A LOOK INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

This is what a Union can do for workers - p20

Hector Figueroa, president of 32BJ SEIU, dead at 57 - p24

Major lawsuit launched by the AFT against U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos - p34

#WinningTheFutureTogether
You may have noticed some labor disruptions in the headlines. A few examples from the past month: employees of Vox Media successfully negotiated a collective bargaining agreement, BuzzFeed employees walked out in an effort to get recognition for their union, and Volkswagen workers in Tennessee talked wildcat strikes after a vote to unionize failed by a small margin.

Last year, teachers walked off the job in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona with walk-outs and other disruptions from Colorado to the Carolinas. This may seem like bad news for capitalists, but unions can be a source of stability as well as class conflict. The recent labor renaissance could help to reverse some worrying long-term trends in the American economy, while also still benefiting the businesses from which workers are extracting gains.

The recent uptick in strikes is not just your imagination, and it recalls an earlier era when unions played a greater role in the American labor market. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) showed more than 485,000 workers were impacted by large strikes that started during the year, the highest number since 1986.

This year, the first five months of the year have seen 307,000 workers impacted by strikes, versus 431,000 in the first five months of 2018.

The return to labor disruptions after a long post-Reagan slumber comes as workers are becoming scarcer. Using BLS data which goes back to 1994, as-of May only 9.12% of the potential workers either had no job and want one, or are working part-time because they can't find full-time work. The measure is approaching its record low of 8.9%, from April of 2000.

This extremely broad metric measures not just those who are counted as unemployed by the BLS, but goes further to include those who haven't been looking for work but want a job as well as those working part-time for economic reasons. If employers want to add capacity or replace workers who retire or quit, there are fewer and fewer places to turn, which gives workers more bargaining power.

The surge in organized labor activity also poses a concern for investors and economic observers: won't all that labor bargaining power lead to wage-price spirals and runaway inflation? Not necessarily.

In fact, the FOMC's most recent Summary of Economic Projections showed 8 of 15 FOMC members see multiple interest rate cuts this year, spurred in part by a weak inflation outlook. Many doves are more worried about slow inflation and the possibility of slipping inflation expectations, rather than inflation surging thanks to excessive labor bargaining power.

One reason a dovish outlook in the presence of low unemployment may carry less risk of a sudden uptick in inflation than it otherwise might: labor share of income is extremely low.

As Bloomberg's Matt Boelser pointed out in April, Federal Reserve Vice Chair Richard Clarida brought the below chart with him from his role at fixed income fund giant Pimco. It shows that labor compensation share of national income hit a record low earlier in the expansion, and has only risen modestly since.
Tight labor markets may help return some balance to the economy, raising income share for workers after decades of declines and very little bounce during the current economic expansion. Higher labor compensation share of income could push up wages and incomes, without a dramatic uptick in inflation from businesses passing wage costs on to consumers.

Can a burgeoning push for unions help that process along? It's always hard to draw concrete causal links between two economic variables, and we should be cautious to say rising union power would definitely raise worker bargaining power...especially without inflationary consequences. But it's clear that declines in labor share of income since the 1970s only took place after unionization rates had been falling, and for quite some time.

Today, less than 11% of workers are union members per the BLS, with even lower numbers for the private sector (6.4%). Back in 1960, per the University of Amsterdam's ICTWSS database, almost a third of the labor force was unionized.

The contemporary political framing of unions is often very negative, and given the experience of high inflation that subsided after supply-side reforms in the 1980s, that's somewhat understandable, but it ignores a longer and more nuanced history of the labor movement in the US. Modern edifices like the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) were introduced to balance the conflicts between unions and employers.

Examples of past excesses include a million rounds fired and chemical weapons used at the Battle of Blair Mountain (West Virginia, 1921) or President Truman nationalizing the steel industry by executive order in 1952 in response to a strike. Unrestrained conflict between workers and management is bad for everyone, but a managed negotiation between workers and business can play a role in creating a more equitable and stable society.

Years of political and judicial maneuvering (ranging from the 2018 Janus decision to much older right-to-work laws) have reduced the power of unions and the NLRB. But workers and employers are also well-served to remember that both can benefit from orderly collective bargaining: stability and predictability may be worth the bottom-line cost of paying workers more.

No employer need worry about an armed revolt or sudden nationalization these days, but even small wildcat strikes or walk-outs (which can destroy a business overnight), higher turnover rates in a low unemployment economy, and failure to attract talent can have devastating consequences. Unions and formalized negotiating can be a venue for class conflict that might otherwise boil over if kept bottled up.

For now, unionization movements are still limited. Organizers' failure to introduce the South to unionized auto manufacturing via the Volkswagen plant is just one example of the difficulties organized labor still faces.

Given the longstanding frustration with slow wage growth and a society that feels imbalanced, recent victories at the bargaining table for journalists and teachers, facilitated by unions, seem likely to get copied in other workplaces.

George Pearkes is the Global Macro Strategist for Bespoke Investment Group. He covers markets and economies around the world and across assets, relying on economic data and models, policy analysis, and behavioral factors to guide asset allocation, idea generation, and analytical background for individual investors and large institutions.

This is an opinion column. The thoughts expressed are those of the author(s).
A year after a landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling that threatened to cripple Public Sector Unions, they seem to be holding their own.

Government Employees, it turns out, see value in belonging to Unions.

Membership in Illinois Government Unions actually has increased a year after the June 27th, 2018, ruling in Janus vs. AFSCME, as Sun-Times Washington Bureau Chief Lynn Sweet reported in a recent column.

The new Members’ dues are offsetting any revenue loss caused by the Janus decision, which allows Government Workers to no longer have to pay “Fair-Share Fees” to Unions.

Before the ruling, Unions were allowed to collect such fees from Non-Member Government Employees to cover the costs of collective bargaining and related expenses.

Organized Labor has reason to celebrate.

It’s holding its own against ultra-conservative and corporate Union Busters.

But Labor might want to wait before throwing a party.

It’s been only a year and the stakes are growing higher.

An ever-rising tide of Income Inequality in the United States is creating an economically upside-down society that increasingly works for only a lucky few.

We are, already, a Nation in which just one-tenth of 1% of the population controls nearly 20% of the wealth.

As U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts said during the first Democratic Presidential Debate: “Who is this economy really working for? It’s doing great, for a thinner and thinner slice at the top.”

The day before the debate, the National AFL-CIO released an eye-opening analysis of the pay gap between CEOs and their Workers.

We saw, once again, astonishing evidence of the deep inequality that runs counter to a healthy merit-based capitalist system.

It’s a pay gap that rivals the Grand Canyon.

CEOs in the United States are doing better than ever, thanks to huge salaries, bonuses and stock options.

The average Employee, not so much.

Last year, the CEO of a large S&P 500 company was paid, on average, 287 times more than the average Worker.

The CEO took home an average of $14.5 million, $500,000 more than in 2017.
The average Worker was paid $39,888.

Illinois Workers did better than the national average, but only a bit.

The average Illinois CEO last year earned 275 to 137 times more than the average Worker (You can explore all numbers in detail at aflcio.org/paywatch).

But perhaps it is necessary, as defenders of such inequities like to say, to pay America’s CEOs this kind of dough to hire and keep the best and the brightest.

If so, a lot of big companies in Europe and Asia must be settling for slackers.

In 2016, the CEOs of publicly traded companies in the United States were paid about 265 times more than the average Worker.

In the United Kingdom, that ratio was 201.

In Canada, it was 149.

In Germany, it was 136.

And in Japan, it was a mere 58.

The Janus case and other legal challenges to Organized Labor “are happening at a time when concentrations of wealth are as extreme as they were back in the pre-Great Depression era,” Labor Professor Robert Bruno, of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, told us.

“The issue of income inequality is front and center in debates among Labor Economists, politicians, in State Legislatures - they’re all addressing it. Unions are the dominant entity representing Middle-Class interests,” Bruno said.

There is no better time, then, for Unions to work overtime to prove why those dues pay for themselves, and then some.
ERS union predicts mass exodus ahead of relocation
Liz Crampton - Politico - July 5, 2019

As many as four out of five employees at the Agriculture Department’s Economic Research Service could quit instead of relocating to the agency’s new headquarters in Kansas City, according to a preliminary survey compiled by union leaders and shared exclusively with POLITICO.

The mass exodus forecast by the union’s review, combined with departures ERS has already absorbed, has added to deep concerns among staff that relocation could paralyze the research agency’s work.

ERS employees monitor agricultural markets and provide assessments of global commodity production, consumption and trade that farmers depend on when making planting decisions. The agency’s researchers also study the effects of climate change on agriculture, nutrition programs and the environment, among other areas.

Employees selected for relocation, several of whom have told POLITICO they believe the move is an effort to stifle research that contradicts the Trump administration’s agenda, have been given until July 15 to notify the department whether they will relocate. The deadline comes one month after Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced the Kansas City area was selected as the new home of ERS and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

The American Federation of Government Employees, which represents workers at ERS as well NIFA, began surveying employees after the announcement. The results indicate staffing within certain ERS divisions could be devastated.

Some employees are uncertain about whether they will relocate, but a sizable majority has already made their decision: The union estimates that two out of three employees are certain they will not move. USDA hand-picked about 200 ERS employees to move to the new headquarters, and 76 others were chosen to remain in the Washington area to perform duties the department considers central to the agency’s mission.

Not a single employee working in the Information Services Division at ERS, which maintains the agency’s IT infrastructure and publishes its research, told union representatives they were likely to relocate.

In the Resource and Rural Economics Division, more than 90 percent of the employees who study climate change, conservation and the environment as well as the state of the rural economy may leave.

In the Food Economics Division, which studies nutrition programs, food safety and pricing, the attrition rate could reach as high as 89 percent. And three out of four employees could walk away in the Market and Trade Economics Division and in the agency’s Office of Administrator.

NIFA employees are expected to leave at a similar rate, but a comparable analysis of those employees has not been conducted, said Kevin Hunt, acting vice president of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 3403.

“The loss in expertise is extremely concerning for those who create policy, rely on sound market and industry research and who collaborate with USDA ERS to address field-based questions that arise,” said Dawn Thilmany, an associate department head at Colorado State University’s College of Agricultural Sciences, when POLITICO asked her to review the survey results.
“The supply of skilled agricultural, resource and food economists with the industry and policy context to conduct cutting-edge research is relatively tight already, so an abrupt shift and change in working location will likely have significant implications for USDA’s key economic, policy and social science research agency," she added.

A USDA spokesperson said in a statement provided to POLITICO that the department will not know employees’ final decisions until the July 15 deadline.

“In the meantime, we are doing everything we can to ensure employees have the resources and information to make their decisions and to implement the transition smoothly and efficiently to ensure mission critical work can continue,” the spokesperson said. The response did not directly address the union’s early findings.

USDA aims to move all employees into temporary office space in the Kansas City area by Sept. 30 as department officials work with the General Services Administration to select a permanent building to house ERS and NIFA. Union officials are attempting to get Perdue to delay or halt the relocation.

Perdue has said the relocation will bring ERS and NIFA closer to the farming communities the agencies serve, cut expenses and improve recruitment and retention efforts. The department’s cost-benefit analysis projected the move to the Kansas City area will save $20 million per year, for a total savings of $300 million over the course of a 15-year lease.

