A LOOK INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

March with PEF on Labor Day, fight for your contract! - p2

The Answer to Burnout at Work is Unionizing - p11

As Labor Day Turns 125, Union Approval Near 50-Year High - p43
There’s a saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words.”

Imagine the Governor marching in the New York City Labor Day Parade, followed three to four spots later in the lineup by hundreds of PEF members with signs demanding a fair contract for all the work they do as nurses, parole officers, fire protection specialists, and so many more titles?

That’s the picture PEF wants to show the Governor and New Yorkers this year, and we need your help.

“We need people to show up,” said Dan Carpenter, PEF’s assistant director of field organizing. “We need to be able to put people in the streets with signs that say PEF demands a fair contract.”

Contract Team Chair Darlene Williams and her team have been working hard at the bargaining table for every PEF member and she is putting out the call for members to give a few hours of their time to help send the Governor a strong message.

“I do not want to be at that parade with only 50 people behind me,” she said. “Bring your friends, bring your kids, bring your family, bring your pets. We need everybody. We need you at the parades. People need to be at every one of these parades.”

Another parade in Massena, Region 7, has been added to the RSVP page. Regions 9 and 12 will bus marchers to the New York City parade, Carpenter said.

The Contract Team is fighting for across the board pay increases and standing firm against increased health care costs, among myriad other small and big table negotiations. “If you’re willing to fight for a contract, then you have got to show up. It can’t be 9 people or 50. It’s got to be hundreds,” Carpenter said.

Members and guests are asked to RSVP so PEF can assure enough supplies for all participants.


Labor Day 2019

Everything You Need to Know about Labor Day
National Today - August 2019

What is the meaning of Labor Day?

Do you get weekends off work? Lunch breaks? Paid vacation? An eight-hour work day? Social security? If you said “yes” to any of these questions, you can thank labor unions and the U.S. labor movement for it. Years of hard-fought battles (and the ensuing legislation they inspired) resulted in many of the most basic benefits we enjoy at our jobs today. On the first Monday in September, we take the day off to celebrate Labor Day and reflect on the American worker’s contributions to our country.

When is Labor Day in 2019?

Labor Day always falls on the first Monday in September, which means anywhere from September 1 through September 7. This year it’s September 2 in the U.S. and Canada — where it’s known as Labour Day. However, this is not the case for most countries — the majority of which celebrate on May 1.

Labor Day History

There’s disagreement over how the holiday began. One version is set in September 1882 with the Knights of Labor, the largest and one of the most important American labor organizations at the time. The Knights in New York City held a public parade featuring various labor organizations on September 5 — with the aid of the fledgling Central Labor Union (CLU) of New York. Subsequently, CLU Secretary Matthew Maguire proposed that a national Labor Day holiday be held on the first Monday of each September to mark this successful public demonstration.

In another version, Labor Day in September was proposed by Peter J. McGuire, a vice president of the American Federation of Labor. In spring 1882, McGuire reportedly proposed a “general holiday for the laboring classes” to the CLU, which would beg The Pullman strike

The Pullman Strike

Ironically, Chicago was also the setting for the bloody Pullman strike of 1894, which catalyzed the establishment of an official Labor Day holiday in the U.S. on the first Monday of September.

The strike happened in May in the company town of Pullman, Chicago, a factory location established by luxury railroad car manufacturer the Pullman Company. The inequality of the town was more than apparent. Company owner George Pullman lived in a mansion while most laborers stayed in barracks-style dormitories. When a nationwide depression struck in 1893, Pullman decided to cut costs the way a lot of executives at the time did—by lowering wages by almost 30% while he kept rent on the dormitories he leased to his workers at pre-depression levels.

Railroad boycott

These conditions ultimately led workers to strike on May 11, 1894. The walkout gained the support of the nationwide American Railroad Union (ARU), which declared that ARU members would no longer work on trains that included Pullman cars. That national boycott would end up bringing the railroads west of Chicago to a standstill and led to 125,000 workers across 29 railroad companies to quit their jobs rather than break the boycott.
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When the Chicago railroad companies hired strikebreakers as replacements, strikers also took various actions to stop the trains. The General Managers Association, which represented local railroad companies, countered by inducing U.S. Attorney General Richard Olney, a former railroad attorney, to intervene. Indianapolis federal courts granted Olney an injunction against the strike, a move that allowed President Grover Cleveland to send in federal troops to break it up.

