

Byrne would end Right to Work law

After considering either economic data and/or their own personal experience, most Virginia workers reasonably conclude that in their case at least, union representation is a detriment, not a benefit.

Under our state's cherished RTW law, they have the right to join or not to join, or pay dues to a labor union. A strong bipartisan coalition in Richmond has kept this vital law on our books for nearly 60 years.

But according to Leslie Byrne, the Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor in Virginia's November 8 state elections, no employee is qualified to make such a decision for himself or herself.

Byrne, blinded as she is by her obedience to her Big Labor allies, insists employees be forced to pay union dues or fees in order to keep their jobs — like it or not.

Byrne has made no secret of virulently opposing Virginia's 58-year-old Right to Work law, which bars the firing of employees for refusal to pay dues or fees to an unwanted union.

In a taped interview with United Mine Workers (UMW) union officials August 8, Byrne was asked whether she would "do away" with Virginia's Right to Work law, granted the opportunity. Her response was blunt: "Absolutely."

Of course, Ms. Byrne's blind allegiance to Big Labor ignores the facts about forced unionism.

According to the Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) — a respected Washington, D.C.-based research group whose data are cited in many forums, including the AFL-CIO web site

THE FORUM

Mark Mix

— last year non-union manufacturing workers earned a nationwide average of \$19.24 an hour.

Meanwhile, unionized manufacturing workers earned significantly less, an average of \$17.95. That comes to a deficit of nearly \$2,700 a year for unionized workers who are employed full time. BNA data also show that, while overall U.S. manufacturing employment fell by roughly 3.5 million between 1994 and 2004, unionized jobs suffered a percentage loss more than three times as severe as the decline in nonunion jobs.

In expressing her contempt for the employee's freedom of choice, Byrne not only chose to ignore ample evidence showing that our Right to Work law is beneficial to Virginia workers, she also committed what is, from most politicians' point of view, a far more serious faux pas.

She publicly thumbed her nose at public opinion. For decades, polls have consistently shown more than 80 percent of Virginians support their state's Right to Work law.

State Sen. Bill Bolling (R-Hanover), who is running against Ms. Byrne for lieutenant governor, quickly moved to publicize the fact that she had taken a deeply unpopular position, pledging his unabashed support for Right to Work and charging that his rival is "in the pocket of Big Labor."

At the same time, the two other Democrats on the

statewide ticket ran for cover: gubernatorial nominee Tim Kaine pointedly refused to endorse Ms. Byrne's position on Right to Work, while Creigh Deeds, running for attorney general, flat-out opposed her position.

As a dyed-in-the-wool Big Labor zealot, Byrne almost certainly won't back away from her pro-forced-unionism stand. But she is attempting to do damage control.

Since few other Virginia elected officials are willing to flout public opinion, she claims that she'll never get a chance as lieutenant governor to repeal the Right to Work law — not mentioning that she sees the lieutenant governor's race as a stepping stone to the office of governor.

"The status quo of the law is not going to change," she told the Richmond Times-Dispatch on August 11.

By voicing her disdain for the Right to Work principle, Byrne hasn't merely stated a policy preference that, if implemented, would go against the wishes of the vast majority of voters and hurt the state's business climate.

Whether she realizes it or not, Leslie Byrne has already let employees across the Commonwealth know that she doesn't think much of them. And that's the most important reason why her anti-Right to Work outburst this month seems destined to go down in history as the biggest gaffe of Virginia's 2005 campaigns.

Mark Mix is president of the National Right to Work Committee, based in Springfield, Va.

Newsletter editor's note: Right to Work Committee members in Virginia who would like to find out more about their 2005 candidates' records on compulsory unionism should contact Jedd Coburn at the Committee's Virginia Beach office, jnc@nrtw.org, or 757-552-0350.