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NMB Considers Rule Change for Air and Rail Elections

In what would be a dramatic improvement to the rules governing union elections for airline and railroad employees, the National Mediation Board (NMB) is weighing a request from the AFL-CIO to allow representational elections to be decided by a majority of workers who cast ballots.

“It’s time to give air and rail workers the same opportunity to form unions that other workers in the U.S. have had for decades,” said Transportation GVP Robert Roach, Jr.

Under current NMB rules, any employee who does not cast a ballot is counted as a “no” vote. The rules for transportation workers are unlike the rules for employees covered by the National Labor Relations Act, which determines the outcome of elections the same way U.S. citizens elect their leaders - by a simple majority of those who cast ballots.

The current system is deeply flawed. Even if 100 percent of voters in an air or rail representation election were to cast ballots in favor of union representation, the NMB will declare the election invalid unless an absolute majority of eligible voters cast votes.

The AFL-CIO’s Transportation Trades Department has developed a Q&A to help understand their request. That Q&A document is available at www.goiam.org.

The AFL-CIO request is expected to face stiff resistance from carriers who have enjoyed an unfair advantage in union representation elections for more than 80 years. The IAM is coordinating with other AFL-CIO unions to guarantee fair elections for all transportation workers.

The IAM has submitted election petitions to the NMB for employees at several carriers. What impact, if any, the rule change request would have on pending representations disputes that have not yet come to elections is unknown.