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Roddy Stinson: Attorney general accused of inaction as labor bosses 'trample' on Texans

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The conflict between the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation and Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott just got hotter:

"Union officials are trampling the employee freedoms provided under Texas law. ... The time has come for Attorney General Greg Abbott to take aggressive action to stop union officials from thumbing their noses at his state's Right to Work law."

—Right to Work Foundation President Mark Mix, quoted in a July 9 news release

The release's subhead expressed the foundation's growing frustration with Abbott:

"Workers' rights group once again urges the Texas attorney general to prosecute statewide pattern of illegal forced unionism."

The "once again" growl is a reference to the attorney general's foot-dragging in the case of a "trampled" El Paso worker, Juan Vielma.

(The story of Vielma's yearlong ordeal was discussed at length here last month. If you missed those columns, contact me, and I will send you copies.)

At the center of the latest confrontation between the right-to-work foundation and the attorney general is the case of a Corpus Christi security guard, Carlos Banuelos, who was given a choice to (a) join the Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America, Local 207 or (b) face dismissal from his job as a guard at the federal Port Isabel Detention Center.

"It's not about the \$30 a month I have to pay. It's the way it was being demanded by the union," Banuelos told a reporter for the Corpus Christi Caller-Times last spring when his case first became news.

To date, the Texas attorney general hasn't involved himself in the case, leaving the heavy lifting to the Virginia-based right-to-work foundation, which offered to represent Banuelos after learning of his desire to assert his right to work without being forced to join a union.

So far, the effort has been successful.

In late June, the National Labor Relations Board ruled Banuelos' case should be prosecuted, and an early October date was set for a hearing by a federal administrative law judge.

(One of the main issues that will be considered at the hearing is whether Banuelos' place of work is a "federal enclave" and therefore exempt from Texas law.)

In the meantime, foundation officials have continued their efforts to get Abbott to come to the aid of Banuelos and any other Texans who have been forced to join unions.

Their latest appeal to the attorney general prompted only a terse note from a staffer in the AG's public information office:

"We appreciate your contacting the Office of the Attorney General and sharing your concerns. I have forwarded your letter to the attorney handling this case."

The name of "the attorney" wasn't given. And no plan of action was provided.

Also, when I queried the AG's office about the right-to-work foundation's latest criticism of Abbott, a staffer told me: "Nothing has changed since our statement sent to you originally" — a reference to this response to criticism of the AG in the Vielma case:

"The Office of the Attorney General is committed to strictly enforcing Texas' right-to-work laws and will take all necessary steps to aggressively pursue any allegations of wrongdoing."

A scoffing right-to-work foundation spokesman's reaction:

"So far, the only action they have taken consisted of sending a letter asking the employer and the union (involved in the Vielma case) to do what a judge ordered them to do. That's hardly a strong statement to other unions that the AG's office will vigorously enforce Texas' right-to-work law."

Clearly, the gap between the foundation and the Texas attorney general is widening.

Meanwhile, 41-year-old Carlos Banuelos continues to fork over \$30 a month to a union that he was forced to join.

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