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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

#### Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Hearing on "The Right to Choose: Protecting Union Workers from Forced Political Contributions"

February 8, 2012

If you read today's hearing title, you would think it is about protecting union workers. Unfortunately, the real purpose of today's hearing is to continue the majority's unprecedented year-long attack against millions of middle-class American workers and their rights to bargain collectively for better wages and working conditions.

The majority's premise for today's hearing is that we need to conduct aggressive oversight to prevent unions from using the dues of their members to fund political activities. The majority expresses great concern and urgency over the prospect that unions are using the dues of their members to advocate on behalf of certain candidates or causes.

But let's start with the facts. First, federal law already makes clear that employment may not be conditioned on an employee's willingness to fund a union's political activities. In addition, unions may not force their members to pay for political activities they disagree with. Unions are already subject to extensive administrative procedures and reporting requirements to ensure they comply with these laws.

In contrast, after the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*, private corporations are free to spend limitless amounts of money influencing political decisions. Corporate money is flooding American politics. According to statistics from the Center for Responsive Politics, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which is funded by corporate donations, spent more than \$32 million on electioneering communications during the 2010 election season, about 94% of which was on behalf of Republican candidates.

This unlimited corporate money bankrolls political action committees that will inject more than \$200 million into the 2012 races, according to estimates. As the Wall Street Journal observed, these corporate funds constitute "possibly the largest force in the 2012 campaign, aside from the presidential candidates themselves and the political parties."

These corporations are not subject to any of the same rules that unions face with respect

to obtaining shareholder consent or input on political spending. Even if shareholders object to political spending by a corporation, they have no comparable legal rights to opt out of financing a corporation's political activity or to seek reimbursement for these funds.

Our colleagues on the other side of the aisle like to use rhetoric that sounds like they have the interests of workers in mind. They talk about "right to work" states and "paycheck protection." But their rhetoric does not match reality. Their proposals hurt millions of American workers by driving down wages, eliminating benefits, and putting more money in the pockets of corporate executives.

According to an analysis by the Economic Policy Institute, "right to work" laws lower the average incomes of workers by about \$1,500 a year and significantly decrease the ability of workers to obtain health insurance or pensions through their jobs.

This hearing is not about protecting the rights of workers. It is about further silencing the voices of unions across this country that represent millions of American workers, while at the same time encouraging private corporations to spend limitless amounts of money without transparency or accountability.

If the majority were really interested in giving American citizens a greater voice in how their money is spent on political activities, it would immediately call hearings on the proliferation of corporate spending this election season after the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*. If the Committee did this on an even-handed and balanced basis, that is something I would support.

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