

Statement of Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, Ranking Member  
House Education and Workforce Committee  
Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions  
“*Restoring Balance and Fairness to the National Labor Relations Board*”

February 14, 2017

Chairman Walberg, let me begin by congratulating you on your selection to be Chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions.

This is my first hearing, too, as Ranking Member of this subcommittee.

I know that we have different personal backgrounds and experiences. And I know, as Chairman and Ranking Member, we are both expected to represent the views of our respective parties.

But I hope that coming fresh to our jobs, as we both do, we may be able to be free from preconceptions. I hope that we can remain willing to listen to each other – and to the many points of views, we will hear from other Members and witnesses, who will appear before this subcommittee.

I look forward to working with you.

As I see it, we have two choices in today’s hearing and over the next two years as we examine the National Labor Relations Act.

The purpose of the NLRA is to strengthen unions as an institution in our economy to ensure that wealth is more fairly shared.

The preamble to the Act states:

*The inequality of bargaining power between employees who do not possess full freedom of association or actual liberty of contract and employers who are organized in the corporate or other forms of ownership association substantially burdens and affects the flow of commerce, and tends to aggravate recurrent business depressions, by depressing wage rates and the purchasing power of wage earners in industry and by preventing the stabilization of competitive wage rates and working conditions within and between industries.*

Here is the policy prescription set forth in the NLRA:

*It is declared to be the policy of the United States to eliminate the causes of certain substantial obstructions to the free flow of commerce and to mitigate and eliminate these obstructions when they have occurred by encouraging the practice and procedure of collective bargaining and by protecting the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self- organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing, for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection.*

The question is, does this Committee update the National Labor Relations Act so it can be more effective in implementing these goals, or do we go back to the era prior to its enactment 80 years ago and find ways to undermine its purposes?

We have choices.

We can address the needs of working Americans whose pay has been largely stagnant over the past several decades, despite rising productivity.

We can try to rebuild the middle class and those who want climb the ladder to get there. This is particularly important following the hollowing out of many good paying jobs caused by the economic collapse during the Great Recession.

We can study the economic history of our country to assess how unions helped to make sure that growth in productivity rates was closely linked to growth in wage rates.

When the economy grew after the great recession, data shows that most of the new wealth was funneled disproportionately to the one percent. While the benefits began to spread more widely in the past few years, one thing is unmistakable. Far too many have been left behind.

- We know from studies that the decline in union density and collective bargaining coverage is closely associated with rise in income inequality.
- The median weekly income of full-time wage and salary workers who were union members in 2014 was \$1,004, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. For nonunion workers, it was \$802.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Economic News Release: Union Membership 2016. Bureau of Labor Statistics.  
<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.toc.htm>

- Unionized workers also have more access to paid holidays, paid sick leave, life insurance, and medical and retirement benefits than those workers who are not unionized.
- At home in the Marianas we don't have many unions but I know that our unionized communications workers are earning about \$3.50 above the minimum wage at the entry level and 2 to 3 times as much as minimum at the higher levels.

Another choice is to go down the same path we have been following for the past three sessions of Congress, when there have been 25 hearings and markups focused exclusively on weakening the National Labor Relations Act.

Bills have been passed which give employers greater power to block union organizing efforts. Other bills actually blocked the ability of the NLRB to function.

When you consider that private sector unions represent a mere 6.4% of the workforce, it is troubling that the Committee has directed so much time on this small independent agency. But attacks on the NLRB are what they are—a proxy for attacks on unions.

We would like to work with you, Mr. Chairman, to try to chart a new path. We have legislative ideas to improve the NLRA which are outlined in the WAGE Act, and I would like to see if we can get these discussed in committee.

I want to thank our witnesses for their work in preparing for today's hearing and I look forward to hearing their testimony.

With that, I yield back.