But an analysis conducted by researchers at the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association disputed the department’s estimate, suggesting relocation could cost as much as $128 million over time. That group’s analysis said USDA didn’t take into account the value of future research that would be lost after veteran economists leaving the agencies, and also argued the department overstated the costs of keeping the agencies in Washington.

As part of the Kansas City area’s proposal, state and local governments from Kansas and Missouri offered $26 million in incentives. When USDA announced the selection, local officials touted the economic benefits of hundreds of jobs coming to the area.

Ahead of the move, local governments dispatched several dozen “ambassadors” to D.C. to meet with ERS and NIFA employees this week to provide information about living in the Kansas City area, such as details about its school systems and neighborhoods.

“Kansas City really was misled that they’d get hundreds of employees for $26 million in incentives,” Hunt said.
Liz Shuler and Sara Nelson have many things in common – both are from Oregon, both are in their 40s, and both are prominent labor leaders. Shuler is secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, the nation’s largest labor federation, Nelson is president of the Association of Flight Attendants.

Another thing they have in common: both hope to succeed Richard Trumka someday as the AFL-CIO’s president.

After decades of being held back, women have only recently risen to the top ranks of America’s labor unions. For a woman to head the AFL-CIO and become the nation’s most powerful, visible labor leader would be “rather extraordinary”, as one historian put it.

But neither Shuler nor Nelson will admit to having an eye on that prize. Both know it would look bad to declare their candidacy with 27 months still left in Trumka’s term.

Shuler, 49, is not flashy – she’s a well-liked team player, solid speaker and excellent administrator. Nelson, 46, is a charismatic speaker and is often viewed as a militant – she likes to shake things up.

Shuler played a leading role last year in mobilizing Missourians to overturn that state’s anti-union-fee law (known as a “right to work” law). Nelson was catapulted into the spotlight last January when she called for a general strike to pressure Donald Trump and Congress to end the government shutdown.

Although AFL-CIO headquarters says there is no campaign under way, there’s a lot happening beyond that official position.

Two top union leaders who insisted on anonymity said that early this year Trumka and Shuler were asking various union presidents whether they would support Shuler to be the AFL-CIO’s next president. These officials said Trumka, the AFL-CIO’s head since 2009, appeared at the time to be considering stepping down within a few months to make way for Shuler, but only if there were strong support for her in the federation’s 55-member executive council, which is composed largely of union presidents.

AFL-CIO officials insist that Trumka, 69, has no plans to step down before the federation’s convention in 2021. Several officials said Trumka dropped the idea of resigning early after the presidents of three large unions representing nearly half the AFL-CIO’s 9 million union members indicated they were not prepared to support Shuler – or anyone else at this point. Those three presidents were Randi Weingarten of the American Federation of Teachers, Lee Saunders of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and Marc Perrone of the United Food and Commercial Workers.

Shuler and Nelson declined to be interviewed for this article – talking publicly could signal they are eyeing the AFL-CIO’s presidency. Nonetheless, labor officials say both are jockeying for labor’s top position.

“It’s really exciting that it’s two women,” said Janice Fine, a professor of labor studies at Rutgers. “We know that a majority of the workforce is women. We know that since the early anti-sweatshop movement, women have been at the forefront of fighting for workers’ rights. Women have only recently got to the leadership of national unions. So this is another milestone.”
Both Shuler and Nelson have strong allies on the AFL-CIO’s executive council. “I think the world of Liz,” said Lonnie Stephenson, president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). “She’s very forthright. She doesn’t want to be the center of attention. I see her as a consensus builder who brings groups together.”

As for Nelson, Cecil Roberts, president of the United Mine Workers, said: “I have great respect for Sara. She’s been a tremendous help to our union.” He said she had taken a leading role in urging Congress to enact a law that would rescue the mineworkers’ beleaguered pension fund. “She is probably as good a spokesperson as labor has,” Roberts said. “She is a great speaker. She is very passionate and fiery. She inspires.”

Having finished college with $45,000 in student debt, Nelson felt lucky to land a flight attendant’s job with United Airlines in 1996. With many co-workers facing sexual harassment and scheduling problems, she became a union activist, and in 2002, she was named the flight attendants’ communications director, locking horns with United after it filed for bankruptcy protection.

Nelson was elected union vice-president in 2011, heading its successful No Knives Ever Again Campaign to prohibit airlines from letting passengers carry knives. She won the union’s presidency in 2014 and has led efforts to unionize flight attendants at Cathay Pacific, Virgin America and Norwegian Airlines.

Shuler, the daughter of an IBEW member, went to work for that union in 1993 as an organizer in Oregon. She was assigned to California in 1998 to help defeat a statewide anti-union referendum, and after that victory, the electrical workers made her a lobbyist in Washington and later an assistant to the union’s president. With Trumka naming her his running mate in 2009, she became the highest-ranking woman in labor history. As the AFL-CIO’s No 2, she is chief financial officer at a time of huge financial strain – many unions have lost members. Shuler’s responsibilities include leading the AFL-CIO’s efforts to attract more young workers into unions and to organize video game developers.

With so many tensions within labor, some labor leaders say it would make sense to have a consensus builder like Shuler as AFL-CIO president. Within the federation, some insiders complain that Trumka has gutted the AFL-CIO’s immigration and civil rights departments. Moreover, the Service Employees International Union and the Teamsters remain outside the AFL-CIO, after breaking away in 2005.

But some union officials say Shuler is not dynamic enough to inspire people to join unions at a time labor desperately needs a turnaround. Some voice fears she might merely oversee labor’s continued decline.

John Samuelsen, president of the Transport Workers Union, said Shuler hasn’t shown all her potential: “If anything, she’s guilty of being too much of a team player. She has the capacity to do more than that.”

Larry Cohen, former president of the Communications Workers of America, said the focus shouldn’t be on who succeeds Trumka, but on how to revive organized labor.

“The key issue in the AFL-CIO’s future,” Cohen said, “is how do the federation and its affiliates come to terms with what has happened in the private sector, going from 35% of workers unionized to just 6%, the lowest percentage of any democracy in the world.”

Weingarten, the teachers’ union president, said she is not ready to endorse anyone for AFL-CIO president because she is focusing on something more important: how to revamp the federation to make it more powerful and effective.
Nelson is an outspoken advocate of using strikes as a weapon for workers to make gains. Some labor officials said she crisscrosses the country giving speeches not just because she feels solidarity with other unions and progressive groups, but because she realizes that many AFL-CIO insiders favor Shuler – and that she needs to generate rank-and-file support for herself.

Nelson has rubbed some unions the wrong way because the flight attendants have battled the machinists and transport workers over which union should organize flight attendants at which airline. But some say this shows Nelson’s eagerness to do what labor needs: more organizing.

Several union officials said Shuler is too close to the building trades unions, which tend to be among the most conservative. Sean McGarvey, president of the North American Building Trades Union, slammed Nelson for supporting the Green New Deal. “She’s aligned herself with a plan that would eliminate half of the AFL-CIO’s jobs,” McGarvey said. “That’s not going to work real well.”

Nelson and others say the Green New Deal wouldn’t eliminate nearly that many union jobs. Roberts, the mineworkers’ president, defended Nelson, saying. “I just appeared on a panel with her, and she very much says union jobs have to be protected as part of any Green New Deal.”

Joseph McCartin, a labor historian at Georgetown, sought to put Shuler’s and Nelson’s ambitions in context.

“The past two years we’ve seen a lot of energy: the #RedforEd movement, the way labor responded to the government shutdown, strong interest in labor among young people,” he said. “Both of these women are under 50 – almost as important as their gender, they’re younger and as such, they’ll be able to connect. One of them might be more adept at appealing outside of the union movement. Sara Nelson has done a lot of that. One of them might be more adept at mending fences within labor. The big takeaway is, it’s very likely that one of them will be the next AFL-CIO president, and that would be rather extraordinary.”
In March 2019, the editorial staff at Gimlet Media became the first podcasting company to unionize when they joined the Writers Guild of America. The announcement came just a month after Gimlet was acquired by Spotify in a $230 million dollar deal.

Unionizing has been notoriously difficult for tech companies, according to Fast Company, but it could be the beginning of an industry-wide shift.

And the Gimlet workers’ move is evidence that labor organizing isn’t a thing of the past. The Center for Economic Policy and Research reported that 75 percent of new union members are under the age of 35.

Will younger generations of workers lead a resurgence of organized labor?

Fresh energy
Whitney Yax has been working for the labor movement for more than six years. In her role as an organizer for Communications Workers of America District 1, which represents 150,000 members in the Northeast, she helps new members get involved in their unions.

She has noticed an increase in younger members, and in younger members’ desire to be active participants. They’re phone banking or knocking on doors to garner support for a political candidate, organizing meetings with industry leaders, or gathering signatures on a petition. This is on-brand for millennials, who typically value experiences over stuff.

“I always think of unions as offering a voice, a role in decision-making at work,” Yax said.

Millennials are more supportive of labor unions than generations before them. A 2018 Gallup poll showed that 66 percent of people ages 18 to 34 approve of labor unions, compared to 60 percent of people ages 35 to 54 and 62 percent of people ages 55 and older.

But unions have a long way to go when it comes to finding the right set of benefits that will encourage membership among millennials, said Zane Dalal, executive vice president of the union benefits administrator BPA.

“Millennials are incredibly adaptable, and people think of them as this sort of vague group, yet they are activists, and they’re incredibly sure of what they want,” he said.

Unions’ influence often extend beyond their membership, Yax said. The opportunity to effect change is attractive to young workers.

“I believe very strongly that unions, individually and collectively, just by their existence, improve the situation for workers that are non-union,” she said.

For example, unions were instrumental in raising the minimum wage in New York, which benefited all minimum wage workers, not just the unionized ones, Yax said.

“The action that union members take can have a great effect on other people,” she said.
A ‘match made in heaven’?

Knowing that our work and financial lives will be much different than what our parents experienced, millennials have been forced to adapt. In many cases, adapting has meant piecing together side gigs and extra jobs. It’s easy to feel alone in the gig economy, or even feel in competition with your fellow workers.

“The human element is diminishing, and it shows in the way that people want to pay their workers,” Dalal said.

He believes “unions might bring back that personal side” to employment.

We millennials can be both disdainful of being forced to go it alone, and oddly proud of our hustle. Joining a union means embracing solidarity and leaving that pride behind, which can be especially hard when you’re raised on a strict diet of American individualism.

Yet, as we try to find a path to retirement, millennials and unions have been called a “match made in heaven” by the California Labor Federation.

“Some may think that unions are a thing of the past, but as reports pile up on how young workers are going to need to work themselves into exhaustion just to put food on the table, joining a union remains the best way for millennials to reap the kind of economic security their parents and grandparents had,” Alexandra Catsoulis wrote for the California Labor Federation.

‘A barrier for younger people’

Union membership peaked in 1970 and has been declining ever since. Whether or not unions can adapt quickly enough will determine if they grow in the next generation, Dalal said.

“There was a heyday of the labor movement, and many of the people who were part of it are still involved, in roles of leadership now,” Yax said.

Millennials have a unique opportunity to contribute to labor unions and, in turn, contribute to change in many sectors. There are issues specific to this age group and this cultural moment that unions could address if young folks pushed for it, Dalal said.

