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New York State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia is resigning her position, effective August 31, for a new job where she will help to improve struggling public schools.

The announcement was made Monday at the Board of Regents meeting in Albany.

“We thank Commissioner Elia for her tireless and unwavering service to New York state’s children,” said Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa.

“Over the past four years, the Board and Commissioner Elia have made much progress to improve education for New York’s citizens. Together we have placed an emphasis on educating the whole child and worked to achieve equity in education for all. Commissioner Elia has been steadfast in her commitment to placing the interests of students first. We wish Commissioner Elia the best in her future endeavors.”

The New York State United Teachers released a statement Monday, saying the union hopes the next commissioner will have a “deep background” in public school classrooms.

“As Commissioner Elia’s tenure comes to a close, we wish her well in her future endeavors. We look forward to engaging with the Board of Regents as the search for the next commissioner begins and ensuring that the voices of hundreds of thousands of educators across New York State are heard throughout the process,” the NYSUT statement reads.

“We look forward to working closely with the next commissioner to fix the broken state testing system for children in grades 3-8 and on our mission to cultivate the next generation of highly qualified, dedicated educators. Selecting a new commissioner with a deep background in public school classrooms will go a long way toward achieving these critical goals.”

Elia came to New York from Florida in 2015 after serving as superintendent of the Hillsborough County Public School district in and around Tampa.
AFSCME Supports Domestic Worker Bill of Rights
Jay Hutchinson - AFSCME Now - July 16, 2019

California Sen. Kamala Harris and Washington Rep. Pramila Jayapal introduced legislation this week to provide domestic workers basic protections and a legal outlet to respond to harassment and discrimination.

AFSCME President Lee Saunders said in a statement that the bill would make sure domestic workers – “who perform some of society’s most important work” – are treated with dignity and respect.

“This bill would close legal loopholes that deny domestic workers basic federal labor and civil rights protections,” Saunders said. “It would also make job conditions safer and fairer for a workforce that is primarily made up of women, people of color and immigrants.”

Domestic work can range from housekeeping, child care, security work or even gardening occupations. Generally, these roles are unregistered and unregulated, with no federal security of minimum wage and health care.

The legislation, called the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights, would ensure “that rights aren’t just on paper, but that they can be enforced and implemented” legally and in ways to decrease retaliation.

The numbers of domestic workers is growing rapidly in the U.S., with eight states and Seattle having already passed local versions of this bill. There are approximately 2.5 million domestic workers across the country, and about 90% of them are women, most being immigrants or women of color. For decades, a majority of these women have had to work in unsafe conditions that left them vulnerable to exploitation with little to no legal recourse.

Jayapal and Harris introduced the bill to bring the protections domestic workers enjoy in their own states to the federal level for the first time.

By 2026, caregivers, nannies and elderly care providers will be among some of the fastest growing occupations in the country. AFSCME stands behind these workers.
National AFL-CIO President Trumka Urges Senate Democrats Into “Full Court Press” On Workers’ Issues
by Press Associates Union News Service - July 16, 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.

“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.
Dearborn — Ford Motor Co. and United Auto Workers leaders stretched across the table Monday for the traditional opening handshake that opens contract negotiations.

The divide between the two stretches much wider, however: On one side is an automaker coming off a stretch of record profits, but is trying to cut costs to prepare for an autonomous and electric future. On the other side, the labor union is looking for job security and a piece of the fat profits all three Detroit automakers reported annually since workers ratified the last contract in 2015.

UAW President Gary Jones set the tone for negotiations with the Detroit Three automakers Monday at Ford's world headquarters in Dearborn, demanding that laborers get what is due to them. The opening handshakes for General Motors Co. and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles take place Tuesday.

"Despite record corporate profits, we've been watching a race to the bottom over the past several years for working men and women in this country," Jones said. "... This must stop."

When the current contract expires Sept. 14, automakers want deals to curb spending over the next several years in anticipation of a downturn.

"What we did together to save our company in '08 and '09 and the sacrifices back then, that will be something I will remember for the rest of my life," Ford Executive Chairman Bill Ford Jr. said Monday. "I've never made the distinction between hourly and salary — we're one family here. There will be tough issues, and we will have disagreements. We always do. But we always do what is right for the company. I expect that to happen this time."

But four years since the last round of bargaining, expensive bets on future technology and an uncertain regulatory and trade environment make for complex negotiations.

"There is some room in the world like this with people unlike us who are looking to try to take our business, probably tech companies," Ford CEO Jim Hackett said. "They think one day all the cars will be made up of software and contract manufacturing. We don't believe that. We think one of the challenges they have had in doing this is the people in red who understand what it means to build a vehicle and do it with quality and consistency and reliability."

Experts say those working in the plants are most concerned with job stability and what electrification, autonomous vehicles and declining sales will mean for their jobs. They also say the UAW will be less likely to bend on issues like health care costs, wage increases, temporary employees and future product allocation. And that could lead to strikes — a possibility for which the union has prepared by increasing strike pay.

"There were no surprises in terms of the kickoff," said Kristin Dziczek, vice president of industry, labor and economics at the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor. "They shake hands, say we're committed to making a deal, but we're going to be tough if we have to be."

Jones said the UAW would work to fight against companies paying lower wages in the United States, Mexico, China and elsewhere, protect temporary employees and shorten the eight-year timeline negotiated in 2015 to bring former tier-two workers to the top of the pay scale. He added that representatives would look to ensure its 156,000 members have the training, tools and safe environment to keep up with the industry's advancements.
Jones also took aim at Ford's partnership with Volkswagen AG in Europe. His comments come after another attempt to organize workers at VW's plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, failed last month.

"Volkswagen was not friendly to the UAW in Chattanooga, and we will look very hard and with great concern at any alliance with them or any other non-labor friendly company," Jones said.

That partnership announced in January will produce commercial trucks and vans outside North America. On Friday, the automakers added an electric vehicle in Europe to that list. All are outside the UAW's scope in the United States. VW, however, will invest $2.6 billion into Argo AI LLC, a Pittsburgh self-driving software company in which Ford also is a stakeholder.

"We have lots of conversations with the UAW on lots of subjects, so we'll listen to their concerns and see what effect it has on Ford," said Joe Hinrichs, Ford's president of automotive. "We're confident the project and the alliance that we've set forth in Volkswagen makes good sense for Ford."

While the UAW is expected to angle for assurance on wage increases in place of profit-sharing or lump sums dependent on profits, automakers are expected to focus on reducing health care costs, adding more temporary workers to the lines and prepping plants for more products they don't make many of yet, such as autonomous or electric vehicles.

In a word, Hinrichs said it is about keeping Ford competitive. Principally, that has to do with the automaker's cost structure, he said. Average hourly labor costs for international producers in the U.S. is estimated to be $50 per hour compared to Ford's $61, FCA's $55 and GM's $63, according to the Center for Automotive Research.

Under Hackett, Ford has been on a cost-cutting path for most of the past two years. The automaker aims to trim $25.5 billion in operational costs while spending $11 billion to restructure the company. In May, Ford said it will have cut 7,000 white-collar jobs globally by August. Last month, it added it would trim some 12,000 jobs in Europe and close or sell six plants there.

The company is proud of the current utilization rates of its plants, Hinrichs said, though he added changes in the industry could alter that.

"The conversations we have, the discussions we have are always taking place," Hinrichs said. "We know that the UAW and Ford will work together to find solutions to be competitive and that over time, that's who wins."

Under the 2015 agreements, UAW employees pay as little as 4% out of pocket for coverage. Some aren't required to have a primary-care physician. All three automakers are expected to try to negotiate a plan that would place more cost on the employees.

The companies are expected to negotiate for more temporary workers. The 2015 agreements varied for each automaker on when and how the automakers could hire or use temporary workers. The UAW has said the "temporary" designation is meant for people who fill in on the line in case of absences or time off, much like substitute teachers. Those employees don't get the same benefits as full-time UAW workers.

The automakers argue that temporary workers protect against layoffs. They also have processes that would allow temporary workers to become full-time employees in some cases.

Despite the automakers' profits in recent years, UAW spokesman Brian Rothenberg maintained that the 2015 contracts were "good for workers and good for companies."
ALBANY — Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed legislation Wednesday morning that will result in farmworkers being treated more like other hourly employees in New York, sealing a victory that labor advocates have prioritized since his father's administration three decades ago.

"The farmworkers bill is not just a great achievement in terms of the effect on the human condition, it's also a milestone in the crusade for social justice," Cuomo said. "One hundred thousand farmworkers will have better lives. Their families will have better lives.

"They will finally, finally have the same protections that other workers have had for 80 years: unemployment, disability insurance, worker's compensation, overtime pay, paid family leave ... a day of rest, and a right to organize and collectively bargain."

Cuomo used the bill signing ceremony to celebrate some of the bill's supporters over the decades. As when he signed the Child Victims Act earlier this year, he held it at the Daily News' Manhattan offices and praised the newspaper's longstanding commitment to editorializing on the issue.

The governor was joined by former sponsors of the bill as well as the current ones, Sen. Jessica Ramos and Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan — both Queens Democrats.

Several members of the governor's family were also at the event. Historically, the elected official from New York most closely identified with farmworkers' rights has been Robert Kennedy. The former U.S. senator's daughter Kerry Kennedy — Cuomo's ex-wife — has spent years advocating for the state bill. Kerry Kennedy, who was also in attendance Wednesday, and Cuomo's daughters have also publicly pushed for the legislation.

"When I was HUD secretary, with Ethel and Kerry's advocacy, we worked with farmworkers on the Texas-Mexico border ... and with their help, we built new housing and we built new facilities," Cuomo said. "Kerry Kennedy never gave up the fight."

The bill that passed last month was a compromise measure, including changes such as language that prohibits unionized farmworkers from striking. Farmers, however, have argued that it is still potentially disastrous for their already-struggling industry.

"Our reasonable requests were cast aside, even though there was support for a moderated bill from legislators on both sides of the aisle," said Farm Bureau President David Fisher in a statement. "While the final legislation signed by the Governor is certainly better than the original version of the bill, it will still lead to significant financial challenges for farmers and the continued erosion of our rural communities."
Chicago Airport Workers Celebrate Ratification of Historic First Union Contracts with a Path to $15 and Better Benefits
SEIU Local - July 17, 2019

CHICAGO – SEIU Local 1 Chicago airport workers were joined by Alds. Roderick Sawyer (6th), Scott Waguespack (32nd) and Gilbert Villegas (36th) at City Hall on Wednesday morning to celebrate a historic victory in their yearslong fight for $15 and union rights at Chicago’s O’Hare and Midway Airports: ratification of their first-ever union contracts with airport contractors Prospect Airport Services and Scrub, Inc.