A few days later, Cleveland realized that he had to act quickly to appease the country’s increasingly agitated labor movement. But he didn’t want to commemorate the Haymarket incident with a May holiday that would invoke radical worker sentiment. So Cleveland harkened back to the first established September 1882 holiday and signed into law that Labor Day in the US would be celebrated on the first Monday in September.

Labor Day vs. May Day

Communist and socialist factions worldwide eventually chose May 1 as the date to mark the Haymarket affair. A 1904 conference issued a plea that trade unions stage rallies on the first day of May — demanding to make the eight-hour workday standard. They organized the action in the name of “universal peace.” The first of May is a national, public holiday in many countries across the world, generally known as “Labour Day,” “International Workers’ Day,” or some similar name — although some countries celebrate a Labour Day on other dates significant to them, such as Canada, which celebrate Labor Day, like the U.S., on the first Monday of September.

Here’s the U.S. Department of Labor’s official tribute to U.S. workers on Labor Day:

“The vital force of labor added materially to the highest standard of living and the greatest production the world has ever known, and has brought us closer to the realization of our traditional ideals of economic and political democracy. It is appropriate, therefore, that the nation pays tribute on Labor Day to the creator of so much of the nation’s strength, freedom, and leadership — the American worker.”
Nearly 60 percent of Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh librarians, library assistants, clerks and IT professionals who cast ballots Wednesday voted in favor of unionizing.

A couple dozen people applauded and hugged after the votes were tallied at the library system’s main branch in Oakland. According to the National Labor Relations Board, 321 employees were eligible to vote from 19 branches. Of those, 173 voted for and 106 against forming a collective bargaining unit with the United Steelworkers. There were 13 challenged votes.

Isabelle Toomey is a librarian at the downtown branch who says she wants a seat at the table.

“It means we have a voice about the job we all care about. It means that we have protection and we can have secure, happy lives doing jobs we love for people who deserve it, too,” she said.

A statement issued after the vote from the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh states that the library system values its staff. “Understandably, this has been an emotional and challenging time. This was a big decision for the future of the Library and one that affects our entire community. There have been strong feelings and spirited debate from staff on both sides of the union issue,” according to the statement. “We respect the process and thank our staff for making their voice heard.”

Organizers say they want a more inclusive and equitable work environment and a stronger voice when it comes to decisions about pay, benefits, hiring and promotions.

But not all say those desires require union representation.

Henry Dragenflo, youth services librarian at Woods Run branch, said he thinks the union is unnecessary and could negatively impact the system. He was one of the 106 to vote no. “I think that the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh is a special place where employees are encouraged and are motivated to make things better for individuals and consider individuals. And they have,” he said.

He referenced stories posted in a Facebook group by others who weren’t in favor of either a union in general or being represented by the United Steelworkers. “I know that there are a lot of staff out there who know their managers are willing to make things better for them. There are also a lot of examples of how employees put their voices together … or where managers considered what staff had to say when they said it all together,” he said.

He also worries that union representation will impact diversity in the system as internal promotions could mean fewer outside hires. Dragenflo said some employees have expressed interest in forming a ‘staff concerns council’ where employees could express grievances without having to involve the union.

James Graham, a teen library assistant at the Hazelwood branch, said for him, a union means having a way to fight for the libraries people deserve.

“We think a union is the best way to represent the community’s interest and the public’s interest within the walls of the library,” he said. The workers filed for a union election with the National Labor Relations Board in June, a year after conversations began. Library drivers and environmental workers are already represented by the Teamsters and SEIU.
Steward's Corner: How to Respond If a Member’s Work Authorization Is Challenged

Guillermo Perez - Labor Notes - August 15, 2019

Every major union in the United States has immigrant members, documented and undocumented.

Union activists and staff who represent these members need to be familiar with the ways these workers may be terminated—or worse still, detained—as a result of challenges to their authorization to work in the U.S.

In 2017 the AFL-CIO came out with an invaluable toolkit of materials to assist unions in responding to these challenges. More on the toolkit later, but first a quick review of how challenges to work authorization typically happen.

