

Workers go to Capitol Hill to protest 'union abuse'

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WASHINGTON -- Until two years ago, Mike Ivey of Gaffney says that his work life was relatively normal. Then, his employer, Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp., allowed United Auto Workers to unionize his company and havoc began. With other decriers of alleged "union abuse," Ivey, a materials handler, traveled to the U.S. Capitol Wednesday to bolster legislation sponsored by Rep. Charlie Norwood, R-Ga., to protect a worker's right to a secret ballot election when deciding on whether to accept or reject union representation. "The people's right to vote in a free and fair election is the absolute bedrock of our democracy," Norwood said. Following falling union membership, Norwood said that unions such as UAW and the United Steelworkers of America have increasingly pressured employees into accepting "neutrality" agreements and a "card check" recognition process. A neutrality agreement is an agreement by employers to remain neutral during an organizing drive, and card-check recognition permits union recognition after a majority of workers have signed union cards. At the news conference, fewer than a dozen workers spoke of suffering abuse and intimidation at the hand of union officials during "card check" organizing drives. The National Right to Work, an organization that has filed federal charges against UAW, represents a group of workers who say that union officials used coercive tactics to get them to sign the cards. The workers claim that they were "harassed" via home visits or threats of job loss. Although he was never personally threatened by the UAW, Ivey maintains his company continued to use UAW to mediate wage negotiations despite a petition he gathered that showed that more than 70 percent of the company did not want union representation. "All I ask for is fairness," Ivey said. Even though Ivey received a wage increase, he said he would prefer that UAW stays out. And, he said, neither UAW nor Daimler Chrysler, which owns FCCC, has gotten back to him about his petition. "If 70 percent of his company doesn't want a union, then there's no union," UAW spokesperson Roger Kerson said of Ivey's situation. "Not writing back is not a violation of the law." Kerson said that UAW has not been doing any coercion, but that he often sees employers pressuring employees. On claims of UAW forcing people to sign neutrality agreements, Kerson said, "There's no evidence of that." UAW legislative director Alan Reuther added, "This reflects an attempt by Norwood to stop one of the most important organizing tools for unionization. Card check has been around a long time. It allows workers to decide whether or not to unionize and it lets them do it privately, without coercion."