The respective three-year contracts with Prospect and Scrub cover a total of 2,200 contracted Chicago airport workers, including wheelchair attendants, cabin cleaners, baggage handlers, security officers, cargo agents and others.

The union contracts with Prospect and Scrub include a path to at least $15 and better benefits, including more affordable healthcare, discipline and seniority protections, a grievance procedure, overtime, paid holidays and vacation days and other benefits.

“This is the power of working people coming together for the good, union jobs our families and communities need to thrive,” said Oliwia Pac, a Prospect wheelchair attendant and security agent at O’Hare, who has been a longtime leader in the fight for union rights at the airport. “We’re improving the lives of thousands of working people at our airports, and we’re making our airports, communities and our entire city stronger.”

The historic contract ratifications come after passage of the September 2017 SEIU Local 1-backed airport ordinance, co-sponsored by Alds. Sawyer, Waguespack and Villegas, among others, that raised the base wage at Chicago’s airports to $13.80 and made it easier for airport workers to organize their union. Prospect and Scrub workers officially won their union with SEIU Local 1 in late 2018.

With two major contracts under their belts, Chicago airport workers, who have been fighting to raise standards at our airports for working people and passengers alike for more than four years, will now turn their fight for $15 and a union to other segments of contracted workers, including the cabin cleaners, customer service agents, baggage handlers, ramp agents and warehouse agents employed by Total Airport Services, Inc.

“We won’t rest until all working people at O’Hare and Midway Airports have the good jobs their families need to thrive,” said Local 1 President Tom Balanoff. “Other contracted airport workers are ready to take the baton from Prospect and Scrub workers and launch their own fight for their union. Together, we will fight to ensure Chicago’s airports continue to be strong economic engines for our city.”
The Amazon Prime Day strike could be a turning point for workers' rights
Nicole Lee - ENGAGET - July 17, 2019

Today, Amazon will start its fifth annual Prime Day, which has been expanded to 48 hours this year. Designed to enlist (and keep) Prime members, it is the company's biggest shopping event of the year -- on the same level as Black Friday -- with extensive discounts and deals across the entire site.

At a time when Amazon would likely prefer that all its employees hunker down to meet increased demand, a group of warehouse workers in Shakopee, Minnesota are going on strike. It isn't the first time the workers in Shakopee have raised their concerns. But it will be the first major work stoppage event for Amazon in the US and could be a harbinger of things to come.

In 2016, the fulfillment center in Shakopee opened and Amazon heavily recruited from the surrounding East African Muslim immigrant population at the time. In a report last year, the New York Times tells a story of how a worker by the name of Hibaq Mohamed made requests for prayer breaks. Even though they were granted according to state law, she was still expected to meet her daily quota of packing 230 items per hour despite the reduced time. But instead of sitting idly by, she and a group of workers organized to complain. They were one of the first worker groups in the country to stand up to Amazon and, eventually, to sit in negotiations.

That was just the beginning. When Amazon canceled a commuter bus to a Minneapolis neighborhood, some started a petition to reinstate it. When Prime Day fell during Ramadan, the workers asked for a lighter workload to accommodate their fasting schedule. The group also received help from the Awood Center, a non-profit that aims to help East African workers. The Awood Center helped organize them and educate them on worker rights.

"Issues like these would pop up, and people would react," said William Stolz, a worker at Amazon's Shakopee warehouse, to Engadget. Stolz is one of the workers organizing the upcoming strike on Prime Day. He is a "picker," and his job is to pick an item up, put it in a tote, which then goes down the line to get packed. He's required to pick at least 320 items an hour to meet his quota. "I usually have to go faster than that though, just to make sure I go enough over to hit my numbers for the week," he said. "It comes down to scanning like one item every eight seconds."

The group eventually got to a point last September and October where they had two big meetings with Amazon management. They raised concerns over the speed of work, the physical and mental toll they deal with on a daily basis and the assurance that the company was taking safety and injuries seriously. "We basically just wanted job security," Stolz said. After a month, Amazon management had come back to them without committing to any substantial changes. It did offer a few compromises, like requiring a general manager and a Somali-speaking manager to agree on any firings. But the group deemed that insufficient.

This isn't the first time Amazon has faced accusations about improper working conditions. A 2015 New York Times exposé described Amazon as a "bruising workplace." Multiple reports claimed that Amazon warehouse jobs are grueling and extremely taxing, both physically and mentally, due to ever-increasing demands. Journalist James Bloodworth wrote that there were workers who peed in bottles to avoid taking bathroom breaks. A Verge report revealed that "hundreds" of workers in a Baltimore facility were fired for not meeting productivity levels. Amazon, for its part, has denied many of these reports, insisting it is a "fair and responsible" employer.

Yet, thousands of workers in Europe have gone on strike in the past to protest increased work hours, the reduction of bonuses and an unhealthy work environment. That hasn't really happened much in the US -- Amazon workers in Europe are unionized, while US workers are not -- but the workers in Shakopee could help change things.
With the help of the Awood Center, they held their first major protest in December. It drew hundreds of people, including Minnesotan Representative Ilhan Omar, the first Somali-American elected to Congress. "Amazon doesn't work if you don't work," she said to a cheering crowd, according to a Gizmodo report.

"It felt super powerful," said Stolz. "We were just really proud of the action we took that day."

Unfortunately, Amazon hasn't quite responded the way the group had wanted. The company did offer a few concessions, like more prayer spaces and air conditioning. But much of Amazon's actions rang hollow. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, for example, donated $2.5 million to a Minneapolis nonprofit to help homeless individuals and families in the days prior to the December rally. The Somali community appreciated the donation, but that wasn't the point of the protest. "They're giving out all these donations, but they're ignoring the real issues we raised in the warehouse," said Stolz.

A group of 30 workers in the stowing department held another three-hour protest later in March, partly to request less punishing standards for when they made errors. Amazon's solution? Newer machines that may reduce the chance for errors, but it also didn't really address worker concerns.

So, with Prime Day coming up, the group decided it was the perfect opportunity to raise its concerns yet again, with much stronger action than it did in December. Today, the Shakopee warehouse will hold a six-hour strike -- day shift workers will walk out for the last three hours of their shift, and night shift workers will stay out for their first three hours.

"People ask questions like 'Why don't you do the whole day', and the reason is because Amazon has a time off system that automatically deducts unpaid time, like if you have to leave early to visit your grandma," said Stolz. It appears that Amazon considers those hours protesting as part of the "unpaid time" -- it deducted them from the protesters in March -- which could be a problem. Amazon workers get 20 hours of unpaid time every three months (up to a max of 80 hours), and if they go under that amount, that is grounds for dismissal.

And that may very well be illegal. As Seattle University law professor Charlotte Garden tells Bloomberg: "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."

As for what the workers want, it's the same as it was before: less pressure. "The biggest ask we have is to have Amazon reduce the speeds that we have to work," said Stolz. "It is physically, mentally exhausting. That leads into other issues like injuries, since you have to do things very fast, and with repetitive motions, all day long."

There's also the issue of job security. Not only because these sorts of jobs aren't the kind people can do for long periods of time, but because Amazon has been outsourcing them to temporary workers. "For 2019, all of the new hires in the building have been using temp workers rather than direct hires," said Stolz. "The temps are doing the same exact job as us, but they don't have the same job security." Temps, he said, are often demoralized, and told things like 'You're replaceable.' It creates a second class of workers," he added.

When Stolz asked someone in Amazon's Learning Department, which is in charge of training new hires, why Amazon was only hiring temps, he received a rather chilling answer. "His exact words to me were 'To increase turnover in the building,'" said Stolz. "Can you believe that? My eyes widened, I was so surprised. The person began to rephrase and backtrack and said it was to 'get new energy in the building'. Right. Sure."

Amazon told Bloomberg that around 90 percent of the employees at Shakopee are full-timers, and that some temps do get promoted to staff. Still, Stolz said that they should just cut out the temp part of it. "Just let people come on as a regular worker," he said.
In response to the upcoming Prime Day worker strike, Amazon released a statement that it's already offering what workers are asking for: "We provide great employment opportunities with excellent pay -- ranging from $16.25 - $20.80 an hour, and comprehensive benefits including health care, up to 20 weeks parental leave, paid education, promotional opportunities, and more." It also encouraged the public to take free tours of its facilities.

Some of these changes, however, didn't come about until Amazon came under fire from politicians such as Vermont senator and presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, whose "Stop BEZOS" act spurred the company to raise its minimum wage to $15 an hour. Which sounds good, but in doing so, Amazon took away employee monthly bonuses and stopped issuing new stock grants to employees. Some say that this actually leads to less pay overall.

As for the open invitation to fulfillment center tours, well, Stolz said that appears to be a way to sway public opinion. "I think they realize that they're getting some negative attention around some of the negative stuff they're doing," he said. "But I would just ask the general public if they think that, you know, an actual Amazon worker is in a better position to talk about what the workplace conditions are, versus Amazon's paid tour guide."

Truth be told, a single warehouse going on strike will likely not affect Amazon's bottom line very much, even if it does happen on Prime Day. But it's a sign of a much larger shift in how Amazon workers across the country are attempting to organize for a better workplace. Some workers in the Staten Island warehouse are trying to unionize, for example, as are Whole Foods employees. As Amazon introduces more automation and attempts to retrain its staff, the need to negotiate better working conditions might be more important now than ever.

Several Seattle-based Amazon engineers, who are part of the Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, plan to join the strike in solidarity. In a statement to Engadget, the group said, "Lending our support to our coworkers in MN is a natural part of our climate justice priorities. We cannot create a sustainable, long-term approach to addressing the climate crisis without addressing the structural racial and economic inequities that are part of our system of extraction -- of energy, material, and human labor -- that has caused the crisis."

The group also compiled a Medium post containing many supportive messages from fellow tech workers about the situation in Minnesota. They include: "The treatment of FC [fulfillment center] workers is a source of shame to me as an Amazon employee," "When Jeff Bezos is worth over $100B, it's totally unfair that you are working in subpar conditions" and "The absolute bare minimum requirements should be a safe workplace, and as one of the most valuable companies in the world Amazon should also be providing fair opportunities for promotion and full-time work." While several of the quotes are anonymous, a large chunk are not, showing that Amazon employees are not afraid of speaking their minds.

"The workers are asking for jobs that are safe and reliable, respect on the job so workers can get promoted, and an end to retaliation," said the Awood Center to Engadget in an email. "Workers have been saying often 'We are humans, not robots,' which sums up well that they want to be respected and treated in a way that honors the hard work they do and the wealth they bring in for Amazon."

