

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

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

“Examining the Policies and Priorities of OSHA”

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Wednesday, September 27, 2023 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Chairman Kiley. First of all, I want to thank Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health, Mr. Doug Parker, thank you for your time, I look forward to hearing your testimony.

There is no question that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is our nation’s main line of defense against unsafe working conditions.

In the 53 years since OSHA was created in 1970—worker injuries have fallen significantly and deaths from acute traumatic injuries have likewise come down sharply.

Unfortunately, too many workers continue to be injured, made ill, or killed on the job. A worker either gets sick or injured on the job every 2.5 seconds and can even succumb to death every 8 minutes because of unsafe working conditions.

Thanks to recent news investigations, we also know that children—especially unaccompanied migrant children—have been suffering all manner of harms in jobs that they should not be working on in the first place.

But take a closer look at those stories: chemicals so caustic that they burn through multiple layers of gloves; machines without guards to prevent people’s arms or hands from getting mangled; food dusts and cleaning chemical fumes that irritate the sinuses and lungs. These stories are not only about children in desperate circumstances—they are also about workplaces that are dangerous to people of all ages.

But workers are losing their lives not because of so-called government overreach or tyranny. They are losing their lives to preventable hazards because of employer negligence and lack of funding from Congress.

Since fiscal year 2010, funding for OSHA has dropped by nearly 20 percent. And in 2021, the number of OSHA inspectors was already near its lowest level ever.

Thankfully, under President Biden’s leadership, OSHA has taken important steps to fulfill its promise to America’s workers. Most recently, OSHA moved to clarify that workers may authorize another worker or third party, including a union representative, to join a walkaround inspection to aid in identifying and resolving hazards.

OSHA also issued a final rule to improve accountability that would require large employers in high-hazard industries to submit detailed information about their workplace illnesses and injuries.

It is disappointing to hear my colleagues proclaim that they care about workplace safety, and then push for legislation, like the *Nullify Occupational Safety and Health Administration Act*, to abolish the leading federal office designed to ensure safe and healthful working conditions for our workforce.

It is disappointing but not surprising. We are just days from a Republican-led shut down of the government that would limit OSHA's workplace inspections, put workers at risk, and delay workers' paychecks.

But let's be clear, Republicans' price to keep the government open is a set of extreme budget cuts to investments that help workers and families.

Republican appropriators already proposed cutting OSHA's budget by \$95 million – but that's not extreme enough.

Republicans want to turn back the clock and reinstate spending levels from several years ago. And this would have a devastating impact on OSHA.

According to the Department of Labor, House Republicans' proposed budget cutbacks would slash OSHA's budget by 22 percent, causing OSHA to lose at least 270 inspectors and conduct 10,800 fewer inspections. That would be the lowest level of enforcement in OSHA's 52-year history.

And we've seen news reports since then about even steeper cuts that rob OSHA of even more capacity.

No matter where someone works, the most basic right for American workers is that they are safe at work and come home at the end of their shift.

Congress should not be turning a blind eye to employer workplace violations and should not be turning its back on workers.

My Democratic colleagues and I remain committed to ensuring safe workplaces for all Americans.

For example, Ranking Member Scott, Rep. Grijalva, and I joined Rep. Judy Chu to reintroduce legislation that provides an enforceable workplace safety standard for heat stress to protect indoor and outdoor workers against excessive heat on the job.

Ranking Member Scott and I also introduced 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 Representative Courtney and Ranking Member Scott reintroduced the *Protecting America's Workers Act* which provides OSHA with the tools to enforce worker safety and to hold employers accountable.

With that, I want to thank our witnesses, again, for their time. And I look forward to a productive discussion. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.