THREE TYPICAL SITUATIONS

It all starts with the I-9. Federal law requires all employers to obtain documentation from newly hired employees that identifies them and shows they have authorization to work in the United States. The employer uses this information to complete a federal IRS Form I-9.

Employers are generally not required to re-verify I-9 documentation, but the stepped-up immigration enforcement of the previous three presidential administrations (the current one especially) has meant that an increasing number of immigrant workers are being subjected to re-verification.

Employer receives a Social Security “no-match” letter.

A “no-match letter” is a letter issued to an employer by the Social Security Administration stating that the name and Social Security number submitted to the SSA for an employee do not match.

Though this kind of mismatch most commonly occurs with native-born workers (a 2006 report by the SSA Inspector General estimated that 70 percent of these errors belong to native-born U.S. citizens), these discrepancies are much more likely to generate a no-match letter for foreign-born workers.

The letter requests that the employer provide the correct information within 60 days, but also states that it does not address the employee’s work authorization and is not to be used as a basis for adverse action such as termination or suspension.

Despite that, employers often react to such letters by immediately issuing ultimatums to the named employees: provide a valid number within a matter of days or be terminated.

Employer decides to voluntarily audit itself or sign up for E-Verify.

In some cases, an employer is required to re-verify a worker’s authorization to work because one of the documents the worker originally submitted as proof of work authorization has expired.

But it’s also the case that employers often use self-audits as a means of targeting immigrants who exercise their rights in the workplace—despite the fact that a number of federal laws, including the National Labor Relations Act, prohibit such retaliation.
ICE issues a Notice of Inspection to the employer.

“Paper” raids, as they’re sometimes called, refer to cases in which Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issues a notice that the agency is demanding to inspect some of the employer’s I-9 forms and requesting that they be made available within three business days.

Following the review, ICE may issue a “Notice of Suspect Documents,” informing the employer that one or more employees appear not to be authorized to work in the United States. The notice will give the employer 10 business days to present additional documents showing that the employees in question are authorized to work or risk possible civil penalties for not exercising reasonable care in verifying an employee’s work authorization.

ICE might also take it upon itself to arrest and detain the named employees even before they’ve been given the opportunity to provide valid documentation.

HOW CAN UNIONS RESPOND?

**Bargain good language in your contract.**

First, unions need to get ahead of the threat by pursuing language in their collective bargaining agreements that addresses how the employer is to respond to Social Security no-match letters, self-audits, ICE “paper raids” and actual raids, and employee absences from work to address immigration issues.

The AFL’s toolkit includes model contract language in all of these areas. (Get it online at bit.ly/AFLtoolkit.) Unions that win such language are in a much stronger position to defend workers whose work authorization is called into question.

In some cases the union may only be able to negotiate what amounts to a severance package for the targeted worker, but in other cases, the union may be able to save the targeted worker’s job.

**Inform members of their rights.**

In the absence of strong contract language, unions should distribute “Know Your Rights” information to all their members (which is included in the AFL’s toolkit) in case they’re confronted by ICE in the workplace or anywhere else.

**If the employer receives a no-match letter.**

In the case of a no-match letter, the union should make clear to the employer that the letter is not proof that a worker lacks authorization and cannot be the basis for adverse action like termination or suspension.

Any adverse action should be grieved as a violation of just cause.

**If the employer voluntarily self-audits or adopts E-Verify.**

In the case of an employer voluntarily self-auditing, the union should demand to bargain and request a list of all the employees subject to the audit. Similarly, employers who unilaterally adopt E-Verify should find themselves on the receiving end of a demand-to-bargain letter—and the threat of National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) charges, should they proceed with implementation.
If ICE issues a Notice of Inspection.

If the union becomes aware of an ICE Notice of Inspection, it should immediately demand information regarding the notice, including:

- a copy of the notice
- the names of all workers whose information was turned over to ICE
- what information was turned over
- any information regarding what may have led to the ICE audit

The union should also demand to bargain over the effects of the audit, with the goal of obtaining all the results of the audit, extending the time employees have to provide proof of work authorization, and winning possible reinstatement with seniority for those who prove work authorization after the deadline.