"Amazon is one of the richest companies in the world," the email continued. "They can and should do better than being 'competitive.' They should lead, and that means respecting their workers and sitting down to make sure these jobs are safe and ones where people can stay and grow."
Climate change bill goes to Gov. Cuomo's desk
Rick Karlin - Times Union - July 17, 2019

Albany - A measure designed to eventually eliminate greenhouse gas from energy production as well as most of the state’s economy has been sent to Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s desk and could be signed as soon as Thursday.

The landmark Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which passed during the past legislative session following years of failed attempts, expands upon and puts legal teeth in what have been several large steps in recent years to limit and eventually eliminate emissions of carbon dioxide, which scientists say is a major contributor toward global warming.

The measure mandates that New York by 2050 reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 85 percent from 1990 levels.
It also calls for 100 percent carbon-free electricity generation by 2040. The state currently gets approximately 60 percent of its electricity from carbon-free sources, most of which are nuclear plants and hydroelectric dams. There is also a small but growing number of wind and solar sources.
To help reach the 100 percent goal, members of a yet-to-be-appointed Climate Change Action Council, to be created by 2020, would have to calculate the costs of such changes and then by 2023 submit a plan for getting there. Environmentalists cheered passage of the bill and Cuomo’s earlier indications that he would sign it.

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“Establishing a mandatory, comprehensive reduction plan that touches all sectors and sources of climate pollutants controllable by human endeavor, New York will lead nationally in the effort to avert the most catastrophic, predictable results of a rapidly heating planet,” wrote Liz Moran, environmental policy director at NYPIRG, one of the bill’s backers.

Others, including business and power production groups, however, worry about the still-unquantified costs of the plan.

“This has very, very wide-reaching ramifications. It would fundamentally change our electric system and our entire economy,” said Joe Shahen, communications manager at the Independent Power Producers of NY, a trade group of electricity generating firms.

The CLCP Act was sponsored by Sen. Todd Kaminsky and Assemblyman Steve Englebright, both Democrats from Long Island.

That region has long been a hotbed of environmental activism with concern over beaches and wetlands, industrial pollution and problems stemming from the historic use of cesspools in numerous residential areas. The governor is said to be planning a bill signing on Thursday along with an announcement regarding plans to produce power from offshore wind generators.
(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - The House voted 231-to-199 Thursday (July 18th) to raise the Federal Minimum Wage to $15 per hour incrementally over six years – and, in the process, eliminate the exploitative Tipped Minimum Wage.

The Raise the Wage Act would impact the wages of roughly 34 million Americans, those in the know have stated. Additionally, it’s estimated that an increase to a $15/hour Minimum Wage would lift 1.3 million Americans out of poverty, including 600,000 children.

In response to the passage of the Raise the Wage Act, American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) President Lee Saunders released the following statement:

This legislation is a long time coming. The Federal Minimum Wage has stayed flat for the last decade, while corporate profits and CEO compensation have skyrocketed. Raising the wage will make a huge difference in the lives of millions of our hardest-working people, many of whom are juggling multiple jobs just to keep their heads above water. A $15 Minimum Wage will reduce inequality and strengthen our communities, lifting families out of poverty and putting upward pressure on wages for everyone. Absolutely everyone working full-time should be able to provide the basic necessities - food, housing, health care and more - that their families need to survive.

The legislation has been endorsed by a number of Labor Organizations, including: AFSCME; The United Steelworkers (USW); the National Education Association (NEA); as well as the National Women's Law Center, and more.

New York State passed legislation that took effect in 2016 that raised the State Minimum Wage, which is currently $11.80/hour, to $15, gradually - 29 states and Washington, D.C. also have Minimum Wage Laws that are higher than the Federal Minimum Wage.

However, Progressives had issued a last-minute warning to their Moderate colleagues not to help Republicans make any last-minute changes to the Bill through the procedural maneuver known as a Motion to Recommit (MTR).

If Moderate Democrats helped Republicans add what the Progressives considered poison pill language to the measure, members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus were prepared to vote against it, the group’s Co-Chairs, U.S. Representatives Mark Pocan and Pramila Jayapal, said.

The MTR would have added language to exempt small businesses with fewer than 10 Employees or annual gross income of less than $1 million from implementing the $15 minimum wage.

Ultimately, Democrats defeated the MTR Republicans offered, 210-to-218, which cleared the way for a smooth - but partisan - final passage. The Raise the Wage Act has been a top priority for many House Democrats and came to the floor with 205 co-sponsors.
The Federal Minimum Wage has been raised nine times since it was first enacted in 1938.

The latest increase was in 2009 to the current level of $7.25 per hour.

The original Bill would have incrementally increased the current $7.25 Federal Minimum Wage to $15 over five years, but a manager’s amendment folded into the Bill upon adoption of the rule for debate extended the timeline to six years.

Under the measure, once the Minimum Wage reaches $15 per hour, it would continue to be adjusted for inflation.

The Bill would also increase the Sub-Minimum Wage for Tipped Employees, teenagers and Employees with disabilities until they all equal the general Minimum Wage.

The movement advocating an increase to the Minimum Wage has grown in recent years.

Fast Food Workers and others have walked off the job to demand a Living Wage and the right to Unionize.

 Strikes have emerged in cities across the country as Workers embraced the “Fight for $15” rallying cry.

And in 2016, Democrats adopted the $15 per hour Minimum Wage as part of their party platform for that year’s elections.
Cuomo signs most aggressive climate change legislation in the nation
James Gormley - The Legislative Gazette - July 18, 2019

During a ceremony at Fordham Law School in Manhattan, Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, with a goal of achieving a carbon-neutral economy by 2050.

Joined by former Vice President Al Gore, Cuomo called the legislation one of the the most consequential achievements of his administration. “To deny climate change is to deny reality,” Cuomo said, making several references to the Trump Administration’s environmental policies. “Trump ignores climate change because it is not politically convenient to acknowledge it. This will be the most aggressive climate law in the United States of America”

The legislation (S.6599/A.8429) was sponsored by Sen. Todd Kaminsky and Assemblyman Steve Englebright, who both chair the Environmental Conservation Committees in their respective houses. The legislation includes aggressive mandates to require that New York achieves a 40-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and an 85-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions — with 100 percent carbon neutrality — by 2050. In addition, the agreement codifies the governor’s goals to achieve 70 percent emissions-free electricity by 2030 and 100 percent emissions-free electricity by 2040.

The 2050 mandate exceeds reductions proposed under the Paris Climate Agreement and stands as the most comprehensive and aggressive climate bill ever enacted at the state level. “This is the most well-crafted [environmental] legislation in the country,” Gore said. “This will set a new bar.”

To achieve these goals, the legislation requires that the state power grid procure at least nine gigawatts of offshore wind electric generation by 2035, six gigawatts of distributed photovoltaic solar generation by 2025, three gigawatts of statewide energy storage capacity by 2030, and 185 trillion BTUs of end-use energy savings below the 2025 energy use forecast.

To get the ball rolling, the state recently selected two companies to build two offshore wind farms for a combined total of 1,700 megawatts of clean energy – enough to power one million homes. The first is the Sunrise Wind project which will be constructed 30 miles east of Long Island and generate 880 megawatts for Long Island. The second is the Empire Wind project, located 14 miles southeast of Manhattan, which will provide 816 megawatts for New York City.

The governor said during his remarks Thursday that $287 million will be invested to construct manufacturing, service and port facilities in Port Jefferson, Brooklyn, Staten Island and the Capital Region. “These projects will help make New York the hub for this industry,” Cuomo said. In addition, New York will provide $20 million to develop a wind training program at several SUNY campuses.

The projects are expected to generate $3.2 billion in economic activity, and 1,600 construction and permanent jobs. Port upgrades will begin in 2020. Construction of the onshore facilities will begin in 2022. Offshore construction will begin in late 2022 and the projects will be completed by 2024, Cuomo said.

The legislation also creates a new advisory council, comprised of experts in agriculture, housing, energy, manufacturing industry, transportation and land use — among other sectors — to help roll out the legislation’s provisions. The bill passed the Legislature in the final days of session and was delivered to the governor on July 16. “We still have a chance,” Gore said. “We have it within our power to grab hold of this crisis and save the future. We need leadership. We need new policies.

“It’s OK to change the light bulbs, but it’s better to change the laws.”
LOS ANGELES (July 20, 2019) — Screen Actors Guild–American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) and Netflix have agreed to an industry-transformative contract covering dramatic live-action productions.

The first-of-its-kind deal between the union and the global streaming service recognizes performance capture as covered work and includes coverage of dubbing, which applies to all of Netflix’s foreign-language live-action and animated motion pictures dubbed into English.

To date, Netflix has produced under the standard SAG-AFTRA television and film agreements.

Now, the new deal also includes gains in theatrical residuals, greater rights for members in the areas of options and exclusivity, improved overtime rules for stunt performers and specific protections for members regarding harassment and auditions.

The deal includes the same harassment protections contained in the Network Code agreement, and Commercials Contracts, in addition to a ban on auditions in private residences and hotel rooms. Netflix has set the industry standard with its Respect at Netflix program that is held as the gold standard in the industry for awareness of gender equality and promoting the participation of all regardless of gender, ethnicity or race.

“We are always looking to adapt and grow within the changing environment of our industry. This groundbreaking agreement speaks to that,” said SAG-AFTRA President Gabrielle Carteris. “Netflix recognizes the value of working with SAG-AFTRA members, and the contributions we make in this global industry. I am gratified that this deal achieved longstanding member goals in particular the recognition of performance capture work, and other important improvements that members want and deserve.”

Netflix Chief Content Officer Ted Sarandos added: “We are pleased that we were able to work with SAG-AFTRA to address these issues unique to Netflix’s production needs and we commend SAG-AFTRA leadership for its creative approach.”

SAG-AFTRA National Executive Director David White said, “I want to salute the contracts staff led by Chief Contracts Officer Ray Rodriguez for its incredible work on this historic agreement. As Netflix continues to ramp up its series and feature film production, it can do so more efficiently under this bilateral agreement, which provides enhanced terms and protections for all our members.”

The deal, which except as specified follows the Codified Basic Agreement and Television Agreements, was overwhelmingly approved by the National Board at its one-day videoconference plenary today. The agreement expires on June 30, 2022.

Additional highlights of the contract include:

Minimum salary and turnaround provisions shall now be applicable to all Netflix programs regardless of whether they trigger the "high budget SVOD" thresholds, an important breakthrough for performers.
Netflix has recognized that performances recorded using performance capture technology is covered work with all the protections of any other type of performance, subject to a mutual reservation with respect to fully animated motion pictures.

Concessions in the area of consecutive employment for guest stars and day performers employed on episodic series.

All Netflix dubbing for foreign language live-action and animated motion pictures dubbed into English in the United States to be done under a union agreement with improved terms.

The agreement covers how to pay residuals for motion pictures that were produced under a SAG-AFTRA theatrical contract that are exhibited on Netflix.