Unions could advocate for student loan repayment policies, as our collective debt continues climbing. They could also become involved in the opioid crisis, he said, pushing for recovery support.

But there’s a sentiment that younger generations don’t want to get involved.

“The language of people who are driving the conversation, they’re in their 70s and they’ll never ‘get’ millennial culture,” Dalal said.

It’s hard to sit in meetings as a young person and hear about how millennials don’t care, Yax said. In fact, it’s “a barrier for younger people to get involved.”

Even so, “I really think we could have another heyday very soon,” she said.
U.S. Department Of Transportation Says Unions Can't Block Use Of Mexican Rail Crews  
by Law360 - July 8, 2019

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) have told the D.C. Circuit it should end a lawsuit brought by Railroad Workers' Unions objecting to the use of non-U.S. Train Crews on the U.S side of the Texas-Mexico border.

In a brief filed Friday (July 5th), the government said there's no basis for the court to allow the Unions - the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART) - to continue the suit, arguing the Unions haven't identified a specific agency action they are challenging.

The Unions filed a petition for review with the D.C. Circuit in September, alleging that the USDOT and FRA violated U.S. Railroad Safety and Training Rules when they allowed Kansas City Southern de Mexico to operate freight trains in the U.S. with crews from Mexico.

The Unions argued in that filing that they can't point to a specific order because the government took the contested action in this case “without public notice or other published documentation.”

The government said in its brief that because there has been no action or order identified by the Unions for the court to review, the lawsuit needs to be dismissed as required under the Hobbs Act and the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure.

“At bottom, the Unions are unhappy that the FRA has not taken enforcement action against KCSM for what the Unions believe to be violations of FRA's regulations. But it is well settled that the decision about whether to pursue enforcement action is committed to the agency’s discretion and is thus unreviewable,” the government argued. “The Unions assert that the FRA’s decision not to initiate enforcement proceedings against KCSM grants it a 'de facto waiver' of FRA safety regulations. But the Unions may not obtain judicial review of an agency’s discretionary decision not to initiate enforcement proceedings by calling that decision a 'waiver.'”

According to court documents, the Unions alleged that since July 2018 the government has allowed Kansas City Southern de Mexico, a non-U.S. railroad company, to operate freight trains in the U.S. without being subject to this country's “laws and regulations governing railroad operations.”

The government told the panel that the Unions only took this action after first threatening to Strike - prompting Kansas City Southern Railway and the Texas Mexican Railway Company to ask for and receive in December 2018 an injunction from a Federal Judge in Texas preventing the move - and then sending a letter to Republican President Donald Trump “imploring him to intervene in the dispute.”

According to court documents, Laredo, Texas, is Ground Zero for the dispute and is also the busiest port of entry for trains on the Southern Border.

The Kansas City Southern Railway Company and its wholly-owned subsidiary, the Texas Mexican Railway, own the tracks and operate trains on the U.S. side of the border, while affiliate KCSM owns the tracks and operates the trains on the Mexican side of the border.
New York, NY – The International Association of Fire Fighters [IAFF] may have already put their eggs in Senator Joe Biden’s basket, just as the NY Hotel & Motel Trades Council has done for Mayor Bill de Blasio — but we shouldn’t expect to see more unions rushing to endorse candidates for the 2020 Presidential Election.

That’s according to one of the most dynamic labor leaders this nation has produced in a long while. In 2016, the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA was among a minority group of unions who decided to back progressive insurgent candidate Bernie Sanders over anointed establishment heir Hillary Clinton.

Most habitually went with the establishment candidate. Despite early presidential endorsements from the IAFF and HTC, Sara Nelson, head of the AFA, doesn’t believe unions will be doing business as unusual ahead of the 2020 vote.

“The difference in 2020, is that unions are taking a different approach to the endorsement,” Nelson recently told LaborPress. “From my perspective we should be focused on what’s happening in the workplace — and organizing and building on the momentum of the strikes that have been bigger and broader and produced more wins than at any time in US history. Between now and 2020, the landscape could change quite dramatically around what sort of power the American worker actually has.”

Three years ago, while an alarming number of rank and file members where openly telling United Steelworkers head Leo Gerard that they weren’t buying Clinton’s act — NAFTA had burned them too badly; so they were gonna bet on this guy Trump — others were clamoring for labor leaders to buck the system and back Bernie over the Democratic Machine. Ultimately, the status quo held, and the rest is the Trumptonian nightmare — replete with its union-busting NLRB and tax breaks for the rich — that American workers are suffering through today.

Next year, however, could actually be a different story with working people actually calling the shots and candidates scrambling to follow along.

“As workers start to understand their power in the workplace and understand the power they can have in unions — and even workers who have been denied the right to join unions because of court decisions that say they’re not employees or some other gig economy baloney — people are not accepting that,” Nelson says. “They’re stepping up and fighting back and getting engaged in the Labor Movement and learning how to be active participants in democracy. And that will have a very different effect on the way this election moves forward.”

While that remains to be seen, Nelson also believes that labor leaders are, in fact, already changing their relationship to presidential politics. And maybe they are. The AFL-CIO did pass resolutions in 2017 loudly declaring the the days of reflexively opting for the “lesser of two evils” are over. Says Nelson, “The leadership of the labor union is taking a different approach — and that is requiring the candidates come to the unions — rather than feeling that they need to show allegiance to a candidate. Setting up a set of principles that require those candidates meet certain metrics, which includes, in many cases, getting on the shop floor or into the workplace with workers. Essentially, walking in their shoes and understanding those issues.”

For Nelson, “It’s really more about the candidates coming to labor than labor coming to the candidates.”

“I think we’re also going to see a much later endorsement process in this election,” she says. We'll see.
In February, about a dozen employees at a small technology company called NPM embarked on an effort that is often frowned upon at startups: trying to unionize.

For more than three months, the workers had battled the company’s new management over their hours, a changing workplace culture and diversity issues, said seven current and former NPM employees. So to give themselves more say, they moved to organize. The employees contacted labor groups, including the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers and the Tech Workers Coalition, to hold unionization discussions.

“We wanted the leverage to negotiate for things that were important to us as workers, rather than having them told to us,” said Graham Carlson, who was a content marketing manager at NPM, which provides tools to web developers. “We felt the best way to address it was to address it collectively.”

Three weeks after the workers began organizing, NPM laid off Carlson and four other employees, all but one of whom had been involved in the unionizing. After some of those employees filed a formal charge with the National Labor Relations Board, the federal agency that oversees such complaints, NPM settled with the workers last month. No union has been formed.

“We did not interfere with any of our employees’ efforts to unionize,” NPM’s chief executive, Bryan Bogensberger, said in a statement.

Tech workers at Silicon Valley’s largest companies have engaged in an unusual degree of activism over the past few years — and it has gotten results. At Google, employees have written letters and signed petitions to force their leaders to address issues such as how artificial intelligence is used in products. Last November, 20,000 Google employees staged a walkout to protest the firm’s handling of sexual harassment, leading to new company policies. Workers at Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft and Salesforce have also pushed for various changes.

But the failed unionization effort at NPM shows the obstacles to employee activism in the tech industry, and how moving from speaking out for change to collective bargaining so far remains a distant prospect.

The difficulties are echoed at other tech companies where recent moves to set up unions have also stalled. At Kickstarter, the crowdfunding site, a unionization effort this year has floundered as organizers struggle to build support. And last year at Lanetix, a logistics software company, more than a dozen engineers were fired after trying to create a union, according to a complaint issued by the NLRB.

A representative from Kickstarter’s organizing campaign said it was “continuing to do the hard work of building a union.” David Gallagher, a Kickstarter spokesman, said its executives had told staff that “Kickstarter is better positioned to overcome its challenges, serve its mission, and do right by its employees and community without the framework of a union.” He added that the company was “in no way seeking to impair the rights of staff members to organize.”

Lanetix’s former chief executive and the company, which has rebranded as Winmore, did not respond to requests for comment. If workers get as far as trying to organize a union, management sometimes takes aggressive action — including dismissals — to block them. And when workers appeal those dismissals to entities such as the NLRB, tech companies often have the resources to resolve the cases without allowing a union to form.
NPM settled the case brought by three of its former employees, who filed charges with the NLRB alleging they had been dismissed in retaliation for trying to set up a union, paying the workers more than $105,000, according to the employees and the company. Lanetix also settled with 15 workers for $775,000 last year over unfair labor practices claims after negotiations with the NLRB.

Sahil Talwar, who worked at Lanetix as a software developer and was part of the unionization effort, said tech companies worked to make unions seem alien. “Associating unions with blue-collar work and making it a stigma to talk about unions in white-collar circles, that’s very deliberate,” he said.

NPM began as an open-source software project in 2009 before being incorporated in 2014. Based in Oakland, California, it has raised more than $10 million from investors and employs around 50 people, a company spokesman said.

For years, NPM had a forgiving corporate culture, said the current and former employees, three of whom spoke on the record while the others requested anonymity because they feared retaliation. Employees joked that NPM stood for “nice people matter.” (It initially stood for Node Package Manager.) Engineers said they were encouraged to take regular breaks and avoid burnout.

That changed last July when new executives were appointed. To prepare for the debut of a new product, employees were required to work extended shifts and be on call at all hours, the current and former employees said.

In February, they sent a letter to management about their work hours, but said they did not receive a satisfactory response. An NPM spokesman said the company had met one of the letter’s demands — for the tech support department to report directly to engineering.

At a corporate retreat that month, employees raised their concerns with management. They said they had been told that they would need to adopt Silicon Valley’s hard-charging, never-sleep culture or leave the company.

Bogensberger, the chief executive, presented slides warning employees not to be dramatic, which workers interpreted as a veiled reference to their complaints about overwork. Employees also said that women and minorities did not have equitable opportunities for promotion. The company spokesman said NPM had a nearly equal split of male and female employees, though it employs proportionally few minorities.

At the retreat, employees met about unionization, two of the current and former employees said. In March, NPM made the layoffs.
Amazon.com Inc. warehouse workers in Minnesota plan to strike during the online retailer’s summer sales extravaganza, a sign that labor unrest persists even after the company committed to paying all employees at least $15 an hour last year.

Workers at a Shakopee, Minnesota, fulfillment center plan a six-hour work stoppage July 15, the first day of Prime Day. Amazon started the event five years ago, using deep discounts on televisions, toys and clothes to attract and retain Prime members, who pay subscription fees in exchange for free shipping and other perks.

“Amazon is going to be telling one story about itself, which is they can ship a Kindle to your house in one day, isn’t that wonderful,” said William Stolz, one of the Shakopee employees organizing the strike. “We want to take the opportunity to talk about what it takes to make that work happen and put pressure on Amazon to protect us and provide safe, reliable jobs.”

"The fact is Amazon offers already what this outside organization is asking for," the company said in an emailed statement. Amazon provides competitive hourly rates ranging from $16.25 to $20.80, with benefits, "and we invite anyone to see for themselves by taking a tour of the facility" in Shakopee, the company added.

