

Miller Canfield, ELA National Survey Finds Many Americans Believe Unions are Key to Improving Working Conditions

September 6, 2006

The latest “America At Work” poll conducted by the Employment Law Alliance (ELA) – the world’s largest network of employment and labor lawyers to which Miller Canfield belongs as Michigan’s representative – is reporting a nation divided over the perception of organized labor and the role it plays in the changing workplace.

The ELA surveyed working Americans just prior to the Labor Day holiday and found that more than 40% of those polled believe that unions have had a substantial impact on improving the working conditions of average American workers.

The poll also sheds significant light on the reasons why workers turn to organized labor. The top four reasons identified by employees as the most important factors driving them to unionization include:

- Workplace safety (63%)
- Getting better benefits (60%)
- Obtaining higher wages (57%)
- Increasing job security (54%)

Workers reported that factors related to poor management were much less important in deciding whether to join a union: poor communication (34%); inconsistent discipline (33%); having union representatives speak on their behalf (31%); and managers playing favorites (29%).

“The results of this poll suggest that companies are doing a good job dealing with employee relations issues like communication and employee discipline. And managers generally know not to play favorites in the workplace,” said Beverly Hall Burns, labor and employment attorney in Miller Canfield’s headquarters in Detroit. “Those issues used to be major motivators when employees unionized.”

“The fact that the weight of workers’ concerns is with job security, wages, benefits and safety comes as no surprise to employers here in Michigan,” Burns added. “It suggests that the focus needs to be on making businesses financially strong so that they are in a position to assure competitive benefits and wages, to provide strong workplace safety programs and to provide the kind of job security that makes sense in their particular workplaces.”

The poll also found that 35% of Americans believe that unions need to focus more on organizing new members and less on electoral politics. This finding comes more than a year after two of America’s largest unions, the Teamsters and Service Employees International Union, broke away from the AFL-CIO out of frustration that it was not spending sufficient money and attention on aggressively recruiting new members.

About the Employment Law Alliance & America at Work Poll

The Employment Law Alliance is the world’s largest integrated, global practice network comprised of independent law firms distinguished for their practice in employment and labor law. There are members in all 50 U.S. states and over 75 countries. Miller Canfield is the ELA representative for the state of Michigan.

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Since 2001, the ELA has commissioned and published 16 public opinion polls as part of its “America at Work” series. The polls, with a sample size of 1,000 and a confidence interval of +/- 4%, focus on the most pivotal and timely issues in the American workplace. The research is conducted by Reed Group-Research, of Philadelphia, under the direction of Dr. Ted Reed. For further information, including access to the survey charts and graphs, visit www.employmentlawalliance.com.

About Miller Canfield

The 350-attorney law firm of Miller, Canfield, Paddock and Stone, P.L.C. was established in Detroit in 1852 and has offices in Ann Arbor, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Howell, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Monroe, Saginaw, and Troy, Michigan. Other offices are located in New York City, Pensacola, Florida, Windsor, Ontario, and in Gdynia, Warsaw, and Wroclaw, Poland.