

# Union means equality: Addressing SJR 39

By **DAVID COOK**  
President



Politics is often a balancing act. Missouri is a vastly diverse state with many different sincere beliefs about how we can make the Show-Me State better. Unfortunately, too often our lawmakers reject compromise, and instead embrace a decidedly unbalanced approach to the law. Senate Joint Resolution 39 is another example of imbalance.

For those of you unaware, SJR 39, if approved by the Missouri legislature, would place a question on the ballot for Missouri's voters asking to approve an amendment to our state's constitution that would allow any business owner or employee to refuse to provide service to a LGBT person if they cite a "sincere religious belief."

Let me be clear: religious freedom is deeply important to our country. It's one of our founding principles to allow any American to worship as they see fit. We must protect it, and we must respect it. But SJR 39 does not provide protection for religious freedom; it does not enhance the freedom of any Missourian to worship. SJR 39 merely rewrites our state constitution to allow the right of any Missouri business owner to show a LGBT person the door.

UFCW Local 655 is a diverse Union, and we have partners with many different faiths and beliefs. It is not my job as President to pass judgment on belief, and it is not my job to spend your hard-earned Union dues on issues that do not impact your life on the job. But as your President, I believe it is my job to make one thing perfectly clear: UFCW Local 655 fully supports the simple principle of non-discrimination.

Labor has always been at the forefront in the battle for equality. We stood alongside people of all colors during the Civil Rights movement, because labor Unions represent at their core a fundamental and undeniable voice for equality and fairness.

We believe a LGBT person should be treated precisely the same on the job as the worker standing next to them. SJR 39 takes Missouri away from a principle of equality, and its wording, as it currently exists, would allow coworkers to discriminate against one another.

While I will continue to focus first and foremost on fighting the attacks on our hard-working families in the form of Right-to-Work and Paycheck Deception, I believe I have just as big of an obligation to publically work against discrimination of any type. Missouri needs to be a state that is accessible and attractive to all. We want the best businesses, the best workers, the best innovators, and the best minds. This cannot be accomplished by enshrining the right to discriminate into our very constitution.

Your free ability to worship is still protected. No one has the legal right to enter your church, synagogue, or temple and tell you to change what you say or do.

UFCW Local 655 fights hard to write protections for LGBT individuals into our employment contracts because the state of Missouri currently does not have anti-discrimination protections for those hard-working people.

No one should be fired just for being LGBT, and no one should be evicted from his or her home for being LGBT, but in Missouri, there is no law against it. If that is not bad enough, if this law passes not only could someone be evicted or fired, they could also be denied the right to purchase items from someone!

This year, like last year, we will participate in the St. Louis Pride Parade, because we want our LGBT brothers and sisters in labor to know we support their right to earn a living. Hard-working people deserve respect, dignity, and the ability to support themselves and their families. The color of their skin, their religion, or their sexual orientation, or their gender identity, should not be a barrier to that basic right.

## Become a 'Volunteer Organizer'

By the time this paper reaches you, UFCW Local 655 will have held an election for the Bon Appétit food service workers at Washington University.

As Local 655 continues to vigorously pursue organizing campaigns across the greater St. Louis area, our Organizers are continuing to emphasize the critical importance of partner involvement in these campaigns, specifically through the Volunteer Organizing Committee.

The VOC is designed to help real rank-and-file Local 655 partners speak directly to workers in the midst of organizing campaigns to have more meaningful discussions about the benefits of being a Union partner.

"We can have the best organizers in the world, but there's a fundamental benefit to having a regular worker knock on doors and say to someone 'hey, I'm a Union partner, let me tell you about my wages and my benefits and having a voice on the job,'" said



UFCW Local 655 Organizer Alex Lange. "At the end of the day an organizer is a staffer on our payroll, but a regular partner relates on a worker to worker level."