In Europe, where unions are stronger, Amazon workers routinely strike during big shopping events like Prime Day and Black Friday. Until now, Amazon’s U.S. workers haven’t walked off the job during key sales days. About 250 union pilots who haul packages for Amazon and DHL Worldwide Express staged a brief strike in the lead-up to Thanksgiving in 2016 before a federal judge ordered them back to work, eliminating any disruptions during the peak holiday shopping season.

While the planned strike will affect just one of Amazon’s more than 100 U.S. warehouses, which typically employ a couple of thousand people, the unrest coincides with increasing political pressure on the company and could embolden workers elsewhere.

As one of the world’s most valuable companies -- led by Jeff Bezos, the world’s wealthiest person -- Amazon has become a symbol of income inequality. Critics say it benefits from tax breaks to build warehouses but pays workers so little that some are forced to seek government assistance for basic needs like food and health care. The pledge to pay $15 an hour didn’t happen until the company had weathered attacks from politicians such as presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders, who proposed a “Stop BEZOS” act that would have imposed a tax on companies like Amazon to make up for the cost of government benefits like Medicaid for their employees.

Of late, warehouses in Minnesota’s Twin Cities region have become an epicenter of worker activism, led by East African Muslim immigrants who organizers say compose the majority of the five facilities’ staff. Last year workers thronged the entryway of a delivery center chanting “Yes we can” in Somali and English, presenting management with demands such as reduced workloads while fasting for Ramadan. They also circulated flyers at a nearby fulfillment center urging co-workers to wear blue shirts and hijabs in support of the same cause.

Organizers say the actions led to talks between employees and management last fall and spurred some modest changes. These include relaxing pressure on workers to meet quotas during Ramadan and the designation of a conference room as a prayer space.
But they say the company has failed to meet worker demands such as converting more temps to Amazon employees and permanently easing productivity quotas they allege make the jobs unsafe and insecure. In a letter last year to the National Labor Relations Board that was reported by The Verge, an attorney for Amazon said that hundreds of employees at one Baltimore facility were terminated within about a year for failing to meet productivity rates. In March, workers staged a three-hour strike.

In its statement, Amazon said that "on average" 90% of the staff at Shakopee were full-time Amazon employees, and that last week it offered more than 30 temps there such positions. The company said its productivity metrics had not changed since November 2018. "We support people who are not performing to the levels expected with dedicated coaching to help them improve," it added.

On July 15, employees at the Shakopee facility plan to strike for about three hours at the end of the day shift and for about three hours at the start of the night shift. In the afternoon, workers also plan to rally outside the facility, located about 25 miles from Minneapolis.

In an effort to show solidarity, a handful of Amazon’s white collar-engineers intend to fly to Minnesota to join the demonstration, where activists will demand the company take action against climate change as well as easing quotas and making more temps permanent employees. “We’re both fighting for a livable future,” said Seattle software engineer Weston Fribley, one of several employees from the group Amazon Employees For Climate Justice who will be making the trip.

It’s the latest example of tech employees with very different jobs trying to forge common cause in the hopes their bosses find their demands harder to ignore.

“We see that our fights are stronger together,” said Abdirahman Muse, executive director of the Awood Center, the worker advocacy group spearheading the Minnesota activism, whose backers include the Service Employees International Union, the Teamsters, and the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. Muse said he expects more than 100 workers to strike.

Workers are also pressing their case to the federal government, claiming their activism earlier this year was illegally punished. Workers filed a pair of complaints last week with the National Labor Relations Board. One complaint, filed against Amazon’s staffing vendor Integrity Staffing Solutions, alleges that it illegally retaliated against a worker who organizers say had been mobilizing co-workers for the March strike and was terminated as he was about to walk off the job to participate. Integrity didn’t provide a comment in response to Bloomberg’s inquiry.

The other complaint, filed against Amazon itself, claims the company retaliated against other workers who went on strike in March by deducting hours from their unpaid time off allotment. The hours they spent striking were counted against the 20 total hours workers can miss each quarter without being fired, according to organizers. Such actions could chill workplace activism and run afoul of federal law, even if they didn’t lead to any actual terminations, said Seattle University law professor Charlotte Garden.

“It’s a violation of labor law when an employer punishes workers for striking, and one way of punishing workers for striking is to take some of their leave away,” she said.

The labor relations board has received about 50 complaints about Amazon, most of which have been withdrawn or dismissed. The Shakopee worker complaint stands out since it alleges collective mistreatment of more than a dozen staff.

The Amazon spokeswoman said that the company had yet to see the complaint about alleged unfair labor practices.
Logistically, the strike will probably amount to little more than a hiccup to Amazon because other facilities and people can easily pick up any slack. Still, the action shows that Amazon workers, buoyed by a tight labor market and employee activism elsewhere, have been emboldened to demand better treatment. Nor will the political pressure go away. Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, another leading presidential candidate, have both called Amazon out over allegations it interfered with Whole Foods workers’ right to organize.
‘This Is What A Union Can Do For Workers:’ Detroit Security Guards Get $15 An Hour After Striking, With Help From The Service Employees International Union

by Andrea Perez Balderrama/The Detroit Free Press - Via WNY Labor - July 10, 2019

(DETROIT, MICHIGAN) – Non-Union Security Guards employed at Bedrock-owned buildings in Downtown Detroit have found out their third-party employer, SecurAmerica, plans on increasing their wages to $15 per hour, said Izabela Miltko-Ivkovich, Communications Director for Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1.

The raise came last week, in the form of an e-mailed memo obtained by The Detroit Free Press, after the Security Guards made the news last month with a one-day Strike and walkout.

The Security Guards took to the streets to fight for Unionizing Rights and living wages.

Some were getting paid as little as $11 an hour according to SEIU Local 1, the Union that helped organize the Strike.

“Our Unfair Labor Practice Strike showed SecurAmerica ‘we are serious about winning a better future for ourselves and our families, and higher pay is the first step on that path,’” Security Officer Rudolph T. Muhammad said in a statement released by SEIU Local 1.
GE's main unions, including local in Schenectady, reject new contract

Larry Rulison - Times Union - July 10, 2019

SCHENECTADY - In a stunning turn of events, General Electric Co.'s main unions, including Local 301 in Schenectady, have rejected the negotiated contract with the company that would have provided raises and a $1,500 ratification bonus. Wednesday's announcement of the tally marked the first time there had been a nationwide "no" vote against a GE contract offer since 1969, when 150,000 union workers went on strike for 102 days.

Today's unionized workforce at GE is fewer that 7,000 nationwide.

One of GE's largest and most influential union locals is already saying that a strike could be on the horizon this time around, as well.

"We are preparing for a nationwide strike of all IUE-CWA GE Conference Board locals," IUE-CWA Local 201 in Lynn, Mass., wrote in a post on its Facebook page Wednesday.

"For now, report to work as usual and prepare for a strike," the post continued.

Health care costs, which would rise in the second year of the four-year deal, appear to have been the biggest area of concern for union members. A majority of the IUE-CWA members actually voted in favor of the contract, but under special winner-take-all vote-counting rules used by the IUE-CWA, all of the votes of each local union shop must be cast with the majority of the votes. So if 51 percent of a union local's members voted to reject the contract, then all of that local's votes are cast against it.

Although GE has 11 unions nationwide with 6,600 members, the IUE-CWA is the largest, giving it a major say in contract talks and ratification.

Local 301 represents hourly workers at GE's steam turbine plant in Schenectady. Its membership had dwindled over the years after repeated job cuts at GE Power, which supplies power plants.

The combined vote total by IUE-CWA members nationwide was 1,643 voting yes and 1,440 voting no. But based on the winner-take-all rules, the final vote was actually counted as 1,591 in favor and 2,001 opposed. The final outcome was likely influenced by the fact that two of GE's largest union shops, Local 301 in Schenectady and IUE-CWA Local 201 in Lynn, Mass., both rejected the contract.

Neither Schenectady nor Lynn revealed their specific voting tallies, only saying that their membership rejected the contract. While Lynn voted Tuesday, Schenectady had voted on July 2. GE's Lynn, Mass., operation is part of GE Aviation, which is one of GE's most successful divisions right now.

Local 301 Business Agent Rob Macherone in Schenectady did not immediately return a call seeking comment. GE said in a statement it was disappointed with the outcome of the vote, and was in talks about the next steps with IUE-CWA leadership, which had urged its membership to approve the deal.

"Today, the IUE-CWA informed GE that although a majority of its members approved the four-year national labor contract, its Conference Board Rules resulted in the proposed agreement being turned down," GE said Wednesday. "We strongly believe the contract is a good package for employees, and a majority approval vote of IUE-CWA membership reflects that."
New York, NY – On Saturday, July 6, Mrs. Alelia Murphy, mother of a retired 1199SEIU member, Rose Green, celebrated her 114th birthday. She is what is known as a supercentenarian, and the oldest living person in the U.S., as validated by the Gerontology Research Group, which works with the Guinness Book of World records on verification. She is also the eighth oldest person in the world. She was born in 1905 in North Carolina, and currently lives in Harlem.

Her daughter describes her as a “gift from God”, and on Friday, July 5, the day before her birthday, she was honored by the African American Caucus (AFRAM) of 1199SEIU at the Harlem State Office Building on 125th Street. 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East is the largest and fastest-growing healthcare union in America. It represents over 420,000 nurses and caregivers throughout Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Florida.

Elected officials, union and community leaders were also present. Senator Brian Benjamin, of the 30th District, which includes Harlem, said, “Harlem is proud to be the home of such an incredible woman who has stood the test of time. We honor her for her longevity and commitment to the Harlem community. Whatever she is eating I would like some of it!”

Mrs. Murphy raised her two children alone, after her husband passed away at an early age. She credits her longevity to eating well and staying active, and added, “Trust in God and be a good person.”
Teamsters Call On Ways And Means To Approve Pension Reform Bill
by Teamster News - July 11, 2019

(WASHINGTON) – Today, the Teamsters Union called on the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means to approve H.R. 397, the Rehabilitation for Multiemployer Pensions Act, more commonly referred to as The Butch Lewis Act.


“H.R. 397 will ensure that we meet our obligations to current retirees and workers for years to come and do so without retiree benefit cuts,” Teamsters General President Jim Hoffa said in a July 8 letter to Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal and Ranking Member Kevin Brady (R-Texas). “I urge you to approve H.R. 397.”

As it stands, there are more than 300 multiemployer pension plans across the country — including the Teamsters’ Central States Pension Fund — that are in danger of failing. The Teamsters have been fighting for years for a legislative solution and have worked with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to do so.

The measure would boost financially troubled multiemployer pensions plans so they don’t fail. It would create a new agency under the U.S. Treasury Department that would sell bonds in the open market to large investors such as financial firms. Those proceeds would then be used to bolster faltering pension plans as part of a 30-year loan program.

Founded in 1903, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters represents 1.4 million hardworking men and women throughout the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.
Hector Figueroa, president of one of the city’s most influential labor unions, 32BJ SEIU, died of an apparent heart attack Thursday night. He was 57.

“It is with overwhelming sadness and a heavy heart that 32BJ mourns the unexpected passing of union president Héctor Figueroa last night in New York,” according to a union statement released Friday. “For those of us who have worked with him to further the well-being of our members and working people everywhere, and felt his personal and principled concern for our members, our staff and others this is a devastating loss.”

