

Microsoft Outlook

From: Martin, Andrew
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2011 3:06 PM
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Subject: Senator Reid's Full Statement

Newsroom

May 11, 2011

Reid: We Must Keep Independent Agencies Independent, Allow Them To Operate Freely And Without Political Pressure

<http://democrats.senate.gov/newsroom/record.cfm?id=332789&>

Washington, D.C.—Nevada Senator Harry Reid made the following remarks today regarding the National Labor Relations Board. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:

“In a partisan environment, there is the temptation turn every issue into a political issue. We certainly live in one of those environments.

“That’s regrettable, but far from unfamiliar. Politics play a role in our representative government, of course, and they always have. The Founders created a system of checks and balances – three branches of government, for example, and two chambers of the Congress – precisely because they anticipated these passions. They wanted to keep us from losing our way.

“Long after that system was created, a new independent federal agency was created in the same spirit of checks and balances. That agency is the National Labor Relations Board, and it acts as a check on employers and employees alike. It safeguards employees’ rights to unionize or not to unionize, if they so choose. It mediates allegations of unfair labor practices. And it does all this independent of any outside influence.

“The acting general counsel of the NLRB is a man who is as nonpartisan and independent as the agency he works for. Last month, he issued a complaint against one of America’s largest companies, Boeing. The

complaint alleges that after Boeing workers in some states went on strike, the company retaliated by opening a new production line in a non-union facility. That kind of retaliation, if that's what happened, is illegal.

"That's just the background. I'm not here to judge the merits of the case. In fact, I'm here to do the exact opposite: to remind the Senate that prejudging the case is not our job. That would overstep long-established boundaries and weaken our system of checks and balances.

"Lately, though, some of our Republican colleagues have attacked the NLRB and tried to poison the decision-making process. They are interfering with case pending before a legal body.

"For example, every Republican Senator on the HELP Committee – the "L" in HELP stands for labor, of course – sent the acting general counsel a letter defending Boeing. The letter itself, sent six weeks before a hearing even takes place, seems questionable at best. But these 10 Republicans went further: they went out of their way to link their request to the acting general counsel's pending nomination. Sounds like intimidation to me.

"That's not all. Eight state attorneys general, all Republicans, also signed a letter to the acting general counsel, calling on him to withdraw the complaint against Boeing – again, long before an administrative judge has the opportunity to review the case.

"I strongly encourage all of them to take a step back. We all know Republicans dislike organized labor. We know they disdain unions because unions demand fairness and equality from the big businesses Republicans so often shield at all costs.

"And let's be honest: Republicans are threatened by unions. They're threatened because when a large, organized group is so concerned with workers' rights, the members of that group vote in large numbers. And because Republicans and the big businesses they defend so often try to take away workers' rights, workers don't often vote Republican.

"But this kind of interference is inappropriate. It is disgraceful and dangerous. We wouldn't allow threats to prosecutors or U.S. Attorneys, trying to stop them from moving forward with charges they see fit to bring to the courts. And we shouldn't stand for this. It may not be illegal, but it's no better than the retaliation and intimidation that is the fundamental question in this case. It should stop.

"We need agencies like the NLRB to be able to operate freely and without political pressures. We need to keep our independent agencies independent. This case is for them to decide, not us."

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