If a union rep is questioned about a worker’s status.

In all of these situations, if a union representative is ever questioned about a worker’s status, he or she should say that the union presumes that everyone hired by the employer is authorized to work and that the union doesn’t ask about status because it’s not relevant to its legal duty of fair representation.

Ultimately, the only real solution to the crisis affecting the estimated 10.7 million undocumented people living in the United States is for immigrant activists and their allies to win a thorough reform of our broken immigration system.

In the meantime, every union with immigrant members should have a plan for how to deal with workplace authorization issues should they arise.
David Rosenfeld, a labor lawyer and self-styled “paid troublemaker,” saw the tweets as good old-fashioned union busting. He went to work. His mission: extract an apology from the man who had threatened to fire “on the spot” any employee who so much as discussed unionizing at his company.

But Rosenfeld’s opponent, Dave Portnoy, the architect and provocateur in chief of the polemical and frat media company Barstool Sports, was aggressively unapologetic.

Rosenfeld is hoping the National Labor Relations Board, which is now investigating charges against Portnoy and Barstool, will change that.

On Tuesday, Portnoy posted his threat to Twitter, responding to a man offering assistance to Barstool employees who may be considering organizing.

“If you work for @barstoolsports and DM this man I will fire you on the spot,” Portnoy wrote.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of unions in the country, condemned Portnoy’s comments, warning him they likely violated the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, the landmark law laying out workers’ rights and encouraging collective bargaining.

Barstool’s founder threatened to fire employees who talk about unions. Then AOC waded in.

Portnoy was unfazed — gleefully defiant, even. Responding on Twitter to a user who wrote “I hope they unionize,” Portnoy said, “Me too. Just so I can crush it and reassert my dominance.”

The next day, Rosenfeld, a veteran attorney who has argued in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, filed a grievance with the NLRB, an independent federal agency charged with safeguarding the right to organize as unions.

The charges triggered an investigation that will require Barstool to respond to Rosenfeld’s complaint and could force Portnoy to delete his tweet, apologize for it and assure his employees that he won’t punish them for unionizing.

In an interview with The Washington Post, Rosenfeld said he filed the charges “just to f--k with these idiots.”

“This guy was just being stupid making these comments,” Rosenfeld said, before referencing two other leaders whose public statements and shoot-from-the-hip tweeting styles have landed them in trouble. “It’s like Elon Musk, he just can’t keep his mouth shut. He thinks he can get away with it because Trump does, but he won’t.”

Writing on behalf of his Committee to Preserve the Religious Right to Organize, Rosenfeld alleges in the complaint that Barstool, “through its crazed president, Dave Portnoy, has threatened to discipline employees on account of Union and/or protected activity.

The Charging Party seeks as relief that Mr. Portnoy be required to tweet and otherwise publicize his severe and sincere apology and to post the appropriate Notice on the public website.”
On Friday, when reports of the investigation became public, Portnoy did indeed take to Twitter — but not for a mea culpa.

“So they are suing for a heart felt apology?” he asked. “Is that really what I just read? How about this? Go f--k yourself. Case dismissed.”

He added: “How soft do you have to be to sue for an apology?”

Traditionally, Rosenfeld said, employers found to be guilty of engaging in these sorts of unfair labor practices would have posted a notice at their workplace, assuring employees they wouldn’t face retribution for their collective-bargaining efforts.

But in the digital age, bosses have had to email these messages. Since the original comments were posted on Twitter, Rosenfeld said he hopes Portnoy will have to publish his apology there, to his nearly 1 million followers.

A Barstool Sports writer made fun of a missing student. He was fired after she was found dead.

If Portnoy refuses, Rosenfeld said, the NLRB can issue an order and ask the court of appeals to hold him in contempt. A representative for the NLRB did not respond to a request for comment.

As of 7 p.m. Friday, Portnoy — whose history of controversy includes refusing to apologize after saying a 20-year-old female employee would be too ugly for the camera in five years — had remained truculent, responding to the NLRB charges with sarcasm and targeted GIFs.

Rosenfeld said Portnoy could avoid trouble altogether by preemptively tweeting his apologies.

“But,” the lawyer said, “it doesn’t look like he’s going to do that.”

