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In 2007, Taren Conforti saw an opportunity to bring real change to her workplace — Verizon's Maintenance Control Office in Long Beach, CA, where workers provide technical support to residential and business DSL customers.

Conforti wasn't always a union supporter. In fact, she was part of the "no campaign" in an earlier union representation campaign in 2005.

"I thought I could represent myself and take care of myself. But as soon as that no vote was cast in 2005, management took away our pensions and the cost of our health care went up."

Conforti and others who had been part of the "no campaign" in 2005 now were the people managing the new representation campaign. "The local union agreed to let us run it and our goal was to move forward as quickly as possible with the election as soon as our co-workers signed up in support," she said. By late March nearly three-quarters of the unit was expressing support for union representation.



Taren Conforti

Verizon had reached an agreement with CWA that the company would remain neutral in organizing and would respect workers' rights. But that agreement went out the window at Long Beach.

Verizon Senior VP Goes 'Cubicle to Cubicle' Telling Workers to Vote 'No Union'



CWAers at Verizon protest the intimidation tactics management used to crush a 2007 union organizing drive in Long Beach, Calif.

"We had real problems with the 'Qs and As' that management kept handing out. It really was a form of brainwashing and was leaving a bitter taste in everyone's mouth," Conforti said.

"But we still thought we had solid support for the union, until top Verizon management sent in Michael Poling," the company's senior vice president for network operations. "That was the icing on the cake," she said.

The day before the election, Poling walked cubicle to cubicle among the nearly 200 workers and told them exactly

what would and wouldn't happen if they voted for CWA representation. "You will never be covered by the core agreement. You will not get raises," he told workers.

Conforti said she and others confronted Poling, but the damage was done. "This was a huge factor and devastating to employees at the MCO. Many were frightened and afraid of losing their jobs," she said.

Union supporters narrowly lost the vote. Conforti, now a union steward for Local 9586, said she came to realize that "I need the union, I need a group to fight for me. I can't do it by myself."