

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Mark DeSaulnier (CA-10)

Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions Hearing

Safeguarding Workers' Rights and Liberties

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Thursday, November 30, 2023 | 10:15 a.m.

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

In the face of wealth inequality and a global pandemic that has pushed working families to the brink, workers are increasingly turning to collective action to secure safer workplaces, livable wages, and increased opportunities. And the corresponding rise in unionization has meant higher pay and better benefits for workers. In the first nine months of 2023, unions secured an average 6.6 percent first-year raise for workers, the highest wage increase in union contracts in over 30 years. This year alone, almost nine-hundred thousand workers have won immediate pay raises of 10 percent or more through their unions.

One of the most recent union success stories is the United Auto Workers' ratification of contracts covering 150,000 workers at Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis. These contracts included significant wage increases, the right to strike over plant closures, and improved retirement security.

Union victories are not just limited to unionized workplaces and frequently result in wage increases in nonunion workplaces so that employers can compete in the job market. For example, shortly after UAW announced its contract agreements, Hyundai, Honda, and Toyota voluntarily announced wage increases for nonunionized workers.

Recognizing that union victories benefit all workers, it is imperative to capitalize on this momentum of worker empowerment and help our economy continue to grow from the bottom up and middle out.

This Congress, Committee Democrats have consistently put forth legislation that builds upon President Biden's pro-worker, pro-union agenda, including bills to raise wages, improve workers' benefits, and create safer workplaces.

Unfortunately, none of these bills have been considered by the Majority.

Instead, Republicans are championing the *National Right to Work Act* here today, which would make it harder for workers to form unions, gut workers' collective power, and further tilt the balance in favor of large corporations.

Historically, the so-called "Right-to-Work" movement was borne, in part, out of Southern segregationists' efforts in the 1940s to stop labor unions from organizing Black workers and fighting for racial equality. Now, corporations and special interests back so-called "Right-to-Work" laws because they are designed to weaken labor unions and workers' bargaining strength, in order to maximize profits.

So-called “Right to Work” laws silence workers’ voices, driving their wages down and suppressing their economic well-being. As Jody Calamine, the Democratic witness, stated in his written testimony, so-called “Right-to-Work” laws are detrimental to workers and create a race-to-the-bottom. Accounting for state-level economic differences and cost-of-living, workers in so-called “Right-to-Work” states earn 3.1 percent less, have 2.6 percent lower rates of employer-sponsored health insurance, and nearly 5 percent lower rates of receiving a pension than their free-bargaining state counterparts. These restrictive anti-worker laws have been found to raise executive compensation and make workplaces more dangerous. So-called “Right-to-Work” states have 50 percent more on-the-job fatalities per 100,000 workers.

Rather than promoting policies that stifle workers, I urge my colleagues to join President Biden and Congressional Democrats in support of the bipartisan *Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act*. The PRO Act protects the fundamental right to join a union by:

1. Empowering workers to exercise their right to organize;
2. Holding employers accountable for violating workers’ rights; and
3. Securing free, fair, and safe union elections.

When workers do better, businesses do better, and ultimately, so does our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.