Hannah Knowles and Michael Brice-Saddler contributed to this report.
It’s Monday morning and your alarm goes off. As you wake up, the dread of going to work creeps in. You’re feeling exhausted, stressed out, underpaid and underappreciated. It’s a mindset you can’t shake, and no amount of coffee will fix: You have workplace burnout.

The World Health Organization recently included burnout as a legitimate diagnosis in their handbook that guides medical professionals in diagnosing diseases. It is characterized by three indicators: “feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and reduced professional efficacy.”

So, what can be done about burnout? “Self-care” has been touted by social media influencers as the best solution to restoring your mental health, no matter the cause. Sure, healthy food, exercise and sleep are important ways to deal with stress, and we could all use more of each. But eating a salad isn’t going to fix the systemic problems at your workplace, nor will getting a massage give you a voice on the job, or increase your paycheck.

If you work at a nonprofit, you might be all-too-familiar with workplace burnout. Nonprofits are notorious for being understaffed and under-resourced. Workers at nonprofits often have to wear multiple hats for the sake of supporting the mission of the organization, and the resulting stress can take a toll on their mental and physical health.

It is important to address these workplace issues comprehensively, but there is one clear and immediate solution: join a union.

Being in a union means that you and your coworkers work together to fix the problems at your workplace, and then negotiate for solutions with management. Whether this means collectively bargaining for raises, vacation time, better healthcare or more clear-cut job duties, there is an undeniable strength in a union. The negotiations will result in a legally enforceable union contract. Unlike most employee handbooks, once you have a strong union contract, management can’t erode your pay or benefits, or fire you without notice.

Workers at organizations such as the Center for American Progress, Community Change and the Economic Policy Institute have organized with the all-volunteer Nonprofit Professional Employees Union (where I’m president) in order to create strength and stability at their offices. Recently, workers at the New Museum and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York organized with the United Auto Workers. Other nonprofits, like the staff at ALIGN New York, have joined the Communication Workers of America. The nonprofit industry is a growing sector in the U.S. economy, and workers are increasingly demanding the dignity they deserve at work.

According to Tech Impact, the top three reasons for nonprofit workers quitting are being underpaid, lack of upward mobility and excessive workloads. Joining a union can help address each of these issues. Research shows that increasing wages leads to less turnover, which is good for both employees and the organizations at which they work.

Nonprofit workers in unions have also bargained for regulated hours, tuition reimbursement, transportation benefits, paid parental leave and professional development—all of which help workers stick around longer and feel more satisfied at their job. Plus, having a union reduces gender and racial wage gaps, and provides workers the tools with which to fight discrimination.
August 17 is National Nonprofit Day—a time to celebrate all of the vital work done by nonprofits across the country.

Much of that praise is owed to the millions of nonprofit workers who are often working longer hours than their private sector counterparts. Most nonprofit workers know they’re not going to get rich with their chosen occupation, but they still deserve a voice on the job. A unionized workplace provides workers fair and equal treatment through their contract.

But a union is more than a contract—it’s a system to improve your life at work. While having a union won’t magically fix all of your problems, it provides a blueprint for solving them.

Your best defense against burnout isn’t self-care, it’s joining together with your colleagues to build power collectively at your workplace.
I was skeptical of unions. Then I joined one.
A union isn’t just right for Vox Media, but for everyone.
German Lopez - Vox.com - August 19, 2019

On November 17, 2017, right after the Vox Media editorial staff started a push to unionize, I sent out my worst tweets of all time. “I am against #VoxUnion,” I wrote in one of the tweets. I wrote in another, “Vox Media is a generous company (unusually so for digital media), and some people want to take advantage of that.”

“I am generally fine with and even supportive of unions,” I concluded. “Just not this one.”

I wasn’t convinced, based on my experience, that we needed a union to ensure the company treated us well. And I was worried that “lazy” or bad workers could take advantage of union protections to stay on the job — something I feel that police unions, for instance, have helped do with even the worst cops.

Almost immediately, I was barraged by much of lefty Twitter with a huge ratio. A few people tried to genuinely debate me, explaining that unions could be good for even workers who feel they are well off. But it was mostly insult after insult, and after a while, I stopped looking at my notifications.