Stunt performers will no longer lose the opportunity to earn overtime because a stunt adjustment pushes them from Schedule B to Schedule C. The adjustment will still be included in the overtime calculation, but will not be used to determine the appropriate schedule.* For more information, click here.

Historic new limitations on the ability to advance pay residuals.

About Netflix

Netflix is the world's leading internet entertainment service with over 151 million paid memberships in over 190 countries enjoying TV series, documentaries and feature films across a wide variety of genres and languages. Members can watch as much as they want, anytime, anywhere, on any internet-connected screen. Members can play, pause and resume watching, all without commercials or commitments.
'Put down your swords': Senate passes bill ensuring 9/11 victims fund will never run out of money.
The bill's title includes the name of first responder Luis Alvarez, who died days after pleading with House lawmakers to pass the measure alongside comedian Jon Stewart.
Dareh Gregorian and Frank Thorp V - CNBC News - July 23, 2019

The Senate passed a bill Tuesday to ensure a fund to compensate victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks never runs out of money — and that first responders won't have to return to Congress to plead for more funding.

The vote came after intense lobbying from ailing 9/11 first responders — including one who died shortly after testifying before Congress last month.

The bill, which was passed by a vote of 97-2, would authorize money for the fund through 2092, essentially making it permanent.

"I'm going to ask my team now to put down your swords and pick up your rakes and go home, and hopefully, we don't have to come back," victims’ advocate John Feal told his fellow first responders at a news conference later. "What I'm going to miss the most about D.C. is — nothing." Feal also thanked Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who advocates charged had slowed down earlier versions of the bill, for getting the bill to the floor.

"He kept his word to me," Feal said.

One of the bill's champions, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., singled out comedian Jon Stewart for his activism on the issue.

"I think we can all agree I'm the real hero," Stewart quipped, before saying working with the 9/11 first responders was "the honor of my life."

"We can never repay all the 9/11 community has done for our country, but we can stop penalizing them," Stewart said. "I'm hopeful that today begins the process of being able to heal without the burden of having to advocate."

Before the bill's final passage, the chamber defeated two proposed amendments: One, from Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, would have restricted the authorization to 10 years; the other, from Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky, would have required offsets for the money spent on the fund.

Paul and Lee were the only senators who voted against the legislation.

"We whipped your asses," Feal said of the pair.

Paul tweeted after the vote: "While I support our heroic first responders, I can't in good conscience vote for legislation which to my dismay remains unfunded."

The bill passed the House by a vote of 402-12 earlier this month, but Paul objected when Gillibrand sought to get the legislation passed in the Senate by unanimous consent last week. Lee also reportedly placed a procedural hold on the legislation, which the Congressional Budget Office has estimated would result in about $10.2 billion in additional payments over the next decade.
Paul called for the spending to be offset with cuts, citing the government's $22 trillion debt.

That led Stewart to later rip the senator as a hypocrite.

"Pardon me if I’m not impressed in any way by Rand Paul’s fiscal responsibility virtue signaling," the former "Daily Show" host told Fox News, noting that Paul supported President Donald Trump's tax cut that "added hundreds of billions of dollars to our deficit."

Stewart also blasted Congress as a whole when he testified before a House committee on the issue last month, slamming lawmakers for requiring the act to be reauthorized, resulting in ailing first responders having to make repeated trips to the Capitol.

Stewart testified alongside cancer-stricken former New York police Det. Luis Alvarez, who was scheduled to undergo his 69th round of chemotherapy the next day. Alvarez said the fund had given him a fighting chance against cancer, and he wanted to ensure other victims who were stricken by the toxic smoke from the smoldering remains of the World Trade Center had the same opportunity.

"My life isn’t worth more than the next responder to get cancer," he said.

He died less than three weeks later at age 53.

The bill, which now includes Alvarez's name, had 74 Senate co-sponsors and is expected to be quickly signed into law by the president, a native New Yorker.

Hours before the vote was scheduled to take place, Feal told NBC News he “just got a call from the White House” inviting him and other 9/11 first responders and their families to the White House for a bill signing Friday afternoon.
(WASHINGTON) – The U.S. House of Representatives voted today to pass H.R. 397, the Rehabilitation for Multiemployer Pensions Act, more commonly referred to as The Butch Lewis Act. The legislation is an essential step to help secure the retirement security of more than 1.5 million workers and retirees nationwide.

The measure, offered by Rep. Richard Neal (D-Mass.), was first introduced in Congress in November 2017. The measure has 209 co-sponsors, including nine Republicans.


“After years of tireless work by Teamster retirees, members and local union officers, the House today rewarded their efforts by passing this critically important legislation,” said Teamsters General President Jim Hoffa.

“Lawmakers cannot delay any longer – this legislation must now be approved by the Senate so that American workers retain their hard-earned retirement security.”

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.
Washington, DC – The AFT has filed a lawsuit regarding mismanagement and sabotage of the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

PSLF enables qualifying public service workers like AFT members—teachers, college faculty and staff, health professionals, and other public sector workers—to discharge the balance on their student loans after 10 years. But the program has failed to deliver on this great promise because loan servicers continue to misdirect and neglect the borrowers they are assigned to help.

Instead of guiding borrowers toward more efficient payoff plans and debt forgiveness through PSLF, the companies withhold information and mislead borrowers so that the loan servicers can continue to collect payments and mounting interest.

The lawsuit, Weingarten v. DeVos, which is brought by eight AFT members, AFT President Randi Weingarten and the national union, seeks immediate loan forgiveness and a court order requiring the Education Department to adopt a process to identify and account for its errors and loan servicers’ misrepresentations.

Initiated by George W. Bush in 2007, PSLF is not just a promise, it’s an entitlement by law. “Betsy DeVos has turned it into a crapshoot,” says Weingarten. “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.”

Plaintiff Kelly Finlaw, an art teacher in New York City, lost credit for 10 years of payments because her loan servicer never told her that one of her consolidated loans didn’t qualify. She had to reconsolidate and start over. “I have $88,000 of student loan debt, and I am at the bottom,” she says. “I have spent so much time on my own trying to make this right, and I’ve come to the end of the line as far as what I can do for myself.”

Plaintiff Gloria Nolan is similarly frustrated. The first in her family to attend college, she faithfully paid off her debt for six years, and was sure she would be eligible for PSLF. Her loan servicer had neglected to tell her, however, that her payment plan did not qualify. She too had to start over from scratch.

“It’s hard to reconcile being told that you can achieve the American dream, you just have to pull yourself up by your bootstraps,” says Nolan. “This process is setting those boots in cement. That’s just not fair, that’s not right.” PSLF has also failed public service workers like plaintiff Cynthia Miller, who has been teaching 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 children’s education, and 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 made the 120 payments required for PSLF, but the Education Department failed to properly count them.

“While DeVos dithers, millions of public service workers miss car payments, sink deeper into credit card debt and struggle to care for sick relatives,” says Weingarten. “This deliberate sabotage of a bipartisan government initiative cannot be allowed to stand.”
Their chants aren’t new. Their message — to free children in detention camps — is still the same.

Despite weeks of protesting for social justice, these ralliers remain faithfully strong.

“There are still 3,000 kids in this country that have not been reunited with their parents,” said Peter Stuhlmiller, Kenmore Teachers Association president.

Stuhlmiller, who’s a father himself, says kids at the border are going through child abuse at the hands of our government.

"And if this is something our government is going to do, then the rational people in our country need to push back,” he stated.

"We want them to feel like there's somebody on their side," added Joe McCann, political action coordinator for the Public Employees Federation.

Friday's rally at Prospect Park was not only to raise awareness, but raise money.

McCann, who helped organize the rally, says the federal government will not accept direct donations like soap and blankets. So they’re raising money for the children's legal defense.

"There's an organization in South Texas called RACES that are offering free and low-cost to the immigrant community and they pivoted to this crisis," he explained.

On the other side, Joseph Falzone thinks the government's actions are appropriate.

"They're government detainees. So I don't know where you would put these government detainees. Maybe some of these people here would like to have them as guests in their house, and they can treat them anyway they want,” said Falzone.

Despite clashing opinions across the country, ralliers say they will continue to fight for justice.

"I just find it unconscionable that democracy that stands for freedom can treat kids how they are treating kids," said Stuhlmiller.

Friday’s rally was organized by different groups such as Jewish Family Services and the Public Employees Federation.

The specific message was "Te Vemos! — We See You!” — a reminder that those at the border are not forgotten.
Walmart Lawfully Disciplined and Fired Protesters
Allan Smith, J.D. - SHRM - July 26, 2019

Walmart didn't violate the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) when it disciplined or fired employees for breaking its attendance policy when they left work for nearly a week to protest at the retail giant's annual shareholders' meeting in 2013.

The walkout was not protected because it was one of a series of protests, rather than a bona fide strike, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) decided July 25.

Walmart has about 1.3 million employees at more than 4,000 stores, and none of its stores are unionized. In 2010, some of its employees, with help from the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, formed the Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart). OUR Walmart sought increased wages, more predictable scheduling, expanded health care access and freedom from retaliation for Walmart workers, noted NLRB member Lauren McFerran in her dissent.

Workers staged a series of short-lived walkouts from 2012 to 2013. For example, on Black Friday in November 2012, often the biggest shopping day of the year and when many are off work for the Thanksgiving holiday, about 100 Walmart employees walked off the job. From late May to early June 2013, about 100 workers walked off the job for five to six days to travel to the shareholders' meeting and demonstrate; 54 were disciplined or fired. There was another walkout involving an unspecified number of employees on Black Friday 2013.

Walmart did not violate the NLRA when it read talking points to protesters stating that it did not believe "these hit-and-run work stoppages are protected" and that if employees "participate[d] in future union-orchestrated work stoppages," the company would consider their work absences unexcused. The talking points accurately described unprotected walkouts, the board ruled.

While Walmart did have a "personal discussion," its lowest-level warning, with one employee about her unexcused absences that included a day on which she protested and wasn't scheduled to work, that was a mistake without discriminatory intent and not unlawful, the board ruled. The NLRB also upheld Walmart's verbal warnings for two workers who protested for four days a few weeks before the protest at the shareholders' meeting. The board reasoned that the discipline was warranted because the workers went on strike and returned to work with the plan to strike again a few weeks later. The NLRA prohibits such "intermittent strikes," according to the board. "Imagine if that bill had passed and become law," Spence said. "That guy (LaBarbera) would not have been locked up. He'd be out right now."

The dissent claimed that the board's decision "sharply cuts back on the right of American workers—including those who lack unions—to protest their job conditions by striking," McFerran wrote. She went on to say that the board classified the walkouts as "an unprotected 'intermittent' strike—even though it was buffered by months of strike inactivity, a tiny percentage of the workforce participated, and no serious difficulties for store operations resulted."

