



Opening Statement

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

Opening Statement of Chairwoman Frederica Wilson (FL-24)

Joint Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions and Workforce Protections Hearing
The Future of Work: Preserving Worker Protections in the Modern Economy

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Thursday, October 23, 2019 | 10:15am

Today, we are gathered for the first of three hearings to explore the “future of work.” This series of hearings will provide an opportunity for experts and stakeholders to share how evolving business models and rapidly changing employment arrangements, coupled with increased use of technology and automation, are impacting workers and employers.

We look forward to hearing ideas on policy options that ensure innovation complements worker protections, civil rights, and economic security.

Today’s hearing will focus on how Congress can ensure that workers have fair wages, hours and benefits; safe workplaces; and an opportunity to bargain for better working conditions at a time when American workplaces are rapidly shifting.

For most of the 20th century, companies primarily hired workers directly. But over the last three decades, there has been a “fissuring” of the workplace where companies are increasingly shifting employment to subcontractors, temporary workers, or workers misclassified as independent contractors.

The most visible example of the fissured workplace can be found in the on-demand economy, where some companies misclassify their workers as independent contractors.

The employment relationship is key to our nation’s foundational labor and employment laws, and the erosion of this relationship threatens to not only undermine our nation’s labor laws, but to also erode the progress we’ve made toward a strong American middle class. That is why preventing worker misclassification and strengthening and maintaining joint employment standards are key to ensuring that workers have access to legal protections and can exercise their rights.

For example, in my district in Miami, Florida, a large swath of the workforce is subcontracted or temporary workers who are hired to support the large tourism, hospitality, and health industries. These workers who are the backbone to multiple billion-dollar industries are currently limited in their abilities to collectively bargain and advocate for themselves. In some cases, workers are being forced to work in extremely unsafe conditions. A full revamp of worker protections is necessary to ensure safer working conditions and better benefits. The right to organize as the law currently stands does not empower our constituents to harness their true economic potential.

The *Protecting the Right to Organize Act*, which we recently advanced through this committee, would strengthen joint employment standards under the National Labor Relations Act to ensure that workers can bring to the negotiating table all of the companies that have a say in the terms and conditions of employment. The *PRO Act* would also broaden the NLRA’s employment standard to prevent workers from being misclassified as independent contractors and thereby denied their rights to organize and collectively bargain.

Now that the *PRO Act* has advanced through our committee, we must continue our discussion for ways to complement and strengthen our current labor laws. Today we will examine whether or not sectoral bargaining can be used to establish industry-wide floors that prevent individual employers from undercutting wages and working conditions in order to compete.

I also look forward to a discussion about how to ensure benefits provided to workers in the fissured workplace truly achieve meaningful improvements for workers.

Innovation is not incompatible with collective bargaining rights or good workplace benefits. Congress has a responsibility to ensure that the changing economy does not undermine the rights of American workers.

Today's hearing is an important step toward shaping a future of work that facilitates innovation and growth while preserving the worker protections and benefits that help form the core of American prosperity.

I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us.