

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

Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions

Ensuring Union Leaders Represent Members, Not Agendas.

Wednesday, December 17, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Let me begin with a simple truth from my perspective: you cannot be pro-worker and anti-union. Workers build unions so they can have a voice strong enough to be heard. You cannot lift up workers while tearing down the very organizations that represent them, protect them, and bargain on their behalf. Being pro-worker requires acknowledging that unions are not outside forces—they are the voice of workers themselves.

Today, union popularity remains strong at 68 percent, according to well-respected, nonpartisan polling. Americans overwhelmingly understand that unions remain one of the most effective tools workers have to negotiate a better quality of life for them and their families. To negotiate higher pay, better benefits, and safer workplaces. And yet, despite record-high public support and worker organizing skyrocketing over the last several years, union membership is at a record low: just 9.9 percent of U.S. workers. That contradiction should concern every member of this committee and every American.

Why is this happening? It's not because workers don't want to have unions. Millions say they would join one today if they could. It's because the system has been tilted against them. The facts are mind-boggling:

- Employers were charged with breaking labor law in 41.5 percent of all union elections.
- Workers were illegally fired for organizing in one out of every five elections in the United States.
- And in 2024, the National Labor Relations Board received over 21,000 unfair labor practice charges, a 7 percent increase from the previous year.

Why does this keep happening? Because the *National Labor Relations Act*—the law protecting workers' right to organize a union—has almost no teeth. If a company fires a worker illegally, the worst that usually happens is that they pay the worker what they should have earned in the first place. There is no penalty, no deterrent. For illegal threats or coercive tactics, employers often face nothing more than a cease-and-desist order—years after the damage is done. In other words, breaking the law is cheap, and union-busting is effective. And this makes high road employers at an unfortunate disadvantage. It's not all employers it's the ones that drive the race to the bottom. Just based on more greed in my opinion.

Unfortunately, that is not the only problem confronting workers. Over the last two to three decades, bosses and corporations are increasingly hiring union-busting consultants to conduct intensive anti-union campaigns to break American workers' efforts to organize a union. Employers spend an estimated \$433 million every year on anti-union consultants, and that number is likely an underestimate due to widespread underreporting. Although its

required, bad employers and union-busting consultants routinely fail to file disclosures when they hire these consultants, and too often face no real consequences. What about transparency?

Meanwhile, the law requires unions—rightfully—to remain accountable to their members. I fully support strong, transparent, worker-driven union governance. Union members deserve to know how their dues are used and have leadership that reflects their voice, not outside political agendas. But we must hold corporations and union-busting consultants to the *same* standard of transparency. Workers deserve to know when their employer is paying consultants to mislead, intimidate, or pressure them. If we demand accountability from unions but ignore the corporations breaking the rules can't get away with not being held accountable and not having transparency, that is not oversight—it is bias and its antiworker and anti-American.

This is all happening in an economy with staggering inequality. From 1979 to 2023, wages for the bottom 90 percent of Americans rose 44 percent, while incomes for the top 1 percent skyrocketed. Imagine that income for the 90 percent and the income for the top one percent skyrocketed by over 180 percent and 44 percent for workers. Wonder why we have problems in this country, that's it. Today, most Americans live paycheck to paycheck. Three hundred eighty-five workers die every day from unsafe working conditions. One hundred million people hold \$220 billion in medical debt. The number one reason for bankruptcy in this country is medical debt. And families are working harder than ever just to scrape by. The system is not simply unfair—it is rigged and America is sick because of it.

I speak not only as a lawmaker but also as a former business owner. I know the responsibility of meeting a payroll, and I know that workers are the heart of any successful enterprise. And I speak as a former union member myself. I have seen firsthand how unions raise standards for high road employers, union and non-union raise standards for their workers, cause its the right thing to do for their business, consumers, and their community. I have seen how collective bargaining gives ordinary people a fighting chance in an economy dominated by enormous obscene greed

But for unions to remain effective, they must remain sovereign and member driven. Workers—not Washington—must decide their union's future. Just as it is a worker's decision to unionize, we must also respect workers' ability to govern their own organizations.

The real crisis we face is not unions having too much power—it's the obscene concentration of wealth in this country. And too few of those people, that top one percent have too few consequences for violating workers' rights and ethical behavior. And when employers break the law nearly half the time in union elections, when they fire workers with near-total impunity, when they hide the millions they spend on anti-union campaigns, we cannot pretend that workers have a fair shot at exercising their right to organize.

Workers want fairness. Workers want a voice. Workers want the same basic economic security that previous generations enjoyed. And workers know that unions remain one of the few tools they have left to obtain it.

And I'll end with a quote that this committee has heard many times by Dwight David Eisenhower who said, "only a fool would try to stop American workers from organizing."

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and I yield back