

Republican attack on unions is short on facts

By state Rep. Joshua Peters For The St. Louis American

My compliments to state Rep. Shamed Dogan (R-Ballwin) on his well-written commentary (“Unions ignore long history of excluding minorities from jobs,” Nov. 13) designed to intentionally distort the reality of unions and their support of minorities. His commentary, while skillfully written, is factually, and intentionally, incorrect.

I was troubled by the fact that the bulk of his anti-union, anti-worker screed was based on reports from the 1930’s, 1959, and “a century ago.” The only current reference to unions and their involvement with African Americans was an AFL-CIO report in 2016 that clearly said the Labor Movement can, will, and has done better when it comes to inclusion. I credit the AFL-CIO for their candor and honesty, something Dogan should try to emulate.

Dogan should read the latest report on 2016 data from the U.S. Department of Labor:

“Among major race and ethnicity groups, black workers continued to have a higher union membership rate in 2016 (13.0 percent) than workers who were white (10.5 percent), Asian (9.0 percent), or Hispanic (8.8 percent).”

Let’s review a few facts about St. Louis’ labor unions and their extensive minority support and inclusion efforts.

FACT: The so-called “right-to-work” law that Dogan praises and voted for (a law that will hurt not only African Americans, but all workers by forcing lower wages, less safe workplaces, etc.), was created in 1936 as a moneymaking venture by a man who did it specifically to keep blacks out of unions. Look up Vance Muse and the Christian American Association and be shocked at what you are supporting.

FACT: The St. Louis Building Trades have for years worked diligently to recruit minorities and women.

In 2013, the St. Louis Building Trades Council and its member unions, along with the St. Louis-Kansas City Carpenters District Council, created the BUD program (Building Union Diversity), which has successfully graduated 87 percent of its 127 participants and placed 86 percent of them in union apprenticeship programs working with unionized businesses and contractors.

Painters District Council 58, in coordination with the Workers Education Society, created an Advanced Skills Workforce Center that to-date has graduated 80-plus African Americans into union painting jobs with union wages and benefits.

The Carpenters District Council's Joint Apprenticeship Program has partnered with the Urban League's Save Our sons program to provide insight into careers for economically disadvantaged African-American men.

FACT: Representatives of the labor community serve on numerous committees and various social justice and workers' rights groups, including the Archdiocese's Peace and Justice Commission and Missouri Jobs with Justice.

FACT: The labor movement has been key to the formation of the nationally recognized Industrial Manufacturing Technician Apprenticeship program and bringing this program to St. Louis in a partnership with St. Louis Community College to provide education and entry-level front-line manufacturing training to minorities, women and others.

FACT: The labor movement has worked hand-in-hand the Missouri NAACP in support of the fight for a higher minimum wage (which Dogan voted against), opposition to Missouri's discriminatory Senate Bill 43, which makes it harder to prove workplace and housing discrimination, and working to prevent the ongoing voter suppression efforts of the Missouri legislature.

FACT: Some unions are founding members of the Regional Union Construction Center that focuses on helping minority- and women-owned construction companies develop business skills to grow and thrive by developing a separate advisory

board with a construction law attorney, a construction accounting CPA, a bonding knowledge expert, and a construction executive. Since its founding in 2007, 30 disadvantaged construction firms have taken advantage of this assistance at no cost. These companies are on track to collectively generate in excess of \$40 million in revenue and \$2 million profits in 2017.

FACT: Unions ensure that their contracts with companies have strong anti-discrimination language.

Dogan's comments were relevant 30 years ago, but today they are misleading and false, part of a planned narrative to discredit unions ahead of next year's public vote to defeat Missouri's misleading "right-to-work (for less)" law. The sole intent of this law is to weaken the labor movement's ability to fight for workers' rights to fair pay, safe work places, health care and a reasonable retirement in order to enhance the bottom line of wealthy business owners

Dogan decries the disparity of financial contributions to minority candidates without referencing any facts (which would prove him wrong) or disclosing that he received \$50,000 from David Humphreys, the CEO of Joplin-based TAMKO Building Products, who is spending millions of dollars to force "right-to-work" on Missouri workers, and whose donation to Dogan on December 7, 2016, as well as contributions to numerous other legislators, directly preceded the February 3, 2017 passage of "right-to-work" by the Missouri Legislature.

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