Figueroa moved to the Bronx from Puerto Rico in 1982. He joined the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, now called Workers United, in 1990 before switching SEIU in 1995. He worked for the union’s “Justice for Janitors” campaign and served as SEIU director for Puerto Rico, deputy trustee, secretary-treasurer and director of 32BJ’s New York metro district. He was elected president of service workers union in 2012. 32BJ SEIU is the largest property service union in the country, representing more than 163,000 window cleaners, airport workers, superintendents, doormen, maintenance workers, cleaners, porters and security officers in Washington, D.C. and 11 states including New York, where there are over 80,000 members.

During his 24 years at the union, Figueroa established a political action fund to further SEIU’s agenda. The union was a national leader in the fight for a $15 minimum wage and helped enact a $19 minimum wage for airport workers in New York last year.

Figueroa was an outspoken supporter of a controversial – and ultimately failed – deal to bring an Amazon headquarters to Queens, which would have created jobs for the union’s members. The union also opposed recent reforms to rent regulations, siding with the real estate industry.

Figueroa was also an ardent supporter of immigrant rights and supported immigration reform. Hours before he died, Figueroa tweeted about President Trump’s efforts to seek citizenship information from existing records instead of using a question on the census.

“Trump is about waging war on ALL immigrants regardless of status or contributions to our economy, culture & politics,” he tweeted Thursday night.

Figueroa is survived by his wife Deidre and two children, Eric and Elena.

Elected officials mourned the loss on Friday.
At Hearing Packed With Workers, Key Panel Okays Multi-Employer Pensions Rescue Bill

Mark Greenberg - Press Associates Union News Service - July 12, 2019

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - At a hearing packed with hundreds of Workers, Lawmakers on the key committee handling pension issues tackled – and approved – legislation to establish Federal Loans for troubled Multi-Employer Pension Plans (MEPs).

The measure, HR397, named for Ohio Unionist Butch Lewis who died of a stroke four years ago, would set up a bureau in the Treasury Department to judge applications from the troubled plans. Lewis’s MEP went broke and his widow’s pension payout collapsed.

Those plans which can show Federal Loans would be used to both become solvent and to keep benefits level for current Retirees – or their families and survivors – would get the loan funds, repayable after 30 years. The money would come from selling U.S. Treasury Bonds.

“We are ‘in the homestretch’” of passing HR397, Teamsters President Jim Hoffa said at an outdoor press conference an hour before the July 12th House Ways and Means Committee work session on it. “This is a ‘battle for dignity and for keeping the promises made’ (to millions of Workers, but Workers) ‘have to walk the halls’ to ensure it passes,” he warned.

The MEP problem now affects more than 100 plans serving one million Retirees and survivors. MEPs cover 10 million people overall. They’re common in industries such as trucking, bakeries and confectionery firms, construction, food processing and – especially – coal mining.

Joint Labor-Management Boards run the plans, with all employers contributing to the Workers’ pensions, but corporate consolidations, bankruptcies and especially the crash in pension values and investment returns from the 2008 financier-caused Great Recession put MEPs into the “red zone” of financial danger, where they could go broke within months or years.

The United Mine Workers’ (UMW) two pension plans, which the Federal Government virtually chartered 72 years ago, are in the most-immediate danger. The biggest threat is the Teamsters’ giant Central and Southern States Pension Plan.

And the Federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation’s (PBGC) Fund to cover takeovers of broke MEPs – which would pay out far less than Workers set aside over the years – is running out of cash too.

The result is huge benefit cuts for Workers, like Butch Lewis, who sacrificed pay hikes and lives to ensure pensions, his widow, Rita, said.

“If ‘there’s a better approach than benefit cuts, which the 2014 (MEP) Law led to, I’d like to hear it,’” U.S. Representative Ron Kind (Democrat-Wisconsin) challenged the GOP during the work session. He got a round of applause.

“It ‘matters that we look out for our people,’” added U.S. Representative John Larson (Democrat-Connecticut).

“This ‘is a solution for everybody, not just’ Teamsters. ‘These people worked hard for thirty or forty years to retire with dignity, and we have to make sure that promise is kept,’” Hoffa said before that.
But Republicans, both on the Ways and Means Panel and overall, call the rescue legislation “a bailout.”

And Murray Energy, the Nation’s largest coal company, also objects. As a result of mergers and bankruptcies, it would fund 97% of one of the UMW’s Pension Funds.

Panel Chair U.S. Representative Richard Neal (Democrat-Massachusetts), along with lead co-sponsor U.S. Representative Peter King (Republican-New York) refuted that bailout charge at the outdoor press conference.

Another House panel, the Education and Labor Committee, passed HR397 last month on a party-line 26-to-18 vote - but Ways and Means writes actual Pension and Tax Legislation, so it’s the key House Committee in the mix.

“This is ‘not’ a bailout. What we are proposing is a ‘backstop.’ The ‘full faith and credit’ of the U.S. government, ‘which is used every day worldwide,’” through the Treasury Bonds, Neal explained. “We will ‘construct a structure, a rehabilitation agency, with minimal costs’” to run the Pension Program.

And, addressing defiant Republicans, Neal stated: “I was ‘here for the S&L (Savings and Loan) crisis.’ ‘That was a bailout.’ I ‘was here for legislation to deal with Wall Street after the 2008 crash.’ ‘That was a bailout.’ They (executives) ‘not only kept their jobs (after tanking the U.S. and World Economies), but they got bonuses.’ ‘That was a bailout.’ ‘This is not a bailout.’” Neal said of the financial finaglers.

Without the legislation, Rita Lewis said: “It’s ‘not just that one million families will be hurt (including thousands in her home State of Ohio). ‘It’s our communities.’ ‘It’s our State (with a $6 billion annual income loss to Ohioans alone. That’s because pensions would be cut by 40% or more, if the Retirees or their survivors get anything at all). ‘Look at our faces.’ ‘We matter.’ ‘We are going to get what we worked for, what we paid for.’ ‘It’s not a bailout.’ ‘It’s a loan.’ ‘I’d ask anyone opposed to this, did you buy a house?’ ‘Did you buy a car?’ ‘You took out a loan.’ ‘This is the same thing.’”

Other Unions and Unionists joined the Teamsters at the outdoor press conference and in the crowded Ways and Means hearing room.

“We’re ‘up here for those who need the attention,’” said Larry Greenhill, the Political Director of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 26 in Lanham, Maryland.

Though his Union’s MEP is solvent, the original Congressional idea – approved in 2014 at the last minute – to have financially healthy plans “bail the others out” didn’t fly, he explained.

“This is much better,” he said.

“We’re ‘here for our young’ Brothers’ and Sisters’ pensions,” said Local 26 member Jerry Lozupone. “Should ‘we ever get in trouble, we want this to be there for us.’”

Added Amber Stevens of United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 400: “When ‘one is hurt, we all are hurt.’” The legislation, HR397, “offers a real, proactive solution” for the financially ailing plans and the PBGC, International Association of Machinists (IAM) President Robert Martinez wrote to the Ways and Means panel.

It “protects the earned benefits of millions of Retirees, Workers and their families,” he said.Plans that get the loans would have to pay Pensioners or their families – without benefit cuts – and pay interest on the loans for 30 years, then repay the loan, Martinez explained.
Mayor de Blasio's cheer of “U.S.A! Equal Pay! U.S.A! Equal Pay!” at the July 10 City Hall celebration of the United States Women’s soccer team’s World Cup championship brought a sharp rebuke from the FDNY Emergency Medical Service unions, which have alleged for years that they are the victims of gender- and race-based wage discrimination.

Following his ride on the champions’ float during the ticker-tape parade, the Mayor and Democratic Presidential aspirant rolled out his national blueprint for gender equality, in which he committed to passing a Federal law aimed at ending wage discrimination.

And Murray Energy, the Nation’s largest coal company, also objects. As a result of mergers and bankruptcies, it would fund 97% of one of the UMW’s Pension Funds.

Panel Chair U.S. Representative Richard Neal (Democrat-Massachusetts), along with lead co-sponsor U.S. Representative Peter King (Republican-New York) refuted that bailout charge at the outdoor press conference.

‘Deserving’

In a joint statement, DC 37’s Local 2507, which represents Emergency Medical Technicians, and Local 3621, which represents EMS officers, accused the Mayor of using the team’s celebration “to grab attention for his presidential run and advocate against pay inequality” even as “the first responders of FDNY EMS are victims of that same inequity.”

The statement continued, “With 30% of our members being women and 50% minorities, we are one of the most diverse departments in the City of New York. Yet the difference in salaries after five years is tens of thousands of dollars. The women's national team deserves equal pay, but so do the hardworking EMTs and paramedics who save lives routinely and who the Mayor has ignored.”

As thousands of soccer fans cheered in City Hall Plaza, the Mayor doubled down on supporting the female soccer players’ class-action lawsuit, filed in March, alleging that their employer, the U.S. Soccer Federation, had violated U.S. Equal Pay Act, which has been on the books since 1963, by paying their male counterparts more.

“This team has shown an undeniable truth, an inalienable right—that the equality of women must be guaranteed in this nation,” Mr. de Blasio said. “And let’s honor them by doing it—let’s honor them by ensuring it.”

Leads to Turnover

The EMS unions blasted Mr. de Blasio in January when he appeared to justify the significant pay disparity between the EMS workforce and FDNY Firefighters when he said “the work is different. We are trying to make sure people are treated fairly and paid fairly but I do think the work is different.”

In responding to the union locals’ most recent statement, a Mayoral spokesperson took a more conciliatory tone. "The work that FDNY EMS does is vital to our City" and the Mayor is committed to “reach an agreement that is fair to workers and NYC taxpayers.”

Local 2507 and Local 3621, as well as the Probation Officers Association, are in different stages of litigation with the de Blasio administration over what the unions contend is longstanding gender and race-based pay discrimination.
Union officials have complained that the pay disparity and the FDNY promotions system together lead to a constant turnover of EMTs, undermining morale and greatly reducing the level of experience on the job as hundreds of EMTs leave to become Firefighters or Police Officers.

“The fact is 80 percent of new hires leave EMS within four years,” Oren Barzilay, President of Local 2507, testified at a recent City Council hearing. “When they leave, they take well-honed clinical expertise with them. This, when coupled with a recent and ongoing wave of retirements, creates a naïve, inexperienced and marginally prepared workforce.”

Studies have documented a strong link between improved medical outcomes for EMS patients during what is referenced to as the “golden hour” with the level of field experience of the responding EMS team.

**Council Weighs In**

During his opening remarks at a June 25 hearing of the City Council’s Committee on Civil Service and Labor addressing pay inequities for some municipal workers and attended by a standing-room-only audience, the committee chairman, I. Daneek Miller, said that despite the fact that “EMS workers perform first-responder duties in a similar capacity to firefighters and cops, and face extreme situations where their health and safety are on the line…the they are paid a fraction of what their first responder brothers and sisters make.” He continued, “For example, within the FDNY, EMTs are paid a little more than $50,000 a year after five years of employment, yet for the same time period, Firefighters are paid about $110,000—more than double what EMTs make. This pay disparity is shocking, as EMTs and paramedics provide vital care to people at emergencies throughout the city and are predominantly women and people of color.”