A year and a half later, sleepless but amped up on coffee and solidarity from a 29-hour marathon final bargaining session, I celebrated with the rest of the bargaining committee, made up of select union members who negotiated directly with the company, as the union and Vox Media management reached a contract agreement.

I had done a complete 180 on unions.

Good organizing and outreach from colleagues helped change my mind about the need for a union at Vox Media specifically. But so did approaching the research on unions the same way I would any topic in my reporting: by looking at the data and talking to experts.

Research suggests that unions have their biggest effects from density. When more people are part of a union, unions don’t just boost their workers’ wages and benefits; they also lift up those they don’t represent.

Unions accomplish this in two ways: The first is through bargaining on wages and benefits, which, because unions tend to represent lower- and middle-class workers, helps people who generally haven’t gained as much from the US economy in recent decades. Second, politically active unions push for progressive policies that lift up the entire working and middle classes, not just their members. Indeed, unions were crucial to some of the biggest gains in this area in the past century, from the New Deal to the Affordable Care Act.

In doing this, unions also help address income and wealth inequality, which have fueled social and political discord in the US in recent decades. Based on reviews of the research, the decline in unions — of about 66 percent since the 1940s and ’50s — can explain about 10 to 30 percent of the rise in inequality we’ve seen in the past several decades.

Toward the end of my journey in unionization, between arguments over the finer details of the contract, the bargaining committee members reminisced on all the work we had put into this up to that point — a year-and-a-half effort that would soon, finally, come to a close. One of them remarked to me: “My favorite part of this process was how much you’ve changed on unions.”
When I wrote those 2017 tweets, I thought unions could be good for some workplaces but others were good enough without unions and so they should be avoided.

I was wrong. We need more unions everywhere.

Unions balance out the workplace

When I first sent out my tweets, I believed that unions could do some good in some places — mainly in low-skilled jobs, like those in fast food and the auto industry. Particularly at Vox Media, I didn’t see the need for a union. The company had long done right by me, offering what seemed like generous benefits with pretty good health insurance, “unlimited” vacation time, 401(k) matching, parental leave for both mothers and fathers, and more.

I saw unions as a balancing act to corporate interests, offering protections to lower-skilled workers who, without collective action, didn’t have much power over their bosses. They would make sense at McDonald’s and Amazon warehouses (both of which are not unionized) and at GM car factories, I thought. But not high-skilled industries like digital media, where workers could, on their own, use their skill sets as leverage over their bosses.

It was, admittedly, a pretty selfish — and, in retrospect, naive — way of looking at a union.

The first thing I learned is not everyone had the same experience; even in a company that genuinely does try to be the best in digital media, things can slip through the cracks, and a bad manager can make a world of difference. I had always gotten along very well with my bosses at Vox, but that could change in one corporate reshuffling. I also started to worry about the future: What if, in a very volatile journalism industry, I’m laid off, or Vox is sold off to another company? Who’s to say the next owners would be as good as the current ones?

I began to see myself as one company reshuffle or sale or economic downturn away from losing all I worked for. Research, meanwhile, has consistently shown that unions are good for most people in them. A 2017 review of the evidence by John Ahlquist, a political economist focused on labor and inequality at the University of California San Diego, found that men in the private sector at unionized workplaces make about 15 to 25 percent more than those at non-unionized ones. Another review by Jake Rosenfeld, a sociologist focused on unions and economic inequality at Washington University in St. Louis, reached similar conclusions, noting that unions consistently produce a premium for workers in them.

A recent study by Henry Farber, Daniel Herbst, Ilyana Kuziemko, and Suresh Naidu, using surveys and other data going back to the 1930s, found that this union premium has been remarkably consistent over the decades. And while less educated workers seem to get a bigger premium, higher-skilled workers still get one too.

Part of this is the result of collective bargaining, as unions negotiate higher pay for their members. But Rosenfeld told me that unions also give a “cultural voice” to workers — one that checks executive excess. It’s this concept, first described to me by my coworkers, that really attracted me to a union.

Companies’ stated goals and values can be undermined by bad managers or overwhelmed by market forces. And even at a good company, these problems can pop up despite efforts to the contrary, and it’s always a risk to speak out about the problems alone. The cultural voice gives a way to address those problems that would otherwise go unheard. During my year or so in the bargaining committee, I saw this firsthand: People would come to us with problems, the committee would raise the problems to management, and the company, which sometimes was genuinely not even aware of the problems, would try to fix them.