But the NLRB said in the majority opinion that it was simply following existing board opinions, which set out "the principle that plans to strike, return to work and strike again are not protected genuine strikes."

Replacement of Striking Workers

Phillip Wilson, president and general counsel of the Labor Relations Institute in Broken Arrow, Okla., said the board's decision was a "rational way to treat this intermittent strike behavior, which is becoming increasingly a strategy exploited by unions." He said the idea behind the walkouts is "you can pick and choose your battles by withholding labor when it's most damaging to employers and most likely to get attention in the press without employees risking anything in return."
That's not the way the NLRA is supposed to work, he said. The law is written so that if a union exercises an economic "weapon," such as a strike, the employer can continue to operate its business by replacing workers.

In an unfair labor practices strike, the replacement workers can only be temporary until the strike ends. Unfair labor practice strikes occur when, for example, someone is fired for union activity and an unfair labor practices charge is filed.

With economic strikes, the strikers may be permanently replaced, though the strikers aren't fired but put on a preferential rehiring list. If permanent replacements leave, strikers are brought back first, Wilson explained.

Prior to the NLRB's decision, a walkout would rob an employer of the chance to replace workers because it is over quickly, Wilson noted. The recent decision restores the balance that the NLRA was intended to create, he said.

The decision is significant partly because a growing number of workers are activists, according to Mark Keenan, an attorney with Barnes & Thornburg in Atlanta.

Employee-Relations Concerns

But Jim Gray, president of Jim Gray Consultants in Charleston, S.C., said, "You do not want to get in the position where people walk off." The only way to avoid walkouts is good employee relations, he noted.

However, Kory Lundberg, a Walmart spokesman, said, "We're pleased that the NLRB has reaffirmed the law, which for decades has said this type of activity is not protected. Our position from the beginning is that we acted lawfully and respectfully, and this decision shows that the board agreed."
From the Archives: Immigration Raids Make Latino Workers the Enemy
Dan La Botz - Labor Notes - July 26, 2019

This article is presented as part of our ongoing series of stories from our archives. It originally appeared in Labor Notes # 40 published on May 26, 1982. -Editors.

James Gonzalez ran in panic from the agents of La Migra who raided the Boulder Valley Poultry Farm in Boulder, Colorado. He ran from the farm into the main road and was run down by a gravel truck and killed. Gonzalez’s real name turned out to be Jose Morales, an undocumented worker.

My friend Juana, who works in a laundry, called me up at the community organization on the north side of Chicago where I work. “Daniel,” she said, “I’m afraid to go to work. My husband is out of town, and the children will be home all alone. What shall I do?” Jose Morales was killed, thousands of workers were deported, and hundreds of thousands like Juana lived in fear in the early weeks of May as the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) carried out “Operation Jobs”—a reign of terror in immigrant communities and workplaces.

PANIC AMONG CENTRAL AMERICANS
Throughout the country, workers stayed away from work; some businesses were forced to close. Church attendance in Spanish-speaking congregations dropped off; students’ attendance at English G.E.D. classes declined. A panic seized the immigrant communities, particularly the Central Americans for whom deportation can mean death at the hands of the dictators in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Some 400 INS agents in many major cities arrested 5,440 undocumented workers and deported 4,071. Over 90 percent of those arrested were Hispanic; most of them were from Mexico but they included immigrants from El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Guatemala. In Chicago, a number of Poles were arrested. Many ethnic, religious, civil rights, and labor organizations—including the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in Chicago—protested these raids. Ted L. Georgetti, assistant director of the INS in Chicago, said, “There is widespread unemployment … and there are indications that a number of illegals are holding jobs that should go to citizens. If this is politically motivated, I don’t think it is wrong.”

The government clearly doesn’t expect to solve the problem of over 10 million unemployed worker by arresting some 5,000 undocumented workers. Nor does its raid make a dent in the estimated 7.5 million undocumented workers in the country or those entering at a rate of 500,000 a year. Why then the raids? The Reagan administration is attempting to blame the undocumented workers for unemployment and to make white and black workers see the “foreigners” as responsible for taking away their jobs. It is an attempt, as crude as it is cruel, to divide the U.S. working class. More subtly, the Reagan administration is attempting to focus the attention of the U.S. worker against the foreigner, particularly against Hispanics, as the cause of this country’s problems.

PATCO WAS ILLEGAL TOO
The INS arrests were not only carried out by the same President who arrested PATCO strikers, they are part of the same attack—an attack on labor. Remember, the PATCO strikers were made “illegal.” Regan struck first at a somewhat better-paid group of professional workers, feeling they would be isolated from the bulk of the organized labor movement. Now he strikes at the lowest-paid immigrant, minority workers, feeling they too are isolated from the mass of unionized workers. The strong sectors of organized labor have a responsibility to support the weaker, to defend the undocumented worker.

PATCO proved the government was prepared to bust unions. The INS raids prove the government is willing to use a national police force against workers. We had better stick together today or tomorrow we may find that we are all “illegals.”
New York's criminal justice system has some 900 professionals who are unsung heroes — the parole officers who monitor offenders released into the community.

There is nothing glamorous about their job. It is duty that comes with plenty of headaches and frustrations, not to mention danger.

One of their missions is to facilitate the rehabilitation of offenders under their supervision. When they succeed, the offender is not the only winner. Society is as well because parole is far more cost effective than keeping someone behind bars.

The parole officers are also there to protect society from those parolees who fail to abide by the laws and the conditions of their release.

The parole officer does not designate the inmates who get released early from a prison sentence.

The state parole board calls those shots. And there is debate today over whether the current board has become too eager to grant parole to violent offenders sent to prison for monstrous and unspeakable crimes against innocent people.

The debate is being fueled by the release of a convicted killer who in a few short weeks has become an inconvenient hot potato for state bureaucrats. That killer's name is Richard LaBarbera, convicted in the brutal killing of 16-year-old Paula Bohovesky in Rockland County in 1980. The victim's 87-year-old mother, Lois Bohovesky, argued strenuously against his release, as well as an initial plan that would have allowed him to go back to his local area.

A state judge, responding to litigation filed by the mother, directed that LaBarbera live at least three counties away from where he killed the teenager, setting the stage for the parolee to be assigned to the Buffalo parole office. In recent days, however, LaBarbera lost his freedom, at least temporarily, when parole officers locked him up for a parole violation. State officials won't say exactly what LaBarbera did, but point out he did not commit a new crime.

Among those who have been critical of LaBarbera's release are state Sens. Rob Ortt, R-North Tonawanda, and Patrick Gallivan, R-Elma. Both contend the parole board has become too tilted in favor of releasing criminals even when courthouse records suggest the convicts could jeopardize public safety.

Gallivan upped the ante July 26 by calling on Gov. Andrew Cuomo to investigate the circumstances behind the decision to release LaBarbera.

All of this comes two months after I reported on a bill, sponsored by two downstate Senate Democrats that would end the ability of parole officers to have parolees sent to jail for technical violations of their release conditions.

As the LaBarbera controversy heated up, I contacted former parole officer Wayne Spence, now the president of the state Public Employees Federation, the union for professional workers in state government, and the chief opponent of the bill that would have handcuffed parole officers from doing the job they do now.
Spence said he is concerned the bill sponsors will try to ram the legislation through again when lawmakers return to Albany.

While New York’s public employee unions are often aligned with Democrats, Spence told me he would be willing to work with GOP senators in drawing attention to problems within the parole system.

He also said that new research has debunked assertions made by some that many of the parolees being held at Rikers Island in New York City are being held for parole violations. He said only 2 percent of the Rikers prisoners are parole violators, and most of the parolees there re-offended or absconded from supervision.

Spence said his union plans to make its case for keeping the current system for technical violations of parole intact by going directly to residents of low-income communities with high numbers of parolees, since having safe streets is in their interest.

He said he would also welcome close scrutiny of New York's parole system.

"The officers feel that they don't have the staffing needed to do the job, and the parolees feel they aren't getting what they need and are being set up for failure," he said.

While they are not in prison, parolees are still serving judicially-imposed sentences until their parole ends.

"I think a lot of politicians forget that," Spence said. He acknowledged what some liberals call "reform" is needed in New York, but said it should not come at the expense of public safety.
It took nearly 18 years, but anyone sickened or dying from the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, finally will have the backing of the federal government after President Trump signed the bill Monday to make 9/11 aid essentially permanent.


“They answered terror with the emotional strength of true warriors,” Trump said. “Our nation owes you a profound debt that no nation can ever pay, but we will keep our promise to you.”

Terence Pfeifer, the son of Ray, who has followed his father’s footsteps to become an FDNY firefighter, was relieved and ecstatic after the bill’s signing.

“Today was amazing. It was everything we could have pictured and more. 9/11 families can finally rest,” Pfeifer said.

The law will ensure that survivors of the attacks and responders who rushed to aid them at the Pentagon, Shanksville, Pa., and the area around Ground Zero can get compensation for their pain, suffering and lost years of work until 2092.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated the law will cost about $10.2 billion for its first 10 years, but that estimate is highly uncertain, and is likely to fall short as more people get cancer and new, slower moving illnesses emerge linked to the fumes and poisons released by the collapse of the twin towers.

Two Republican senators objected to costs, but the law that passed the Congress is open-ended and designed to cover anything that could prove to be a problem once doctors and scientists understand the need.

“It basically prepares everyone for the future. The money will be there, the security will be there,” said New York Rep. Pete King (R-Long Island) a sponsor of the bill who stood in for the New York delegation at the signing. “And they earned it. These are men and women who put their lives on the line and are going through terrible illnesses. Others will go through terrible illnesses.”

Sen. Chuck Schumer, (D-NY), said he wasn’t able to attend because of scheduling issues but he was thrilled that the fight was over at last.

“Finally, nothing can get in the way of our first responders getting the help they are due and they very much need,” Schumer said. “It has been a long struggle, but because of the courage of the many who joined the cause, the memory of people like James Zadroga, Ray Pfeifer, Luis Alvarez and so many others will live on in this law.”

The law covers the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund, which had been running out of money, and would have expired in 2020. The extension essentially matches the life of the compensation fund to the length of the separate 9/11 health program, which was made permanent in 2015.
VCF Special Master Arupa Bhattacharyya announced that the Department of Justice-run program hoped to begin paying out restored awards by Sept. 11.

The law is named after three men who not only answered the call of 9/11, but died from illnesses after their exposure to Ground Zero’s dust and toxins.

NYPD Det. James Zadroga was the first to have his death in 2006 formally linked to his time at the disaster site. Former FDNY Firefighter Ray Pfeifer and NYPD Det. Lou Alvarez both died of cancer after spending some of their last days lobbying Congress for 9/11 legislation. Pfeifer battled for a bill in 2015 amid cancer treatments. Alvarez’s dramatic, heartbreaking testimony along side Jon Stewart in June came just before he was admitted to hospice care.