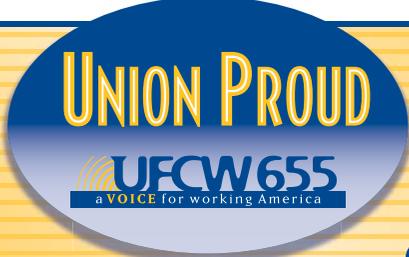
Earlier this year, Local 655 narrowly lost an election at the Weekends Only store on Manchester by a razor-thin margin. Organizing staff say that this election would have been a victory if they'd had just a few rank-and-file partners available to knock on doors and talk directly with employees at Weekends Only.

"Bottom line is partners win elections," Lange said.

"We want them, we need them, and they are a huge benefit. With our partners involved, we can grow this Union."

Any Local 655 partners interested in being involved in the Volunteer Organizing Committee will first receive training and materials from Union staff. If you're a retiree or current partner interested in helping grow your Union, contact Alex Lange in the organizing department at 636.736.2776.

**AN EXCLUSIVE  
TWICE MONTHLY  
REPORT FOR**



**UFCW 655  
MEMBERS &  
THEIR FAMILIES**

[www.ufcw655.com](http://www.ufcw655.com)

## Goodbye to a great leader: Jack Valenti

It's with great sadness that we report the passing of Jack Valenti, 89, retired president of UFCW Local 655 on Tuesday, April 12.

Valenti retired April 1, 1989. "Jack was a leader among leaders," said Local 655 President David Cook. "He was a 21st Century leader in the 20th Century. He was quiet in his normal demeanor but ferocious when it came to fighting for his partners. He was respected by partners and management alike, setting a standard of leadership that everyone since has used as a guidepost."

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## Tread lightly when talking Teamster issues at Schnucks Warehouse

Schnucks Markets is opening a new distribution warehouse. Currently, their warehouse workers are members of Teamster Local 688; drivers are members of Teamster Local 610.

Schnucks has stated that they have hired a third party to run the new warehouse. The third party Schnucks has hired does not have an agreement with Teamster Local 688 and it appears the new workforce will be non-union with much lower wages and benefits than current warehouse employees.

UFCW Local 655 is very closely engaged on this troublesome development.

In recent months, UFCW Local 655 President David Cook has met with the leadership of Teamster Local 688. In addition to attending their Union meeting, Cook was asked and attended a recent meeting with leadership from the Teamsters International and Todd Schnuck on this issue. At this time it appears Mr. Schnuck is not willing to reconsider his position.

As of April 9th, Teamster members began leafleting select Schnucks stores. The Teamsters plan to continue this activity and increase it in the weeks to come, but they are not yet asking for a boycott.

In part due to their action, the issue has begun to explode on social media, and

some supporters of hard-working families have already begun vowing not to shop at Schnucks stores.

The Teamsters have been clear they are not calling for a boycott. At this time they simply want the public to let Schnucks know that this is not acceptable and they are willing to stand with the Teamsters if needed.

Once again there is no BOYCOTT of Schnucks.

"I will be in constant contact with the Teamsters on this issue," said Local 655 President David Cook. "Please know that we are 100 percent committed to standing with our brothers and sisters in labor, and we believe that the public is tired of seeing hard-working people getting pushed out of good jobs."

UFCW Local 655 wishes to make something clear to all our hard-working partners:

Employers have disciplined employees who have posted derogatory comments about their employers on social media sites.

Feel free to post your support for the Teamsters, but please refrain from posting derogatory comments about Schnucks.

Do not discuss the issue with customers.

Refer any customer questions regarding the Teamster issue to store management. It is important that management is aware of how much the general public cares about this issue.

**UPCOMING  
EVENTS**



**Pride Parade: June 26**

Contact Laura Kelley at 636-736-2760

**Sickle Cell Fundraiser:  
July 23 • 11-5pm**

Contact Theresa Hester at 636-736-2758

**UFCW Annual Softball  
Tournament:**

**August 1-4 and 8-9**

Team Applications will be mailed out in May

**Share Your Pride: Share this page in your break room.**