

Opening Statement for Ranking Member Alma Adams (NC-12)

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections Hearing

"Safeguarding Workers and Employers from OSHA Overreach and Skewed Priorities"

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Wednesday, July 24, 2024 | 9:00 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to our witnesses for your testimony today. Welcome.

This hearing is particularly timely, as next week* marks the 20th anniversary of the passing of Asunción Valdivia, who died in his son's car on the way to a hospital after he collapsed in the field during a 10-hour shift of grape picking in triple-digit heat. However, 20 years later, our constituents still lack the basic, common-sense protections that would keep them safe from heat stress in extreme temperatures.

In North Carolina, the family of Wednesday Johnson continues to mourn the loss of their mother, sister, and aunt. Ms. Johnson served her community for twenty years as a postal worker yet lost her life shortly after hours working in an unairconditioned postal truck in 90-degree weather.

We are not talking about being uncomfortable on a hot day. We are talking about excessive heat, combined with heavy clothing and high humidity, that can incapacitate our body's natural cooling mechanisms and lead to injury, organ failure, and death. And this problem is only getting worse. In fact, this past Sunday was the hottest day [ever recorded](#) on Earth.

Thankfully, after years of advocacy, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), under the leadership of President Biden and Vice President Harris, has proposed common-sense measures that employers can take to prevent these tragedies.

In fact, there is much more work OSHA should be doing to protect workers. In his testimony, Mr. Gerstenberger highlights the need for a Tree Care standard, and I agree that such a standard is necessary. What I do not understand is how cutting OSHA's budget will do anything to expedite that process. Year after year, House Republicans work to cut OSHA's budget and reduce its regulatory capacity and then have the nerve to complain that the agency isn't effective.

The challenge is not that OSHA's priorities are skewed. Rather, it has been Congress' failure to adequately support an agency whose sole mission is to keep workers safe on the job. And as we speak, House Republican appropriators are advocating to slash OSHA's budget by roughly 12 percent.

I've met countless constituents with horrifying stories about heat illness in the workplace and employers who won't even provide them with cool water. To slash OSHA's budget and to attack the proposed Heat Standard is to say that the health and lives of my constituents do not matter.

The reality is — this Congress, House Republicans have abandoned their commitment to workers, as evidenced by their proposed agenda, "Project 2025."

If my Republican colleagues had their way and enacted Project 2025, businesses would get a pass for any “non-willful” violation if it was the first time they were caught. That would mean that an employer could commit any number of OSHA violations, even a serious violation in which a worker is killed, and no one would be held accountable.

Aside from the pain and suffering caused by not adequately protecting workers, the economy suffers as well when we do not take a proactive approach to addressing hazardous workplaces. As our witness, Mr. Barab, mentions in his testimony, a [2020 report](#) found that the loss of labor because of heat exposure cost the economy about \$100 billion, a figure projected to grow to \$500 billion annually by 2050.

Workers should not have to risk their lives and safety to provide for themselves and their families. Committee Democrats are committed to ensuring OSHA has the resources and capacity to ensure workers come home safely at the end of the day.

That is why I introduced with Ranking Member Scott, the *Protecting Children Act* to address abusive child labor by providing OSHA with the resources to deter violations and prevent harm to children from intensive work in dangerous jobs.

And it’s why I cosponsored the *Asunción Valdivia Heat Illness, Injury, and Fatality Prevention Act* to ensure swift action on an OSHA standard that would provide support to workers with heat stress.

And, why I support Representative Courtney’s and Ranking Member Scott’s *Protecting America’s Workers Act*, which provides OSHA with the tools to enforce worker safety and hold employers accountable.

Ultimately, if Committee Republicans continue to turn a blind eye to employer workplace violations, workers will keep sustaining serious work-related injuries or, worse, face a preventable death.

With that, I look forward to a productive discussion today, and Mr. Chairman, I yield back.