

Unions strengthen communities

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IF ONE PONDERERS the question of why there is growing cynicism regarding the integrity of journalism today, one does not have to look much further than The Journal's editorial page to find an answer.

Recently, an organization entitled Working Rhode Island was launched. This organization, with a membership of over 100,000, was created to return dignity and respect to the Rhode Island workplace. The members include all the union affiliates of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO, the National Education Association of Rhode Island, the United Nurses and Allied Health Professionals, the Brotherhood of Correctional Officers, the American Association of University Professors-URI, and a host of smaller unions.

Excellent articles by Journal reporters Scott MacKay and Liz Anderson have detailed the launch of our organization, giving readers a fair and balanced report on our group. In stark contrast, the editorial side of the newspaper has decided to alter the facts to meet its own premise of what our organization is about.

Specifically, the editorial board wanted to create the impression that we established the organization in order to attack politicians (Nov. 2 editorial cartoon; Nov. 3 anonymous editorial, "Focus on the common good"; M. Charles Bakst's Nov. 4 column; and Edward Achorn's Nov. 4 column). This is despite the fact that the intent of the organization, as detailed by The Journal's own reporters, is completely different.

Let me share with you, the reader, the mission of Working Rhode Island, unfettered by The Journal's editorial spin:

Working Rhode Island has been assembled to vividly illustrate why unions are a positive force in the community, and not the detriment that some people, such as members of the Journal's editorial board, are attempting to put forward. Once the information is disseminated to the public, we believe that Rhode Islanders will realize and respect the need for good union jobs.

Unions have helped to improve the quality of life for all Rhode Island workers by helping to pass laws that ended child labor, establishing the eight-hour workday, protecting workers' safety and health, and helping create Social Security, unemployment insurance, and the minimum wage. Unions are continuing the fight today to improve life for all working families in America, and especially here in Rhode Island.

A strong union presence has proved to build stronger communities. The statistics are there. In a comparison between the 10 states where unions are strongest (Rhode Island being one of them) and the 10 states where unions are weakest, there was a considerable

difference in the quality of life provided.

The states where unions are strong have a household income of almost \$8,000 more a year than that in states with a weak union presence. In the states where unions are weakest, 3.3 percent less of their population is covered by medical insurance than the population of those states with strength in unions.

Another sign that a community is thriving and prosperous is the percentage of the population living in poverty. In states where unions are the strongest, the poverty rate is 2.7 percent less than in the states where unions are the weakest.

A further indicator of a strong community is its focus on youth education. States with the strongest unions have higher SAT scores by almost 15 percent than the states with the weakest unions.

Furthermore, the crime rates in the stronger union states are significantly lower than those in the weaker union states: The strong union states have 4,114 crimes per 100,000 people, whereas the weaker union states have 4,694 crimes per 100,000 people.

The positive effects of unions are also felt in citizen initiative and participation. The states where unions are strong have a 6 percent higher voter turnout in presidential elections than those with weaker unions.

Strong unions also lead to greater workplace safety. In states where unions have a stronger presence there are 4.6 workplace fatalities per 100,000 workers, while states with a weaker union presence have 6.3 workplace fatalities per 100,000 workers.

We of Working Rhode Island are fighting for workplaces that can bring these benefits to our communities. Our organization is not about hurting politicians, as The Journal's editorial board suggests. It is about helping working people by bringing dignity and respect back to the workplace.

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