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Labor Access to Farmworkers

FRESNO_ The Fresno County Democratic Party condemns Governor Newsom's decision to veto the law that would have allowed farmworker unions to provide a vote-by-mail option for their internal elections similar to California's statewide process. The party stands in solidarity with the United Farm Workers as they march in protest from Tulare to French Laundry, the Napa restaurant where Newsom visited during Covid restrictions to much legitimate criticism. Hamstringing unions is a poor way to repay the hard work progressives just put into saving Newsom's job.

California's own experience, including the election that just allowed Newsom to retain power, shows that vote-by-mail elections can be conducted in an effective and secure manner, and are a vital tool for increasing the power of the public.

Now, instead of following his own example, Newsom has bowed to the interests of rich agricultural landowners who do not want anything that might tip the lopsided power arrangement toward equality with those who provide their labor.

With sickening timing, the Trump-packed Supreme Court has set Americans back again, by striking down a 50-year-old California law that gave farmworker unions the right to approach work sites to recruit members. This law had been an achievement of legendary labor organizer Cesar Chavez, who campaigned to end the special exemption that provided farmland more protection than other industries.

Since farm labor is characterized by occurring within expansive swaths of privately owned land with no public facing presence, California's law allowing union organizers to approach workers where they congregate is necessary. The Supreme Court's conservative majority decision to value property rights over worker power will only hurt our nation.

Ag owners like to say that any potential lessening of their privilege is a threat to the general food supply. But the landowners are just one part of the chain—the ones who can get rich off it.

We know who's really doing the planting. Agricultural workers are more likely to be poor with unreliable access to communication technology and reside in multiple scattered locations as they pursue seasonal work.

Direct contact with union organizers was a lifeline for a population otherwise far too vulnerable to exploitation, and now the law crafted to protect them has been slashed apart while a law to strengthen their operation has been stopped at the gate.

The conservative campaigns to weaken unions have been a major contributor in the gulf of inequality that has grown between those who labor and those who profit off ownership. Pressure from California unions has just succeeded at helping pass a speed-quota transparency

law, aimed at combating the culture of ambiguity and fear that Amazon has used to extract extra labor from its warehouse staff.

If elected Democrats such as Governor Newsom continue to act in agreement with conservative judges by weakening unions, the future of working people in the United States looks bleak.

For more information, contact the Fresno County Democratic Party at 559-495-0606 or dems@fresnocountydemocrats.org.