Terence Pfeifer, a member of Engine 79 in the Bronx, said a sad note to the signing is that the legislation will be needed long into the future.

"Thousands of families have been affected so far. There's just no end in sight," he said. "Guys are dying way too early."

[More Politics] Bill de Blasio’s opening address at DNC debate interrupted by chants of ‘Fire Pantaleo’ »
Also on hand were John Feal, and numerous members of his FealGood Foundation, who were part of some 280 lobbying trips Feal ran to sway lawmakers who were reluctant to pass a permanent program for the heroes of Sept. 11.

"This is the fruition of our work,” a teary-eyed Feal said. “I’m happy that they got a chance to do this, and for America to be able to recognize who they were. And for the 9/11 community, I’m ecstatic.”
Four Long Island hospitals are among the top 10 in the New York City metropolitan area and statewide, according to U.S. News & World Report rankings released Tuesday.

North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset was ranked highest on Long Island and fourth overall in the metro area and statewide. NYU Winthrop Hospital in Mineola was ranked seventh in the metro area, Long Island Jewish Medical Center in New Hyde Park eighth, and St. Francis Hospital in Flower Hill 10th.

Stony Brook University Hospital, rated 12th, is the highest-ranked hospital in Suffolk County.

North Shore’s high ranking “reflects how we have tried to bring into the system providers and physicians who really are at the top level, and they’ve built teams that are at the top level, so it reflects the team effort between physicians, nurses and everybody else in the hospital,” said Dr. Mark Jarrett, chief quality control officer for Northwell Health, which runs North Shore.

NYU Winthrop spokesman Ed Keating said the ranking “clearly places us in the forefront in health care on Long Island. It should certainly reassure patients who come to us for help in their time of need.”

The U.S. News rankings of 4,653 hospitals nationwide are based on federal and other data in 16 adult specialty areas, focusing on factors such as death rates, nurse staffing levels, the breadth of patient services, patient evaluations and the opinions of physicians.

U.S. News also ranks the top 50 hospitals nationwide in 16 specialty areas, such as cancer, cardiology and heart surgery, gynecology, orthopedics and urology. North Shore led Long Island hospitals with a national top-50 ranking in nine specialties, followed by Long Island Jewish and NYU Winthrop, which each had six specialties that were nationally ranked.

The U.S. News ratings are among several national rankings and grades of hospitals released annually. The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released its “Hospital Compare” rankings in June, and The Leapfrog Group, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that focuses primarily on hospital safety, published its rankings in May.

Keating said NYU Winthrop analyzes data from each ranking organization, along with internal data, to help determine “if there are opportunities to improve in certain areas.”

Dr. Charles Lucore, president of St. Francis, said that because the methodology for each rating organization is different, rankings can differ among surveys. U.S. News, for example, gives less weight to patient safety than does Leapfrog and less emphasis on patient outcomes — such as mortality and readmission rates — than Hospital Compare, he said.

“We value all the ratings and think they supply good information to consumers,” Lucore said. “When making a choice, I would reference them all.”

He noted that St. Francis scores highly on all three recent national surveys, “so you can see that consistency. But you can also see another hospital where there is not that consistency.”
Darren Dopp, a senior vice president at the Healthcare Association of New York State, which represents hospitals statewide, said his organization is uneasy about hospital rankings because “methodologies and results can vary widely and be a source of real confusion for consumers.”

The complexity of health care cannot easily be boiled down to a single ranking, he said. Dopp advises patients to consult with their doctors, family and friends.

Jarrett said although each rating is helpful, Northwell opts to focus on a single one — the federal rankings — in communicating with hospital employees, in part to avoid confusing staff with different results.

In addition, he said, the federal government — whose data Leapfrog and U.S. News also use, along with other metrics — focuses heavily “on outcome measures, like mortality and readmissions” and other categories that Northwell views as critical priorities, and the federal data are validated through examinations of individual patient medical charts.

One advantage of U.S. News is that it ranks hospitals in specialty areas, he said. The federal government has data on specialties, but no numerical ranking.

Rankings of specialties is important to patients, because they can get an easy-to-understand look at the best hospitals for the type of condition for which they need surgery or other types of treatment, Jarrett said.

“If you're going in for a joint replacement, you're not as concerned about how that place does in open heart surgery,” he said.

TOP HOSPITALS

Eight Long Island hospitals were ranked by U.S. News & World Report as among the top 30 in the New York City metropolitan area, which U.S. News defines as including Long Island, the five boroughs, Westchester County and northern New Jersey.

1. New York Presbyterian Hospital (five locations in Manhattan and two in Westchester County)

4. North Shore University Hospital, Manhasset (top-ranked on Long Island)

7. NYU Winthrop Hospital, Mineola

8. Long Island Jewish Medical Center, New Hyde Park

10. St. Francis Hospital, Flower Hill

12. Stony Brook University Hospital, Stony Brook

14. Huntington Hospital, Huntington

20. South Nassau Communities Hospital, Oceanside

29. Good Samaritan Hospital, West Islip
Union Gains in Airline Industry Seen As Symptomatic of Labor Resurgence

Bob Hennelly - The Chief Leader - July 30, 2019

After years of decline in the American union movement, there is evidence of a revival within the transportation sector, particularly at the airlines. The turnaround is notable because it’s widely believed that it was President Ronald Reagan’s mass firing of striking Air Traffic Controllers in 1981 that helped accelerate labor’s diminishing influence.

A Two-Thirds Reduction

In the early 1950s, at the height of its power the union movement represented 34.8 percent of the nation’s workforce. According to the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, this year it represents 10.5 percent.

Nowhere was that retrenchment felt more strongly than in the transportation sector, which in the past, along with the utilities and telecommunications industries, were the most-unionized in the private sector.

According to the BLS, in 2000 1.8 million of the transportation sector’s 8.1 million workers, were unionized. By 2017, the total workforce had grown to 8.8 million, but those represented by unions had dropped to 1.3 million.

Last year, the Transport Workers Union of America prevailed in a National Mediation Board election and won the right to represent 5,000 flight attendants with JetBlue. The parent union of TWU Local 100 had already represented 14,000 airline mechanics across the country.

A Long, Hard Slog

The organizing drive took nine years.

Across the country, 11,000 workers who provide the catering for millions of air travelers annually have organized under the UNITE HERE banner in dozens of cities in a drive to raise their meager compensation and improve their health-care coverage.

This workforce, like the JetBlue flight attendants, is covered under the National Railway Labor Act and union contracts are amendable, with the terms of the last contract carrying over until a new deal is reached. Strikes or lockouts are prohibited unless the parties are released from negotiations by the National Mediation Board.

In a vote at Newark’s United Airlines kitchen, almost three-quarters of the workers voted to join the union, which now has national traction.

In a late June Port Authority of New York and New Jersey public meeting, dozens of UNITE HERE Local 100 members turned out to ask for the Commissioners’ intercession with the airline caterers in their first contract negotiation.

A Cold Employer

Carol Walter has been with Sky Chef for 34 years, receiving the minimum wage. “I work in a cold room,” she said. “My company gave me a jacket, but I don’t have protection for my head, my feet, or my hands. I work 10-to-12 hours in the freeze,” and she is paid minimum wage “as American and Delta are making more money than ever.”
“More than 11,000 workers across the country have voted to authorize a strike when released by the National Mediation Board,” said union member Jenny Carpio. “This is the largest-ever such vote in the U.S. airline catering industry.”

She continued, “Our demands are simple. We need a living wage and affordable health insurance....We refuse to sit back and watch the airlines make billions in profits while we barely scrape by. We are demanding that one job should be enough to survive in the airline catering industry.”

Last year, after an aggressive campaign by Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ, the transportation agency committed to substantial raises for thousands of airport workers, culminating in a $19-an-hour wage by 2023.

‘Workers Waking Up’

John Samuelsen, president of the TWU of America, said that he sees transport workers and Teachers as being at the forefront of a labor revival in even some of the nation’s most conservative states like West Virginia, where last year Teachers prevailed in a statewide strike.

“The amount of organizing going on in transportation is tremendous,” he said in a phone interview. “Transport workers are waking up. The new bosses in the transportation industry are the new robber barons. These are folks that might as well be living in the 1880s.”

Mr. Samuelsen said that in many ways it is the management culture in the industry that’s helping build support for the trade-union movement.

“The airline industry is at the height of its wealth right now and getting richer and richer and doing what multinational corporations do: try to make their workforce poorer,” he said. “There is a total whip-cracking mentality when it comes to workers, so worker morale is low. When worker morale is low, that leads to a worse customer experience.”

No Opting-Out

From a union perspective, Mr. Samuelsen observed, organizing a workforce covered by the National Railway Labor Act, which was enacted to ensure the reliability of transportation, has some major advantages.

“It is a guaranteed dues payment and you are not dealing with something like the Janus decision” where public-sector workers can opt-out of membership, he observed. “And we have workers in Florida, Texas and Oklahoma where they are 100 percent dues-compliant and state right-to-work laws mean nothing.”

To remain relevant in an economy where the terms and conditions of employment are increasingly skewed to the companies’ advantage through web-based applications, Mr. Samuelsen believes requires organizing drives that can connect with the broader public about the issues at stake.

“As we go forward, we need to develop organizing models that are a crossroads between organizing and a political operation because the idea that these huge cyber-platform industries can make billions and can avoid direct organizing drives is extremely harmful to working America,” he said.
Busy Time for Pilots

Michael Russo, a veteran pilot with the Airline Professionals Association, Teamsters Local 1224, which represents 2,000 pilots who are flying the cargo jets that carry the products of Amazon and other web-based retail operations that have upended America’s bricks-and-mortar business model.

They are also covered under the Railway Act and are working under a contract that expired in 2011.

In February of this year, the crash of an Amazon-chartered Boeing 767 30 miles southeast of Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport killed three crew members, two of whom were members of the Local. The cause of the crash is under investigation.

“This has been a really intense time,” he said in a phone interview. “On the good side, we are happy to see the growth, but can the growth get through the choke-point” of training all the new pilots the industry needs?

In addition to the stagnant wages, Mr. Russo said the frenetic growth in package volume puts the pilots at risk of burnout. It has also given rise to a culture of deferred maintenance on the aging jet-cargo fleet, which includes older passenger jets converted to freight service.

Essentials Neglected

“Training and maintenance don’t produce revenue,” he said, adding that under the management culture both get cheated. “It’s true that we have regulations about flight times, duty time and rest time which includes a requirement of one 24 hour-break over seven days, but you can work six days, and they are always asking people to come in on their day off,” Mr. Russo said. “And fatigue is really cumulative. You can stretch yourself for weeks, even a few months, but for the last two or three years now that’s the way it has been. And that starts to take a toll on you physically and at home, because that’s even more time away from your family.”

