



The Stouffer Report: *The Value of the Secret Ballot*

My great-grandfather, "Judge" Stouffer, was a county commissioner in Saline County and a farmer. He and his family lived in the same home on the same farm Sue Ellen and I do today, near what was the big town of Napton. His family moved to Saline County following the New Madrid earthquake. At that time, both Arrow Rock and Napton were the center of the Midwest in many ways.

One thing I know with certainty, but without research, is that my great-grandfather did not vote for Abraham Lincoln in the [presidential election of 1860](#). First, Lincoln represented a radical group of people, known as Republicans, who sided with the Union. Second, that group would have been very unpopular in Saline County. In fact, the candidate from Illinois only won 10 percent of the vote statewide. Finally, there was no voting by secret ballot during those times. In fact, Grover Cleveland was the first president we voted for by secret ballot, in the 1892 election.

One of our fundamental privileges as people of a free nation—the ability to vote our conscience without our choices being known to others—is coming under fire from Washington in the form of the "Employee Free Choice Act," a federal measure designed to allow union bosses to more easily organize workplaces for unions. As Teamster's president James Hoffa stated, "Since when is the secret ballot a basic tenet of democracy?"

Close to becoming federal law last year, the measure has even greater support this year with Barack Obama as president. While I'm not necessarily against unions, I don't think forcing Detroit onto our small businesses during these tough times is a good idea.

It is estimated that the costs of unionization of our small businesses would be more than \$11,500 per employee. This is the type of burden that may cause even more jobs to leave the U.S.

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Under the act, an employee of a union can stand outside the place of business with 10 or more employees and ask each to sign a card. As soon as they track down 50 percent plus one of these employees, the business would be unionized – even if these employees leave, die or change their minds. If the business and employees can not make an agreement on the terms, a federal arbitrator comes in to mandate workplace policies including compensation.

In early April, Missouri's Secretary of State approved the wording of a [citizens' petition](#) designed to protect the power of secret ballots in Missouri. Along with re-affirming the existing statutory guarantee of a secret ballot in federal, state and local elections, the petition would have questions of choosing union representation decided *only* by secret ballot, and do away all together with the card-signing route. If enough signatures are gathered on the petition, Missouri voters will ultimately decide whether to endorse the integrity of the secret ballot, or allow the provisions of the federal act to take effect, if and when it is presented to the president. The legislature could also place the question on a statewide ballot through the passage of [House Joint Resolution 37](#).

I personally believe secret balloting make sense as it rids political pressure on people's decisions. It is a process we have had in this country for most of its existence and it would be a shame to lose it. I pray we see it continue to be the method we use to vote—not only for elected officials, but throughout all aspects making up our democracy.

Senator Stouffer serves the counties of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, Macon, Ray, Saline, and a part of Clay.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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