**Seeking ‘Transparency’**

Systemic gender-based pay discrimination within the City's civil service may be more widespread than just the titles that have been the subject of litigation. A 2018 analysis of the City’s pay practices by the office of then-Public Advocate Leticia James found that the average salary of women at the top-10 majority-women municipal agencies was $10,000 less than the average salary of men at the 10 largest majority-male agencies.

Earlier this year, CWA Local 1180 reached a $15 million pay-discrimination settlement with the city that covers roughly 2,000 union members.

Ending gender and race-based employment discrimination within the city, including within the municipal civil service, has been a top priority of City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo and Council Member Miller, chair of the Council’s Civil Service and Pensions Committee.

In April 2018, the City Council passed a law requiring that the city annually disclose pay and employment equity data within municipal agencies. City’s agencies will be required to submit that data to the Department of Citywide Administrative Services by Nov. 30. By February 28 of next year, and for every year thereafter, DCAS has to turn that data over to the Mayor’s Office of Data Analytics, which in turn has until April 29 to provide access to the pay data to the City Council. By the end of the following month, a report has to be issued to the Mayor and City Council Speaker and posted online.

In an interview after the June hearing, Mr. Miller likened the potential impact of the public disclosure of the pay data with what happened when the City Council mandated that the NYPD regularly report the race and age of the subjects of its controversial stop-and-frisk strategy.

"Reporting creates transparency," he said.
(ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA) - Transit in the Washington, D.C., area is heavily unionized, but until recently there was one stubborn holdout - the DASH Bus System in Alexandria, Virginia.

The city debuted DASH 35 years ago to create a cheaper, Non-Union alternative to the regional MetroBus service. It was set up as a non-profit corporation owned by the city so that it would technically be privately run, disqualifying Workers from receiving the city pension.

Over and over since then, Drivers at DASH reached out to Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689 to organize.

They wanted what Union Members in the region already had - decent wages and benefits.

The Union tried to organize repeatedly, but it always ended in failure.

Management used every trick in the book to crush Union Drives.

They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on Union-Busting Consultants.

They promised to change.

They bought off or rooted out Union Sympathizers.

They did lots of little things to curry favor with particular Workers to keep their loyalty.

Despite its low wages, DASH managed to retain Immigrant Drivers by routinely allowing them to travel home for extended periods in excess of what the handbook allowed.

It was enough to keep Workers from uniting for a Union.

Whenever the latest Organizing Drive receded, it was back to business as usual.

“There was ‘no respect’ for the Drivers,” said veteran Driver Charles Barrett. “When a customer complaint came in, ‘they’d always side with them, but they’d never give us a compliment.’”

“There ain’t no bars on the windows. You can always leave,” is what the ham-fisted operations manager would say whenever someone brought up a problem.

And people did leave.

DASH was a place where “people take a job to get a commercial driver’s license so that they can ‘go get another job someplace else,’” said Driver Tyler Boos.

The company struggled to maintain an adequate workforce amid a nationwide commercial Driver shortage.
Meanwhile, a generation of DASH Drivers saw Alexandria transform from a backwater town into a posh hub of development.

These days the city is peppered with lawn signs advertising “condos from the upper $1 millions!”

The transformation culminated in the recent announcement that Amazon’s new second headquarters would be built in Northern Virginia in the DASH service area - courtesy of millions of dollars of corporate welfare extracted from government coffers.

Yet, none of this newfound prosperity trickled down to the Bus Operators.

In one of the most expensive places in the country for housing, they were making do on a starting salary of $35,000.

Wages at DASH were the lowest in the region.

Each year of the wage progression was $3 to $10 less per hour than at unionized facilities.

And, it took 20 years to reach top pay, so the majority of workers were making less than $20 per hour.

Alexandria’s city workforce includes more than 250 salaried officials who make over $100,000 a year.

The DASH Bus Operators were always left behind.

The last straw came when, five years into a wage freeze, management withheld the end-of-year bonus that Drivers had always counted on.

Workers again contacted ATU Local 689.
NEW YORK, N.Y.—Facing the back side of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices with chants of “Close the camps” and a forest of orange and white electric candlelights, more than 1,000 people rallied in lower Manhattan July 12, to protest what 32BJ SEIU called “the inhumane detention practices and brutal immigration policies of the Trump administration.”

Opening the rally in Foley Square, the Rev. Kaji Dousa proclaimed a “friendly warning” about the eternal consequences for “anyone who claims to be a Christian and ignores what Jesus said in Matthew 25”—to wit, mistreating or not helping “the least of my brethren.”

“For Jews around the world, Friday night is when we bless the children,” Rabbi Joshua Stanton added. “There cannot be a Shabbat of peace while there is a reign of terror against children in this country.”

The rally was one of about 800 “Lights for Liberty” protests held in 50 states and 20 countries. Labor organizations involved included 32BJ, the American Federation of Teachers, 1199SEIU, the Professional Staff Congress, and several United Auto Workers locals.

“One of the reasons I have always believed in unions is that they’ve always supported human rights,” American Federation of Musicians Local 802 member Thomas Gargano told LaborPress after the rally. “If ‘you can’t get behind protecting our right to organize, well, then that’s pretty much the end of the conversation,’” Trumka told the Senators.
It was particularly emotional for the 32BJ members and staff clustered around the stage, as it came less than 24 hours after the death of the union’s president, Hector Figueroa. “He would not want us to be anywhere else tonight but here defending the rights of immigrants,” said 32BJ vice-president Alison Hirsch. As the Trump administration escalates attacks on immigrants, she added, “we will not panic, and we will not stand down.”

Our movement lost one of our strongest warriors yesterday,” said Murad Awawdeh of the New York Immigration Coalition.

Muslim activist Linda Sarsour, wearing a hijab and a “SILENCE = DEATH” T-shirt from the AIDS activist group ACT UP, called the abolition of ICE the movement’s “most fundamental” demand. After reading the names of the six children who have died in federal custody in the last year—Darlyn Cristabel Cordova-Valle, 10, of El Salvador; and Guatemalans Carlos Gregorio Hernandez, 16; Juan de Leon Gutierrez, 16; Felipe Gomez Alonzo, 8; Jakelin Caal Maquin, 7; and Wilmer Josué Ramírez Vásquez, 2½—she said it is not “moderate” to allow any more. In 30 to 40 years, she said, people will ask “Where were you when children were being stripped from the hands of their mothers?”

People have “a duty not to remain silent, not to remain indifferent and insensitive to the atrocities on our border,” said Judy Sanchez of the New Sanctuary Coalition, speaking in Spanish.

At least 24 people have died in ICE custody during the Trump administration.

According to a report released July 12, by the House Oversight and Reform Committee, more than 2,600 children have been separated from their parents, including at least 18 under 2-years-old who were kept apart for three weeks or longer.
That is “beyond immoral,” Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-N.Y.) told the crowd. U.S. asylum law, he explained, is based on principles adopted after World War II and the federal government’s 1939 refusal to admit a ship carrying 900 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, and it says that if people fear violence or persecution in their home country, they have the right to a hearing, “and there’s no place it says if you apply for asylum, you go to jail.”

The administration’s “conscious policy,” he continued, is “let’s torture the kids, let’s kidnap them to deter their parents.” Trump would like the asylum laws changed to allow indefinite detention of families, he added.

A handful of pro-Trump counter-demonstrators, one carrying a “Thank You ICE” sign, faced off against the protest on the west side of Foley Square, kept separate by a line of police.

Frank Barker, who immigrated from the Caribbean island of St. Kitts in the late 1970s, said he had spent two years in an ICE detention center.

His case was complicated, Ravi Ragbir of the New Sanctuary Coalition told LaborPress, because ICE wouldn’t recognize that he came from the nation of St. Kitts and Nevis, and the country wouldn’t take him back. St. Kitts and Nevis, a former British colony, became independent in 1983, so Barker never lived there as a citizen.

“I just want to live,” Barker told the crowd. “At the end of the day, I’m still a human being.”
Major Lawsuit Launched By The AFT Against U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos Over Student Debt Debacle – Suit Charges DeVos With ‘Deliberately Blocking Access’ To Public Service Loan Forgiveness, ‘Stiffing’ Student Borrowers

by American Federation of Teachers Press Release - July 14, 2019

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - A lawsuit suit has been filed in Federal Court that spells out in devastating detail how U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos deliberately stymied Public Service Workers from accessing a Loan Forgiveness Program they are entitled to under Federal Law.

The landmark complaint, Weingarten v. DeVos, lays bare the gross mismanagement and out-and-out sabotage of the Federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF) by DeVos and her Department of Education. PSLF is a Bipartisan Loan Forgiveness Plan signed into law by Republican President George W. Bush. It enables qualifying Public Service Workers to discharge the balance on their loans after 10 years, potentially saving them tens of thousands of dollars.

In unlawfully denying forgiveness, DeVos ignored a litany of lies and misdirection deployed by loan servicers under contract with and overseen by her department, the suit states.

The suit is brought by eight members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Union itself, and AFT President Randi Weingarten (Pictured Above - On The Left, With U.S. Education Secretary DeVos, In The Middle).

Many AFT Members organized their lives around the promise of loan forgiveness.

Instead, they have been sentenced to crushing debt at the hands of DeVos, who has unlawfully deprived borrowers of their most basic due process rights.

The United States is in the midst of a snowballing $1.6 trillion student debt crisis.

As of March (2019), less than 1% - 518 individuals - of those applying for PSLF had received it, compared with more than 32 million American borrowers estimated to be repaying PSLF-eligible loans.

The AFT’s Weingarten said in a distributed press release: “Public Service Loan Forgiveness is a right, but Betsy DeVos has turned it into a crapshoot. Twelve years ago, Congress made a bipartisan commitment to help millions of Workers pay off their student loan debt as recognition for their dedicated public service. DeVos has broken that promise and vindictively - and illegally - blocked their path to the Middle Class.

Instead of helping the millions of Americans owed debt relief under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, DeVos has hurt and pauperized them. And instead of working with lawmakers to improve the program that millions of Teachers, Firefighters, Nurses and First Responders deserve, DeVos has vandalized it. While DeVos dithers, millions of Public Service Workers miss car payments, sink deeper into credit card debt and struggle to care for sick relatives. This deliberate sabotage of a bipartisan government initiative cannot be allowed to stand.”

DeVos has failed Public Service Workers like plaintiff Cynthia Miller, who has taught for more than 10 years in a low-income public high school, sacrificing her own education goals so that she could pay back her student loans and contribute to her own children’s education.
DeVos has also failed Public Service Workers like Crystal Adams, a Federal Employee who has spent the last 10 years paying back her student debt, causing her family to forgo basic needs, like a reliable car.

Both Miller and Adams made the requisite 120 qualifying payments, but the Education Department failed to properly count them.

Two of the corporations charged with helping borrowers qualify for PSLF - loan servicers Navient and Nelnet - told plaintiffs Deborah Baker and Kelly Finlaw that they were “on track” for relief even though they had the wrong loan type.

Years ago, these plaintiffs could have easily switched their loans to the right type.

Instead, now, 10 years after working hard in public service and paying down their debt, the Education Department has slammed the door in their faces, the AFT said.
The Landmark Agreement Between NYC & DC 1707

Neil Tepel - Labor Press - July 14, 2019

The recently settled contract agreement between District Council 1707 early childhood care providers and New York City benefits over 4,000 of their union members.