That’s exactly what I hoped a union could accomplish.
Unions fight income inequality

When I started out at Vox in 2014, I wasn’t making much money: $30,000 as a writing fellow in Washington, DC. I have risen up the ranks since then to make far more than that. In writing my anti-union tweets, I was focused on one side of the equation: that I had the opportunities to rise up quickly through the ranks.

Molly Armstrong, with Democratic Socialists of America, takes part in a rally at Roots International Academy in Oakland, California, on Tuesday, February 26, 2019, during the Oakland teachers strike for better pay. Jane Tyska/MediaNews Group/The Mercury News via Getty Images
What I gave less thought to was that I had been making $30,000 to begin with. Vox, as it grew out of startup mode, had since publicly increased salaries for the lowest-paid writing position. But I realized I wanted to make sure the higher pay for the lower end was written into a contract, to guarantee no one went through what I did again. In fact, I was willing to give up some of my money, or raises, for the benefit of the lower-paid. I wanted to make Vox Media just a bit more equal when it came to pay.

It turns out that this kind of wage compression is one thing unions do very well: Ahlquist’s research review found that unions tend to bring wages up for a workforce’s lower end while keeping wages for the higher end a little flatter or even leading them to decrease. One study he cited found that unionization led to a 12 percent reduction in pay for the top management, such as the CEO or other executives. Part of that is likely a balancing act: As more of a company’s revenue or surplus goes to its lower-level workers, there’s just going to be less for higher earners.

This is the societal case for unions: In general, they help reduce inequality. And it’s the decline of unions that helps explain, in part, why inequality has gotten worse and worse over the past several decades.

Since the 1970s, the top 1 percent in the US has reaped the bulk of the benefits of the growing economy, through explosive income growth, while everyone else has seen much smaller gains or even stagnation. Meanwhile, the share of American workers in unions has declined from around a third of workers in the 1940s and ’50s to about 10 percent today — a trend that shows little sign of reversing.

“From the research perspective, if you’re interested in more progressive domestic policy, unions have been the answer to unchecked corporate power,” Rosenfeld, the sociologist, said. “More unions mean the kind of counterweight to policies that benefit the economic elite. There’s pretty good decades of research demonstrating this.”

By using data going back to the 1930s, Naidu’s study found about 10 percent of growing economic inequality could be explained by declining union membership. “Not nothing,” Naidu told me, adding that it’s likely a conservative estimate because the study couldn’t capture all the downstream effects of declining unionization (such as whether a lack of unions lobbying for workers made it easier to move some jobs overseas).

Other research has put the estimate higher. According to Ahlquist’s review, the decline in unions explains about 30 percent of the growth in wage inequality for men in the private sector from 1973 to 2007, and about 20 percent for women.

Michael Strain, an economist at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute, told me it’s likely true that “the decline of unions accelerated the growth of inequality.” But he argued that there have been bigger forces at play — particularly technological advances, from the internet to automation, that led to more jobs and higher pay for more skilled workers and the opposite for those at the lower end. We should focus on addressing the fallout from that, Strain said, instead of boosting unions that, he believes, may stifle economic growth.
The evidence indicates that technological change has played a big role in the rise of inequality, but unions have too. The most convincing study I found, published by researchers Tali Kristal and Yinon Cohen, looked at computerization in different workplaces to gauge what drove inequality. It concluded that “declining unions and the fall in the real value of the minimum wage explain about half of rising inequality, while computerization explains about one-quarter.” Depending on the time and industry, union decline could even be the biggest factor.

This study does not come with 100 percent certainty. All of the research in this field involves imperfect data and methodological compromises.

But it’s the best data we have. And there seems to be widespread agreement that unions have some effect on reducing inequality, particularly when there are more of them. That’s a case for more unions — everywhere.

Unions also balance out politics
Unions’ equalizing effects apply to politics too: While the increasingly wealthy and big corporations have fueled a rightward shift in American politics and policy since the era of Ronald Reagan, unions could help — as they especially had before they were weakened in the 1980s — swing the pendulum back in the other direction.

