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Roddy Stinson: Big Labor punishes little Texan while indifferent Abbott 'AWOL'

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Texas Republican Attorney General Greg Abbott is "AWOL," and his lack of aggressive enforcement of the state's right-to-work law is an open invitation for organized labor to harass and persecute workers.

Or at least that is the growing belief inside one of the nation's most active and respected conservative organizations, the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation.

Leaders of the Springfield, Va., foundation are furious about Abbott's refusal to get involved in the case of an El Paso worker, Juan Vielma, who has been out of work for a year because he refused to join and pay dues to the International Union of Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America.

The yearlong story of the 58-year-old security guard's integrity and bravery is remarkable and inspirational, but I have only enough space to provide these bare-bones details:

While Vielma was working as a security guard at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement Processing Center in El Paso, his Minnesota-based employer suspended him without pay because he refused to join a union that had a contract with the company.

The employer and the union argued that the processing center was a federal enclave and therefore not protected by Texas' right-to-work law.

Vielma dug in his heels. "I work to get paid; I don't pay to work," he told anyone who would listen.

John Scully, a lawyer for the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, did listen, and last fall he wrote Greg Abbott in an effort to get the Texas attorney general to come to Vielma's aid.

Abbott declined to do so. And an Abbott aide, without a hint of sympathy or admiration for Vielma, tersely told Scully: "You may wish to direct your concerns to the National Labor Relations Board."

(Reading the letter, one can almost hear an accompanying sniff.)

To their credit, Scully et al. refused to leave Vielma twisting in the wind, and they helped him file charges with the National Labor Relations Board.

Meanwhile, Vielma remained unemployed and struggled to make ends meet — month after month after month.

Finally, last week, the gutsy Texan got some good news when an administrative law judge heard his case, ruled that the El Paso center was not a federal enclave and instructed the union to ask Vielma's employer to reinstate him and reimburse all of his lost earnings and benefits.

The ruling pleased right-to-work foundation officials, and it also added to their anger at Abbott.

"Union lawyers run the clock while the Texas Attorney General's office turns a blind eye to a violation of the state's Right to Work law," they declared in bold type in a victory statement that criticized Abbott for being "AWOL" while union officials were trying "to destroy Mr. Vielma for standing up for his rights."

In a June 18 letter to Abbott, foundation president Mark Mix asked the attorney general "once again" to prosecute right-to-work law violations, and he pleaded with Abbott to "review all forced unionism agreements at federal facilities ... and consider bringing fraud and racketeering claims as appropriate."

In response to press inquiries prompted by the Mix letter and by Vielma's legal victory, Abbott released a statement last week that said, in part:

"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."

No specific "steps" were detailed.

And, sorry to say, Abbott's months-long cavalier attitude about Vielma's plight doesn't instill much confidence in his "commitment" to protecting Texas workers from Big Labor or any other predatory group.

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