District Council 1707 Local 205 educators provide critical services to young children yet they had been paid much less than teachers in the city school system. The contract extension will benefit 4,241 early childhood education employees with over 10,000 students in their care and serve as the model for remaining certified early childhood education providers. The tentative agreement provides a pathway to pay parity between certified early childhood education teachers.

This agreement builds on the deal reached in 2016, which provided the first comprehensive salary increases since 2006 for day care employees.

“There are few things as valuable as early childhood education and our youngest New Yorkers deserve the very best,” said Mayor de Blasio. “With this agreement, we’re ensuring whether you’re in one of our schools or teaching in a community based organization, you get the same starting salary.

That means our kids and parents can rest assured that they’ll always have our best teachers in the classroom.”

“This deal ensures that certified teachers who work in community based organizations will earn the same starting salary as their DOE colleagues. More importantly, this deal enhances the educational opportunity of our City’s students by helping to provide stability in their classrooms, instead of losing effective teachers due to the lack of pay parity. All NYC teachers deserve the same pay, the same benefits and the same respect, and when we provide pay parity in education, we provide better educational opportunities for our students,” said City Council Speaker Corey Johnson.

This pathway to pay parity will help community based organizations recruit and retain qualified staff in the future. The tentative agreement covers the period through September 30, 2022.

While DC 1707 workers are employed by contract providers who are members of the Day Care Council, New York City is a key party to negotiations and funds the union contract as well as these early childhood education programs in New York City.

“I want to thank the Mayor for his leadership, in recognizing the need to rectify this on-going problem of paying public center-based educators less than their counter-parts in the DOE.

I also want recognize the members of the City Council and advocates for their support. Together we made history,” said District Council 1707 Executive Director Kim Medina.

The agreement must be ratified by DC 1707 Local 205’s membership.
New York, NY – I dunno, but after the sudden death of 32BJ President Héctor J. Figueroa late Thursday evening and Donald J. Trump’s plan to raid working families in 10 American cities over the weekend, I can’t help thinking that, indeed, “only the good die young.”

Maybe, you’re thinking the same thing. I didn’t know Figueroa well; he could have had feet of clay. But as a labor journalist, what I do know is that, unlike others, Figueroa had the courage to address tough questions and always provide thoughtful responses.

He would have been there in the trenches on Friday afternoon in Foley Square representing the Labor Movement and helping to beat back the “inhumane detention practices and brutal immigration policies of the Trump administration.” Instead he was gone at 57.

Héctor J. Figueroa was better than Donald J. Trump. He fought for the American working class. At the time of his death, the popular 32BJ leader had declared this the “summer of justice”; putting the elite of this city on notice and threatening to strike if tens of thousands of office cleaners, maintenance workers, security officers, doormen and porters didn’t get a fair contract later this year.

“The building industry in booming in New York City and we have to start telling the building owners and the contractors that we have done the work; we have earned what we deserve; and we are coming for our fair share of the wealth that is here in New York,” Figueroa told scores of rank and file members rallying outside Bryant Park in June.

When ICE tried putting a Bronx building porter and father of five named Baba Sillah on a plane and deport him in March — Figueroa took to the steps of 26 Federal Plaza declaring an end to the U.S. “deportation machine.”

“We’re going to stop the funds and eradicate this deportation machine that is basically giving fuel to a broken immigration system,” Figueroa said. “All it does is go after working people. Baba is a worker. [His wife] Mamou is a worker. This assault on immigrant workers that are building our economy along with all other workers has got to stop — and has to stop now.”

Figueroa was especially savvy, too, in that he well understood that the one thing Trump has been successful in doing, is turning American workers against each other — scapegoating and demonizing immigrants searching for jobs, while shielding the stateless corporatists who are actually responsible for creating a “race to the bottom” and eroding the middle class. The 32BJ leader alluded to the issue at a Brooklyn rally against deportations last summer, when he told those hoping to get a massive public infrastructure investment or fair trade policy out of the Trump administration that “the writing is on the wall.”

“If you can’t get behind protecting our right to organize, well, then that’s pretty much the end of the conversation,” Trumka told the Senators.

“It’s very clear: [Trump’s] not interested in helping working people,” Figueroa said. “He’s interested in exploiting and dividing and using workers to whatever ends he needs.”

Figueroa once explained to me that in his union, “We no longer really talk about politics — we more broadly talk about justice.”
National AFL-CIO President Trumka Urges Senate Democrats Into “Full Court Press” On Workers’ Issues
by Press Associates Union News Service - July 15, 2019

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – National AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka is urging Senate Democrats to undertake a “full court press” to pass a wide-range of Pro-Worker Legislation and issues - including strong Labor Law Reform and a new trade pact with Canada and Mexico that helps Workers, not the Corporate Class.

But during a closed-door speech he gave to the Senate Democratic Caucus last week, Trumka added that a new Pro-Worker North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Pro Act, which strengthens the right to organize and enacting other Labor Law Reforms, are not the end of the story.

“We ‘can’t fix the economic rules if we don’t fix’ NAFTA, ‘but we also can’t fix the rules if we only fix’ NAFTA. ‘We need a full court press on a wide range of economic policies that advance good jobs, higher wages, great benefits and the freedom to form a Union,’” he told the caucus. “So ‘whether it’s pensions, immigration, ‘protecting’ Federal Employees, Voting Rights, the future of work or raising the Minimum Wage to $15 an hour, the Labor Movement is ready to help advance a ‘Pro-Worker’ Agenda – ‘and that starts with you talking to us and making our issues your own.’”

Trumka urged the Senate Democrats to talk up Workers’ Issues when they return home for the month-long August Congressional Recess.

That break may be in doubt, though he did not mention it.

Lawmakers face a money and legislation crunch in mid-September, when Congress must vote to raise the debt ceiling or not.

If they don’t, the U.S. could default on some of its bills.

Some 40% of “Americans ‘say they are still struggling to pay the bills.’ ‘Their prosperity isn’t based on the Dow or the GDP.’ ‘They judge progress in wages and health care and the ability to provide a better life to their children - and by every measure, they are working harder for less,’” Trumka told the Senate Dems. “They ‘believe with every fiber of their being that the deck is stacked against them.’ ‘Politically.’ ‘Economically.’ ‘You name it.’ ‘They are frustrated.’ ‘And they don’t trust’ Washington. Yet (the National AFL-CIO’s) Trade Tour (which occurred last month) ‘demonstrated’ Working People ‘are hungry for a conversation.’ ‘They want it.’ ‘They need it.’ ‘And if you don’t go and have it with them, someone else will.’ ‘And that person or group may not have workers’ best interests at heart.’ ‘The 2016 election is the most obvious example of this.’”

That’s when Republican Presidential Nominee Donald Trump drew half of Union Family votes - including 52% in Ohio - to eke out narrow wins in the key Great Lakes States of Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania - and those states’ electoral votes gave him the White House.

But Trumka issued an electoral warning too.

And that’s important, since Democrats will have a chance to retake the Senate majority next year.

There are now 45 Democrats, two Democratic-leaning independents, and 53 Republicans.

The GOP must defend 22 seats in 2020 to the Dems’ 12.
U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta resigned July 12 amid a rising clamor for his ouster over an unusual bargain he negotiated as a Federal prosecutor in Miami with a man who last week was charged with sex-trafficking in Manhattan.

His exit came just four days after the arrest of hedge-fund magnate Jeffrey Epstein for the trafficking of minors as young as 14 brought heightened scrutiny to the deal Mr. Acosta brokered as U.S. Attorney in Miami with Mr. Epstein on 2008 for similar charges.

Initially, President Trump backed Mr. Acosta staying on. Press reports quoted anonymous White House sources claiming that he had fallen out of favor because he was not moving fast enough with the Trump deregulation agenda.

On July 10, Mr. Acosta took defended himself in a lengthy televised press conference and released several documents meant to justify his actions back in 2008 out of concern that state officials were mishandling their case against Mr. Epstein.

“Simply put, the Palm Beach State Attorney’s Office was ready to let Epstein walk free, no jail time, nothing. Prosecutors in my former office found this to be completely unacceptable,” he told reporters.

After Mr. Acosta’s press conference, Barry Krischer, the former State Attorney for Palm Beach, contradicted the Labor Secretary’s account.

He said in a statement, “If Mr. Acosta was truly concerned with the state’s case and felt he had to rescue the matter, he would have moved forward with the 53-page indictment that his own office drafted. Instead, Mr. Acosta brokered a secret plea deal that resulted in a Non-Prosecution Agreement.”

That statement came as legal experts began to raise additional questions about Mr. Acosta’s credibility.

House Sought Action

On July 11, New Jersey Rep. Bill Pascrell called for Mr. Acosta’s impeachment. House Democrats also demanded a briefing from Justice Department officials and their own access to documents related to the Epstein plea deal.

Writing to U.S. Deputy Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen, the Democrats wanted access within 14 days to all the agency’s documents leading up to Mr. Epstein's non-prosecution immunity agreement and any other internal files covering Mr. Acosta’s job performance as the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi tweeted July 9, a day after the charges against Mr. Epstein were announced, that Mr. Acosta “must step down” because as “U.S. Attorney, he engaged in an unconscionable agreement” with Mr. Epstein that was “kept secret from courageous, young victims preventing them from seeking justice.” She noted that Mr. Trump was aware of the controversy when he nominated Mr. Acosta.

The President initially defended Mr. Acosta to reporters, saying, “I can tell you that for two and a half years, he has been just an excellent Secretary of Labor.”
But by then, U.S. Senator Tim Kaine and several other Democratic members of Congress had already called for Mr. Acosta’s resignation. The Department of Labor and the Department of Justice are the Federal government’s lead agencies responsible for enforcing the laws against human-trafficking.

Probing Prior to Charges

In February, following a request from congressional Democrats and Sen. Ben Sasse, a Republican from Nebraska, the DOJ announced its Office of Professional Responsibility would open a probe into Mr. Acosta’s actions in the Epstein case.

Mr. Epstein was apprehended July 6 at Teterboro Airport by FBI agents after his private jet returned from Paris. The 66-year-old is being held in the Metropolitan Detention Center in lower Manhattan on charges that could send him to prison for 45 years, according to Geoffrey S. Berman, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

Federal prosecutor Alex Rossmiller disclosed at a July 8 court hearing that in a raid on Mr. Epstein’s Upper East Side mansion, FBI agents discovered in a locked safe “a vast trove of lewd photographs” as well as compact discs of what appeared to be pictures of nude underage girls.

Mr. Epstein is a registered sex offender as a result of his Florida conviction.

In February, Federal Judge Kenneth A. Marra ruled that the 2008 agreement executed by Mr. Acosta as U.S. Attorney broke Federal law because prosecutors failed to notify dozens of victims of Mr. Epstein’s crimes when he granted lawyers’ request to put the deal under court seal before the plea deal was signed off on by the courts.

Misled Victims

Judge Marra ruled in the case, brought by two victims under the Federal Crime Victims’ Act, that Mr. Acosta’s office intentionally misled the victims that there was still an ongoing criminal probe after they had inked the sealed deal with Mr. Epstein.