Under the terms of the existing contract, there are salary-step increases for the first five years, “but if you have been there for 15 years like I have, you won’t see a raise until there is a new contract.”

Tipping Point?

The uptick in labor organizing in the transport sector comes as polling data indicates that 55 percent of Americans have a favorable opinion about unions, compared to 33 percent who disapprove.

Multiple economic studies have linked the labor movement’s decades-long decline and stagnation of wages across the entire economy and the nation’s increasing concentration of wealth at the upper levels.

According to the Pew Research Center, over the last few years, workers have seen some very modest wage gains. Yet, Pew reports “after adjusting for inflation...today’s average hourly wage has just about the same purchasing power it did in 1978, following a long slide in the 1980s and early 1990s and bumpy, inconsistent growth since then.

Pew’s analysis continues, “In fact, in real terms average hourly earnings peaked more than 45 years ago: The $4.03-an-hour rate recorded in January 1973 had the same purchasing power that $23.68 would today."

Even in this prolonged period of stagnant wages, BLS data documented a significant wage advantage for union workers, who average $1,051 a week, compared to non-union workers who earned just $860.
Democrats and organized labor aim to make Eugene Scalia, the pick to lead the Labor Department, a target in 2020 in hopes of testing President Trump’s support among rank-and-file union voters.

Trump is nominating Scalia, the son of the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, to replace former Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta. Acting chief Patrick Pizzella and Eugene Scalia, if confirmed, are expected to push through controversial rules opposed by Democrats and unions. Trump has yet to formally nominate Scalia but critics are already vowing to put a spotlight on that agenda and Scalia’s work as a lawyer for businesses in high-profile labor fights.

“Scalia is not going to help folks at all and that’s why it’s so important that we have a group of candidates that are pushing and supporting issues that have impact on working families,” American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees President Lee Saunders told The Hill.

Kermit Kaleba, managing director of policy at National Skills Coalition, said the administration had failed to keep their promises on “making workers a priority.”

“This nomination doesn’t send a signal that that’s changing,” Kaleba said.

Union leaders supported Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in 2016, but she only won labor households by 8 points over Trump — the narrowest margin since 1984. Those voters helped deliver Midwestern states that will be crucial to Trump’s reelection.

Union leaders say keeping those voters could be a challenge for Trump if Scalia pushes a conservative agenda at the Labor Department.

As a lawyer, Scalia fought unions in many important cases. Among the most notable was his defense of Boeing in 2011 after the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) accused the company of trying to open a factory in South Carolina as retaliation against striking workers in Washington state. The Obama NLRB later dropped the case.

Scalia’s track record has 2020 Democrats who are highlighting labor issues strongly opposing his nomination.

“The rich and powerful have teamed up with the Republican party to push for measures at all levels of government designed to decimate unions and collective bargaining. Eugene Scalia is the latest example,” the campaign of Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) told The Hill. “He’s opposed implementing financial reforms at every turn and has spent his entire career representing giant corporations and Wall Street over American workers.”

A campaign aide for Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), also a 2020 presidential contender, said Trump’s Department of Labor (DOL) and NLRB have “overturned labor protections and collective bargaining rights at every turn.”

“In Bernie’s view, there is really no way the middle class in this country is going to grow unless we build the trade union movement,” the aide added.

Pro-labor advocates said Acosta was slow to implement many controversial proposals backed by conservatives. They worry that will change under Pizzella and Scalia.
Pearce said on matters involving “wages, employee classification, health and safety … Acosta showed reluctance to make radical deregulatory changes.”

“I don’t get the impression that Scalia has that kind of sensitivity or commitment to the mission of the DOL,” he continued.

If confirmed, Scalia will have a number of important issues to decide, including rules on overtime pay, calls to ease safety regulations and a proposal to narrow the definition of joint employers in cases where more than one employer is responsible for an employee’s wages.

Experts also say Scalia could move on initiatives like auditing international labor group finances, which unions see as intended to weaken their power.

The contest for rank-and-file labor voters in battleground states will be fierce, and union advocates and Democrats are looking for any edge to sway those voters.

“If they relax [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] standards and they effect wage and hour standards and workers start feeling it … then I think that it’s going to start to sting and have a negative effect on their support,” Pearce said.

“We expect that they’re going to continue to be anti-labor and anti-worker,” Saunders said of Scalia and Pizzella’s agenda. “I think what we’ve got to do is … educate our members and organize and mobilize them.”

Progressives like Warren and Sanders have vowed to defend unions and push tougher rules on employers. Warren in April accused Democratic leaders of not doing enough to protect labor groups. She has called for beefing up enforcement of wage rules and has backed proposals that would make it easier for unions to organize workers.

Sanders has called for legislation to protect union workers and give them more powers to challenge employer practices.

Whether Democrats and unions can successfully make the case against Scalia is an open question. Scalia has strong support among Republicans and business groups and has been a fixture in conservative circles.

“Gene Scalia is a great choice to serve as secretary of Labor at a time when the department continues to work on defining issues,” said Patrick Hedren, vice president of labor, legal and regulatory policy at the National Association of Manufacturers.

“[Scalia] is whip smart and knows the department’s mission and operations well,” said Glenn Spencer, senior vice president for employment policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. “Together with Pat Pizzella, DOL is in good hands.”

And Republicans are dismissing the idea that the Labor pick or any policies he implements could hurt Trump’s standing with union voters.

“President Trump continues to enjoy widespread support of union workers around the country thanks to his America First policies that have brought manufacturing jobs and investment back to America,” Republican National Committee spokesman Michael Joyce said. “Union workers know that they have a President who fights for them every single day whether he’s combatting unfair trade practices of other countries or putting more money back in your paychecks through tax reform.”
Others also question if the issues on Scalia’s docket will actually hurt Trump’s support among rank-and-file union workers. They point to Trump’s revised North American trade deal, which could keep union voters in the fold.

George Washington University law professor Charles Craver said Trump’s base also strongly backs him on border security and social issues that are likely to have more prominence in 2020 than labor issues.

Still, union leaders hope to capitalize on Trump’s labor policies and say they will be watching Scalia closely.

“Our members understand and realize that this is a rigged economy right now and folks are trying to take that seat away from the table,” Saunders said.
DETROIT, Mich.—James Hoffa didn’t get his wish, but the Democratic presidential debate July 30, dealt with labor issues noticeably more than the first round in June did.

The Teamsters Union president had urged the 10 candidates on stage to address the pension crisis. “If multiemployer pension funds fail, it will have a ripple effect throughout the economy,” he said in a statement a few hours before the debate began. In Detroit, “an industrial city where retirees rely on pensions to make ends meet, each candidate needs to address the more than $40 billion in pensions at risk nationwide.”

None of them did, but the word “union” was mentioned in the first opening statement, when Montana Gov. Steve Bullock described himself as a “pro-choice, pro-union, populist Democrat.” He was trying to balance his previous sentence, when he attacked Medicare for All and the Green New Deal as “wish-list economics.”

With the three moderators not asking any questions about labor issues or economic inequality, discussion of those issues came indirectly, in the context of health care, climate change, and tariffs and trade.

The debate on health care had the most intense contrasts, pitting little-known centrists—former Rep. John Delaney of Maryland and former Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper—against the two strongest Medicare for All supporters, Senators Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.).

Delaney and Rep. Tim Ryan of Ohio argued that the Medicare for All bill’s eliminating private health insurance would hurt union members who’ve given up raises to get good insurance. Delaney called the bill “bad policy,” while Hickenlooper called it “massive government expansion.”

“Stop using Republican talking points,” Warren told Delaney. Sanders said that 500,000 Americans go bankrupt each year from medical bills, many union members pay high deductibles, people regularly lose their health insurance when they switch jobs or their employer changes policies, and Medicare for All would eliminate deductibles and copayments while enabling people to choose their own doctors, much like the Canadian health-care system.

South Bend, Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg called for letting people buy public-option insurance that would be cheaper than private insurance, as did Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota. Delaney said he had a plan for a public-private system that would provide free universal health care, without giving any details, while Ryan advocated letting people between 50 and 64 buy into Medicare.

Former Texas Rep. Beto O’Rourke said all uninsured or underinsured people should be enrolled in Medicare.

The debate on climate change followed a similar pattern, with Delaney and Hickenlooper attacking the Green New Deal concept as an impractical job-guaranteeing boondoggle, and Warren again accusing them of using “Republican talking points.” Warren called for a “green industrial policy” such as manufacturing solar panels. Ryan and Bullock said the plan should not attack autoworkers or fossil-fuel workers, after Sanders said the fossil-fuel industry was destroying the planet. Ryan said the U.S. should “dominate” electric-car manufacturing and revamp agriculture to be more sustainable, and that the jobs created should be union. Sanders said the transition to renewable energy would create good union jobs, and that a “just transition… is what the Green New Deal is about.”
That the candidates did not explicitly address how to strengthen unions and improve workers’ status was not necessarily their fault. Eight of the nine currently serving in Congress (all except Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii; the four on stage at this debate were Sanders, Warren, Klobuchar and Ryan) have all cosponsored the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, a bill introduced in May that would pre-empt state laws banning the union shop, levy fines on employers who retaliate against union supporters, and give temporary, contract, and “independent contractor” workers the right to organize and bargain collectively.

Buttigieg says his labor proposal would go “above and beyond” that bill, while Bullock last year stood up for locked-out talc-mine workers.

The moderators simply didn’t ask those questions (much like the 2016 Clinton-Trump debates, when they didn’t ask a single question about climate change). Instead, they asked if candidates’ age should be an issue and if the Democrats are moving too far left to defeat Trump. They also did not mention housing or pensions.

On the other hand, no candidate bluntly said, “the Democrats need to be the party of working people.” Warren and Sanders perhaps came the closest in their closing statements.

Warren said the U.S. government has been on the side of the wealthy for decades, and we need “big structural change.” Sanders said he was not just running just to defeat Donald Trump, “but to transform this country and stand with the working class of America, which for the past 45 years has been decimated.”
Mineola, Long Island – Nassau County has upgraded their living wage laws to prevent vendors and businesses from bypassing County labor regulations.

“Nassau is taking action to help working-class families and hold accountable the companies we do business with,” said Nassau County Executive Laura Curran. “The loophole we closed allowed companies to appear smaller than they actually were to avoid paying their workers a living wage,” continued Curran.

The County Executive discussed changes in their labor laws at a recent press conference attended by several union leaders including John Durso, president of RWSDU/UFCW Local 338 and chairman of the Living Wage Advisory Board.

