interview with The Seattle Times, a senior Boeing executive said as much, telling the newspaper "the overriding factor" in the company's decision to move the line wasn't "the business climate. And it wasn't the wages we're paying today." It was, he said, to avoid strikes.

Retaliation is illegal, so the International Association of Machinists (IAM), which represents workers at Boeing, filed an unfair labor practice complaint with the NLRB. The Board is now seeking a court order requiring Boeing to operate the second 787 line in the Puget Sound.

Tom Buffenbarger, president of the IAM, told delegates at a May 10 legislative conference in Washington, D.C., the charge "is the most significant NLRB case in half a century."

Which is why the complaint has set off a barrage of near hysterical criticism from Republicans, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the right-wing media — all claiming it would

have a "deleterious effect on job creation and economic opportunity."

Forty-one Republican U.S. senators sent a letter to President Obama threatening to filibuster his upcoming appointments to the NLRB and vowing to defund the agency. The two nominees — acting general counsel Lafe Solomon and former AFL-CIO attorney Craig Becker, are currently serving under recess appointments.

All 10 Republicans on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee signed a letter to Solomon, urging him to drop the complaint and linking their demand to his pending nomination as general counsel.

In addition, eight Republican state attorneys general signed a letter to Solomon calling on him to withdraw the complaint.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) described the actions as "disgraceful and dangerous."

"This kind of interference is inappropriate. It is disgraceful and dangerous," Reid said. "We wouldn't allow threats to prosecutors or U.S. attorneys, trying to stop them from moving forward with charges they see fit to bring to the courts. And we shouldn't stand for this. It may not be illegal, but it's no better than the retaliation and intimidation that is the fundamental question in this case. It should stop."

Kimberly Freeman Brown, executive director of American Rights at

Work, said the complaint follows the Board's normal procedures, including an investigation and a formal hearing (scheduled for June 14 in Seattle), where both sides will be able to make their case.

"That's hardly a radical departure from the NLRB's mandate, and it's certainly not an attack on the economy, states' rights, or even so-called 'right-to-work' laws," Freeman Brown said. "If we stand to learn anything ... it's that the uproar has nothing to do with the economy and everything to do with politics," noting that the same group of people have a history of trying to dismantle the NLRB.

"The reality is that the NLRB is a neutral agency charged with protecting workers' rights and ensuring that unions and businesses play by the rules

in America's workplaces," she said.

Reid said that just as there is a system of checks and balances among the three branches of government, the NLRB serves as a check and balance between workers and employers.

"We need agencies like the NLRB to be able to operate freely and without political pressures," he said. "We need to keep our independent agencies independent. This case is for them to decide, not us."

Reid also pointed out that the case is far from decided, and Republicans should not prejudge the outcome.

"What we are really witnessing here is another example of the Republican assault on the middle class that has been echoing across the country for months now," added Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa). "Just as people are rising up

in states across the country to tell governors and other elected leaders not to destroy their rights, we in this body also need to stand up and tell powerful and politically connected corporate CEOs that they are not above our nation's laws."

At the legislative conference, Buffenbarger admitted that the union "still has a hill to climb" before the case concludes. He predicted it would go all the way from the June 14 hearing through appeals to the full Board and the courts, "all the way up to the Supreme Court."

*(Editor's Note: Mike Hall of the AFL-CIO Now News Blog and Press Associates Inc. contributed to this report.)*

## Chamberlain appointed to port commission

SALEM — Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain has been appointed to the Port of Portland commission.



TOM CHAMBERLAIN

Chamberlain replaces former Commissioner Mary Olson, president of Norris Olson & Associates, Inc., who has served in that post for 10 years and whose term expired last month.

Chamberlain was appointed by Gov.

John Kitzhaber and was unanimously confirmed by the Oregon Senate on May 4. He was seated May 10.

"Tom's two decades of union and political leadership experience will add a strong voice for job creation — one of the key roles the Port plays in our region through its transportation advocacy work and its marine, aviation and industrial properties," Kitzhaber said.

The Port of Portland is responsible for overseeing Portland International Airport, general aviation, and marine activities in the Portland metropolitan area.

Chamberlain joins Bruce Holte of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and Ken Allen of Oregon AFSCME Council 75 on the nine-member commission.

Commissioners are unpaid and serve four-year terms. They can be reappointed.



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