That plea deal required only that Mr. Epstein and four co-conspirators plead guilty to two state prostitution charges in exchange for receiving immunity from far more serious Federal charges.

“Epstein used paid employees to find and bring minor girls to him,” Judge Marra wrote in his decision. “Epstein worked in concert with others to obtain minors and not only for his own sexual gratification, but also for the sexual gratification of others.”

The Epstein controversy surfaced during Mr. Acosta’s Senate confirmation hearing in February 2017.

In a July 8 editorial, the Miami Herald, whose investigative reporting on the case Mr. Berman credited with “assisting” prosecutors, repeated its call for Mr. Acosta’s resignation.

The paper’s series entitled “Perversion of Justice” reported that Mr. Acosta met privately with Mr. Epstein’s legal team more than a decade ago and that as a result of the deal Mr. Epstein was sentenced to just 13 months in a county jail, from which he was granted daily work release and allowed to “travel to New York and his private island in the Caribbean during his subsequent house arrest.”
‘Shocks the Conscience’

The most controversial aspect of the 2008 deal, which Mr. Epstein’s lawyers insist was signed off on at the highest level of the Bush Administration Justice Department, was that by permitting him to plead to just state prostitution charges, it failed to hold him to account for sexually exploiting scores of underage girls on a scale that Mr. Berman told reporters “shocks the conscience.”

The current prosecution is being handled by Mr. Berman’s Public Corruption Unit, with assistance from the NYPD’s Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force.

At back-to-back court hearings, Mr. Epstein’s legal team accused Federal prosecutors of improperly trying to get a “do-over” because DOJ prosecutors had erred in their failure to notify victims of the 2008 plea deal.

Mr. Berman told reporters that the Southern District of New York had no part in the 2008 immunity deal that was brokered by Mr. Acosta and was free to pursue the case.

There is no statute of limitations for certain sex crimes.

Attorney David Boies, who represents five alleged victims in the Epstein case, said in an interview outside the courthouse, “This is an incredible big step towards getting justice for the many victims of the Epstein sex-trafficking operation”

He added that his clients “have been subject to years of verbal abuse which compounded the sexual abuse by Mr. Epstein and his enablers who have tried to attack their credibility, undermine their testimony—and this is an extremely important vindication.”

The disclosure that Mr. Epstein was still in possession of naked photos of “apparently underage girls,” caught Mr. Boies by surprise. “That somebody that knows he is subject to discovery to have kept all of those nude photographs of girls is in my mind incomprehensible. What it does show is how much he thought he was above the law, and he wasn’t worried about it,” he said.
**Mid-Year Tax Tips For 2019 Returns**  
Barry Lisak - The Chief Leader - July 15, 2019

For most taxpayers, the filing deadline has passed. But planning for next year can start now. The IRS reminds taxpayers that being organized and planning ahead can save time and money in 2019. Here are some things you can do now to make next April 15 easier.

1. **Adjust your withholding.** Each year, millions of American workers have far more taxes withheld from their pay than is required. Now is a good time to review your withholding to make the taxes withheld from your pay closer to the taxes you’ll owe this year.

This is especially true if you normally get a large refund and you would like more money in your paycheck.

If you owed tax when you filed, you may need to increase the Federal income tax withheld from your wages. Use the IRS Withholding Calculator at IRS.gov to complete a new Form W-4, Employee’s Withholding Allowance Certificate. But by then, U.S. Senator Tim Kaine and several other Democratic members of Congress had already called for Mr. Acosta’s resignation.

The Department of Labor and the Department of Justice are the Federal government’s lead agencies responsible for enforcing the laws against human-trafficking.

2. **Store your return in a safe place.** Put your 2018 tax return and supporting documents somewhere safe. If you need to refer to your return in the future, you’ll know where to find it. For example, you may need a copy of your return when applying for a home loan or financial aid. You can also use it as a helpful guide for next year’s return.

3. **Organize your records.** Establish one location where everyone in your household can put tax-related records during the year. This will avoid a scramble for misplaced mileage logs or charity receipts come tax time.

4. **Shop for a tax professional.** If you use a tax professional to help you with tax planning, start your search now. You’ll have more time when you’re not up against a deadline or anxious to receive your tax refund. Choose a professional wisely. You are ultimately responsible for the accuracy of your return regardless of who prepares it.

5. **Consider itemizing deductions.** If you usually claim a standard deduction, you may be able to reduce your taxes if you itemize deductions instead. If your itemized deductions typically fall just below your standard deduction, you can “bundle” your deductions. For example, an early or extra mortgage payment or property-tax payment, or a planned donation to charity could equal some tax savings.

6. **Keep up with changes.** Find out about tax-law changes, helpful tips and IRS announcements all year by visiting IRS.gov.

A little tax planning now can save a lot of headaches in April, and maybe for years to come!
Dissent in Ranks of Hollywood Writers Who Fired Their Agents

John Koblin - The New York Times - July 15, 2019

The two unions representing television and movie writers took a firm stance in April, when they instructed their members to fire their agents and sued the four biggest talent agencies in Hollywood.

Now a faction of writers who belong to the Writers Guild of America West and the Writers Guild of America East are beginning to go public with criticisms of the unions' tactics. They are also pushing to challenge union leaders in an election scheduled for September, with candidates who say the fight between the writers and the agencies has not accomplished its objectives.

“The cause remains a good one,” said Jason Fuchs, a co-writer of “Wonder Woman” and “Ice Age: Continental Drift,” who is running for a board seat. “The conflicted practices of the agencies 100 percent need to be addressed. But the strategy is failing. The problem hasn’t gone away.”

Several other Writers Guild members said they were also planning to run for board seats for both the East Coast and West Coast branches. One longtime union member, William Schmidt, has announced that he will run against David Goodman, the president of the Writers Guild West.

Until now, Writers Guild members have largely presented a united front, reluctant to go public with any doubts concerning the efforts to make significant changes in the structure of the entertainment business.

“I’m deeply committed to seeing the way agencies do business change,” said Craig Mazin, the creator and writer of the HBO limited series “Chernobyl.” “I just don’t think the way we’re going about it is going to get us there. And that’s why I’m running for the board. Not to capitulate to the agencies. But to win. Right now, we’ve won nothing. All we’ve won is the dubious right to be shut out from the four most powerful agencies in our business.”

In what has amounted to a Hollywood standoff, more than 7,000 writers cut ties in April with agents working for agencies that did not sign a revised code of conduct meant to replace the franchise agreement that had long governed the relationship between writers and agents. None of the big four agencies — William Morris Endeavor, Creative Artists Agency, United Talent Agency and ICM Partners — agreed to the new code.

Union leaders argued that the agencies were violating their legally bound fiduciary duty by placing their own interests ahead of writers. They pointed to how writers’ wages have gone down in recent years, even though there is more entertainment content than ever, thanks to the rise of Netflix and other streaming companies.

A central issue in the dispute between writers and agents is a decades-old business practice called packaging. In a typical packaging deal, agents assemble a group from their client rosters — for instance, a writer, a director and a star — in exchange for money paid to them by the studios. In accepting these so-called packaging fees from the studios, the agents forgo the usual 10 percent commissions paid by individual clients.
The Writers Guild has argued that packaging deals allow agents to take advantage of their access to talent and enrich themselves at the expense of their writer clients.

After union members fired their agents en masse three months ago, the Writers Guild escalated the fight against the four major agencies by suing them over packaging fees. In recent weeks, William Morris Endeavor, United Talent Agency and Creative Artists Agency replied by filing suit against the unions, arguing that the directive instructing members to sever ties with their agents was in violation of antitrust laws.

The major agencies have given no indication they are inclined to eliminate packaging. But they have signaled a willingness to discuss a revised revenue-sharing arrangement. Last month, the agencies offered to share with writers 2 percent of back-end profits from successful TV shows built on packaging deals.

Mr. Goodman, the Writers Guild West president, responded to that offer by saying that any revenue-sharing deal was “off the table.” That effectively killed off talks, leading to a breaking point for some union members.

Mr. Fuchs, the “Wonder Woman” co-writer, said, “The decision to take revenue-sharing off the table left me more confused about what the endgame looked like for us.”

Others feel similarly.

“I oppose the failure of negotiation,” said the writer Ayelet Waldman, who said she was also running for a Writers Guild West board seat. “I want a return to the room.”

A novelist and essayist, Ms. Waldman said that, at 54 years old, she was new to writing for television and feared her prospects would be limited if she had to navigate Hollywood without an agent. The industry, she said, “idolizes youth.”

“I don’t have three years, and that’s how long I anticipate we’ll be waiting, if the courts decide,” she said. “In three years, I’ll have no career. I’ll be finished.” Mr. Mazin, the “Chernobyl” creator, also cited Mr. Goodman’s statement on refusing to negotiate on revenue-sharing as a reason for his decision to run for a board seat. A writer of “Identity Thief” and “The Hangover: Part II,” Mr. Mazin received a share of fame when he tweeted about his Princeton roommate Ted Cruz during the 2016 presidential campaign. He recently expressed his misgivings with union leaders on the podcast he co-hosts, “Scriptnotes.”

“I’m still enthusiastic that this is a worthy war,” he said. “But I think we haven’t started fighting. All we’ve done is pull our pieces off the board.” Some writers critical of union tactics have said they had been wary of going public with their criticisms earlier, deciding instead to voice their grievances privately.

“It saddens and frustrates me that I’m feeling more and more that dissent feels like betrayal,” said Matthew Sand, a screenwriter of “Deepwater Horizon.”

With the filing deadline for union candidates drawing near, some writers are overcoming their earlier reluctance.

“Whatever the outcome of this election, the debate and conversations that’ll spring out of this process will be incredibly healthy for the guild,” Mr. Fuchs said. Those who have spoken publicly about their doubts conceded that they are not sure know how many of their fellow members feel the way they do.

“If a lot of people vote for me, that should be seen as meaning something,” Mr. Mazin said. “And if a lot of people don’t vote for me, that should be seen as meaning something. I’m as curious as anyone.”
ALBANY – New York Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins is poised to assume leadership of the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee, a national group that seeks Democratic takeover of legislatures across the country.

A spokesman for the DLCC said that Stewart-Cousins is set to be elected the DLCC's first board chair imminently. Stewart-Cousins would be the first African-American to run a major, national Democratic electoral committee.

According to the DLCC's website, its 2019 annual meeting begins Wednesday and the group's board of directors meeting is being held in Napa, California.

The position is especially crucial given that state legislatures determine the shape of legislative seats in the once-a-decade redistricting process, which occurs after the federal census is taken. The DLCC works to end "right-wing gerrymandering across the country," according to its website.

The New York process, which for decades had been controlled by Senate Republicans, will likely occur in 2020 or 2021, and is set to be run by bipartisan appointees under a process dictated by a newly implemented constitutional amendment.

Stewart-Cousins led the Senate Democrats to their first majority in a decade in the 2018 elections. The resounding victory has left the Democrats with 40 members in the 63-seat chamber.

Republicans in recent years have taken control of many governorships and state legislatures nationally, which in turn has helped them shape congressional districts across the country. In many states the line-drawing is left to state legislators.

According to its website, the DLCC "recruits, trains, and supports local Democrats running for state legislative office" and gives "our candidates resources, field support, and the data they need to run smart, winning campaigns."