The living wage legislation is designed to ensure that employees of county vendors are earning a decent wage, receiving health benefits and getting an appropriate number of days off, said County Executive Curran. Under the law, a county vendor’s full-time employees are eligible for 12 paid days off for sick leave, vacation or personal necessity.

Since many companies who were seeking contracts with the county nefariously would meet the qualifications for a waiver in order to avoid the living wage requirement – Nassau County needed to update the regulations. The changes to the law allow the county to review a vendor’s parent company and related subsidiaries as well as their compensation when determining waiver eligibility.
The city Health Department recently detected mosquitoes that are carrying the West Nile virus, adding that there have been no cases reported of anyone contracting the disease.

The virus can be fatal, with 38 deaths documented out of the 259 cases that the city has tracked over the last 20 years.

Most Cases ‘Mild’

“West Nile virus infection can cause a mild or moderate febrile illness; and most (80%) of those infected have no symptoms at all,” according to the DOH advisory. “In some people, particularly those 50 and older or who have weakened immune systems, West Nile virus can cause a serious and potentially fatal infection of the brain and spinal cord.”

The advisory continued, “The most common symptoms are headache, fever, muscle aches, and extreme fatigue. Symptoms of more severe illness can also include changes in mental status and muscle weakness requiring hospitalization. If a person has symptoms of West Nile virus, they should contact or see your doctor.”

The advisory has considerable significance for the thousands of city employees who work primarily out-of-doors, according to Fitz Reid, president of District Council 37’s Local 768, which represents several thousand workers in public-health titles including Pest Control Aide and Exterminator.

“The city may not want to create a panic, so they are playing it down and I understand that,” he said in a phone interview. “But they need to do the field-tracking and use the city workforce as ambassadors to engage the public on what they can do to protect themselves and their families.”

Staff Down Nearly 50%

Mr. Reid said that he felt staffing levels should be increased. “We are down to 26 Pest Control Aides and just 15 Exterminators citywide and we had close to 80 workers if you combine both titles under Mayor Bloomberg,” he said. He also suggested the city waive the fees it charges to clean up lots as part of its insect and pest-control program.

One problem in keeping staff is that Pest Control Aides are paid just $15 an hour to clean up what the union website called “the worst trash in the city,” including “the remains of animals [and] human feces.”

Joseph Puleo, president of DC 37’s Local 983, said in a phone interview that 90 percent of his 3,200 members work outside in the city’s park system or repairing highways.

The local represents Park Rangers, Urban Park Rangers, city seasonal workers, park workers who do maintenance and construction work and 650 highway repair workers who work for the Department of Transportation.

“I’m hearing about this for the first time from you guys, and that’s problematic,” Mr. Puleo said. “The city needs to be more pro-active, and all of the agencies need to brief their workers on how best to protect themselves and what to look out for.”
EMS Union’s Concerns

“This is not only a public-health issue, but also an increased health concern for first-responders, as they are exposed to more outdoor activities than the average resident population,” said Oren Barzilay, president of DC 37’s Local 2507, which represents Emergency Medical Technicians and paramedics. “The city needs to provide more solutions on how to protect its workforce, particularly those working outdoors and specifically for those working in areas” where the West Nile virus has been identified.

“The Health Department has developed a comprehensive reference document for city employees titled: Procedures to Prevent the Transmission of Vector-Borne Diseases to City Employees and the Occupational Exposure to Pesticides & Related Chemicals Used to Control Such Diseases,” the DOH wrote in response to a query from this newspaper. “The contents offers guidance on how to prevent and/or minimize exposure to vector-borne diseases such as West Nile virus (WNV), prevent and/or minimize pesticides exposure (including larvicides and adulticides) used to control mosquitoes and how to properly use mosquito-repellants.”

The city has over 61 surveillance sites and will spray pesticides to target mosquitoes if persistent West Nile virus activity is detected.

Precautions to Take

The DOH recommends that workers and the public use an approved insect-repellent containing picaridin, DEET, oil of lemon eucalyptus (not for children under three), or products that contain the active ingredient IR3535.

Windows and screens should be checked for holes or tears. Homeowners should eliminate any standing water around their property, and roof gutters should be clean and able to drain properly.

Swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs should be chlorinated, and when not in active use, drained or covered. Pool covers that collect water are another breeding ground that needs attention.
No Class: Pay Discrimination In Women’s Sports ‘Is’ A Labor Issue
via Western New York Labor - August 1, 2019

The U.S. Women’s National Soccer Team (USWNT) captured hearts worldwide this year for a few very good reasons, including, of course, their fourth straight Women’s World Cup victory.

There was also Co-Captain Megan Rapinoe’s unapologetic, joyful rebuttal of President Trump’s bigotry and bullying - and there was their unflinching demand to get paid what they deserve.

On the field, at victory celebrations, and in press interviews, Members of the USWNT returned to a glaringly unfair point: They are pop culture juggernauts and elite Professional Athletes, and yet their compensation is still only a fraction of what the (much less successful) Men’s Team earns - roughly two-thirds less, according to a lawsuit the team filed against U.S. Soccer earlier this year.

This sort of gendered pay discrimination for Professional Athletes is hardly unusual.

Women Athletes at the highest levels of play, like tennis superstars Venus and Serena Williams, generally make much less money than their male counterparts.

Wimbledon only closed its pay gap in 2007 and the Williams sisters remain fierce advocates for equal pay, particularly for Women of Color.

Professional National Football League Cheerleaders, who are often unjustly left out of these discussions, have taken their fight for proper compensation and better working conditions to court, but many are still barely making minimum Wage, if that, and sexual harassment remains a pervasive workplace issue.

While there are fewer non-binary and trans-professional athletes, those who play in designated women’s leagues often experience the same pay discrimination as Women Athletes.

For example, Harrison Browne, a trans man who was the first openly transgender athlete in a professional U.S. team sport, played on a National Women's Hockey League (NWHL) team until his retirement in 2017. In 2015, the year he joined the Buffalo Beauts, the highest-paid player on his team was Megan Bozek, who made just $22,500. The next year salaries were cut by 38%.

The fight to close the pay gap kicked into high gear in the 1970s.

In 1972, the pivotal Civil Rights Law Title IX came into effect - the Law “protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance,” such as school sports teams (and all other aspects of education that receive Federal funding).

Title IX also required girls and women be given equal opportunities to participate in sports.

Up to that point, only a fraction of young women were involved in school athletics programs.

The number exploded post-1972.

Pay discrimination was launched further into the spotlight in 1973, when tennis legend and longtime advocate for equality Billie Jean King won the historic Battle of the Sexes match against Bobby Riggs.
But Title IX wasn’t a cure-all.

The subject of equal pay has factored into some of the biggest labor disputes in recent sports history, including the on the basketball court, hockey rink and soccer field.

Professional Athletes who are represented by Labor Unions, like the Women’s National Basketball Players Association (WNBPA) or U.S. Women's National Soccer Team Players Association (USWNSTPA), regularly engage in contract negotiations with their employers.

Those who are not Unionized are represented by organizations like the National Women's Hockey League Players' Association (NWHLPA) or Commission for Equity in Women’s Surfing (CEWS), which advocate for their Members - but do not engage in collective bargaining.

Players who are Union Members are able to use their Collective Bargaining Agreements to address concerns and push for improvements in pay, benefits, and working conditions, like any other Union Member.

There is also a long history of Professional Sports Teams (mostly men's baseball and hockey) going on Strike.

It’s important to remember that though the pay scale for professional athletes is often above what most people can fathom, they are still Workers - they can have greedy bosses, workplace safety issues, and be mistreated or underpaid compared with their peers.

And they owe a debt of solidarity to their fellow Workers, something that certain men’s teams seemed to have forgotten during last year’s Marriott Hotel Workers Strike.
SARATOGA SPRINGS — With thoroughbred horse racing under nearly unprecedented public scrutiny following horse deaths, local U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko on Thursday renewed his call for adopting national standards for medications and other issues now regulated by states.

Tonko's proposed Horseracing Integrity Act would ban race-day medications for all thoroughbreds, and set up an independent commission to make recommendations on issues like the use of equine medications, which some people regard as performance-enhancing drugs, during training.

"It is a national sport so it needs a national response when it comes to standards," Tonko, D-Amsterdam, said at a press conference outside the clubhouse entrance to Saratoga Race Course. "This will allow greater integrity and safety for our equine athletes."

The New York Racing Association and many others in the industry support the legislation, which Tonko hopes to bring to a vote in the House Energy and Commerce Committee this fall, and a floor vote by the end of the year.

The bill has bipartisan support. Tonko is a co-sponsoring the bill with Rep. Andy Barr, a Kentucky Republican. They currently have 136 co-sponsors, including North Country U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-Schuylerville. Tonko first proposed the legislation in 2015, and re-introduced it this past March.

The racing industry, which generates about $15.6 billion in economic activity nationally and more than $3 billion in New York state, has faced new scrutiny over horse safety following the deaths of more than 30 horses over the winter and spring at Santa Anita in California.

"[The public] has spoken out for a common-sense solution," Tonko said. "I believe this bill does that."

The Saratoga Race Course and backstretch has seen nine equine deaths since the training season started in April, with three fatalities considered non-racing by the state Gaming Commission, and only one death due to a breakdown while racing on the main track. There are more than 1,000 horses stabled at the track during the July and August racing season.

Nick Zito, a Hall of Fame trainer who has been winning major stakes races for nearly three decades and is a regular at the Saratoga meet, acknowledged the pressure the industry is facing to make racing safer.

"What we do, we do to fix the sport," said Zito, one of the best-known trainers in the nation. "I really believe at this time in our future as horse racing. There are so many people in this industry who want to do the right thing."

NYRA, which operates the Saratoga track, forbids all race-day medications except Lasix, which is widely used to control capillary bleeding. Race day drug standards vary but state, even though about half of all thoroughbreds are raced in more than one state.

"We at NYRA applaud the effort toward uniform regulations," said Patrick McKenna, NYRA's director of communications. Shawn Smeallie, executive director of the Coalition for Horseracing Integrity, said one goal is to improve equine safety by bringing regulation to the use of drugs while horses are in training -- something that is largely unregulated now.
Thoroughbred owners Arthur and Staci Hancock said national standards are necessary. Arthur Hancock comes from a major horse-breeding family, and he and his wife own Stone Farm, a 2,000-acre breeding farm in Kentucky. Staci Hancock is a leader in the Water Hay Oats Alliance, which seeks to end the use of performance-enhancing drugs in horse racing through federal legislation.

"For what we're doing here, there is no alternative," Arthur Hancock said. "This is a great bill and I hope we can all get behind it."

Hancock said banning race-day medications would bring North American racing to the same standard as most of the rest of the world, which bans medications for 24 hours ahead of races.