

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ilhan Omar (MN-05)

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

The Future of Wage Laws: Assessing the FLSA's Effectiveness, Challenges, and Opportunities

Tuesday, March 25th, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, everyone, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Chairman, congratulations on your position – I look forward to working with you on this subcommittee. I hope you'll indulge me for a moment.

It is an honor to serve as the Ranking Democrat, not only because of the important work we are going to do overseeing our nation's labor laws but because I am following in the footsteps of one of my political heroes: the late Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota. Senator Wellstone served as the Ranking Member of our Senate subcommittee counterpart, and in 1997, his first opening statement in that role was on this very topic: the *Fair Labor Standards Act*. Today, as we discuss this landmark law, I hope we will do so with the same commitment—to uphold fairness, strengthen worker protections, and prioritize the well-being of the working people.

Now, let's be honest about what's happening in this country. Millions of workers wake up every morning, put in long hours, and still struggle to make ends meet. Meanwhile, billionaires and CEOs are making record profits off their labor. For too long, our economy has only worked for the wealthy and the well-connected while workers have been left behind.

Over the past four years, the Biden Administration and Congressional Democrats fought to level the playing field, but now that progress is under attack. Since returning to the White House, President Trump has wasted no time implementing Project 2025 to attack workers—ripping away protections, dismantling labor enforcement, and handing over more power to the same corporate interests that have exploited workers for decades.

The future of the American economy depends on American workers. Yet today, economic inequality is reaching levels not seen since the 1920s. The *Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938* was created as a reaction to that inequality and the Great Depression when workers lacked basic workplace protections.

That is why we must strengthen this landmark law, not weaken it.

That means finally raising the federal minimum wage—which has been stuck at a shameful \$7.25 an hour since 2009.

It means tackling wage theft because every year, employers steal over \$50 billion from workers' pockets.

It means increasing penalties for child labor violations.

It means eliminating the subminimum wage and 14(c) so that workers with disabilities are paid fairly like everyone else.

There is so much we can and should be doing. I hope that's the kind of conversation we'll be having today, Mr. Chairman.

I hope this hearing is not just the latest in a long line of Republican-led efforts to undermine the FLSA under the guise of updating it.

Last month, Ranking Member Scott and I wrote a letter to the Department of Labor, demanding to know the impact of DOGE's takeover and firing of countless staff on critical DOL programs, such as the Wage and Hour Division, which enforces the FLSA. Trump's DOL failed to respond by the March 14th deadline, leaving Congress— and working Americans— in the dark about the future of these programs. I invite Chairman Mackenzie and my Republican colleagues to join us in demanding answers on behalf of our constituents. I would like to submit this letter into the record.

Democrats are providing concrete solutions to safeguard workers during these difficult times and looking to build an economy for the future instead of dragging our country backward. We want workers to come home safe and paid fairly for their labor. We want children in the classroom, not the factory floor. We want to raise the minimum wage so that no one is in poverty while working full-time.

These goals should not be controversial.

That is why we must pass key legislation such as the *Raise the Wage Act*, which would increase the minimum wage and the *LET'S Protect Workers Act*, which would hold employers accountable for breaking the law.

As we sit here today, thousands of federal workers across the country, such as medical personnel, scientists, and park rangers, face losing their livelihoods and the ability to support their families, while the American public stands to lose the essential services they provide.

Workers deserve better. America deserves better.

Thank you, and I yield back.