The most illuminating study on union’s effects on politics comes from researchers James Feigenbaum, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, and Vanessa Williamson. Their working paper compared bordering counties across state lines: one county in a state without anti-union right-to-work laws (which allow workers to refuse to pay union dues and fees even after a workplace votes one in, depriving unions of a revenue source), and the other in a state with them.

They found that right-to-work laws reduced the presidential vote share for Democrats by 3.5 percentage points, with similar effects in other races. Overall voter turnout also dropped by 2 percentage points overall. (For reference, Donald Trump in 2016 beat Hillary Clinton by 0.7 points in Wisconsin, which adopted a right-to-work law under Republican leadership in 2015.)

At the state level, the study found that right-to-work laws also shifted policy to the right on labor issues, and led to different policy outcomes regarding, for example, prevailing wage and minimum wage laws — the kinds of policies that can help close income inequality.

Hertel-Fernandez told me that this is an underappreciated aspect of unions, but an important one: Just as unions balance out the workplace to help workers, they also help balance politics by creating a powerful set of organizations that can counter economic elites and corporate interests that often have a big say in Washington, DC, or state capitals.

Hertel-Fernandez compared what unions do for the left to what gun clubs and evangelical churches do on the right — mobilizing voters, educating them about issues, and even creating pathways to running for office. “If you’re in a union, you have experience showing up to meetings where you’re speaking in public, running for elected office for your union,” he said. “You gain these skills that you otherwise might not have if you weren’t in a union." I relate to this. Before I posted my tweets, I honestly hadn’t given unions or labor issues much thought. Sure, I read about them on the news, going back especially to Wisconsin’s fight over an anti-union law in 2011. But my policy interests by and large lie in other areas — including criminal justice issues, guns, and drug policy.

Since joining a union, I have spent a lot more time reading about unions and labor issues. As a member of the union’s bargaining committee, I also got a lot of experience — some more than I, well, bargained for — over how to negotiate, organize, prioritize different constituents’ wants and needs, communicate with a broader public, manage expectations, set up events, talk and argue in public, and more. I had little need for these skills before. And unions appear to do this for a lot of people, based on Hertel-Fernandez’s research.
Every union isn’t the same. Some unions, like those for police or coal companies, may not advocate for progressive policies. And some workers may not like it when a union gets too political; Republican members of a union, for example, may not be too happy if their union endorses Elizabeth Warren over Donald Trump.

But unions’ political activism, on net, seems to shift America toward supporting progressive policies that can help workers, offering another explanation for studies finding more unions mean higher wages and less inequality.

Those on the right know this. As Republican strategist Grover Norquist wrote in 2017, “If Act 10 [an anti-union law for public-sector employees] is enacted in a dozen more states, the modern Democratic Party will cease to be a competitive power in American politics. It’s that big a deal.”

Unions don’t have to come with big downsides
I had another concern with Vox Media’s union: Given the volatile nature of the journalism industry, could a union lead to layoffs? This is a common argument from critics of unions: Once wages go up, employers cut back on overall hiring and work hours to make up for the higher costs.

There’s some research suggesting this is true. One line of studies, by economist Brigham Frandsen and others, looked at what happens to workers after close union representation elections, based on the idea that places where workers approve a union by a small margin aren’t too different from places that narrowly reject a union.

In one of the better versions of these studies, looking at unionization efforts in nursing homes, Frandsen and his colleagues found unionization did appear to reduce employment for some workers, particularly those with higher incomes, even as they led to higher wages, particularly for lower-paid workers.

This line of research doesn’t provide total assurance. One of Frandsen’s studies indicated that places where unions marginally win and the places where unions barely lose might actually be more different than economists initially thought, undermining the basis for such studies. Still, they’re the best evidence we have about unions’ effects on employment.

Naidu, who was part of the study measuring unions’ effects going back to the 1930s, argued that the research on unions’ effects on employment “is not great” but that, ultimately, “the net effects are likely small.”

 Altogether, the research and statistics don’t completely dispel concerns, raised by Strain at the American Enterprise Institute, that unions may lead to slower economic growth and less employment. But the effect seems small, so hard to detect in studies that it may not exist at all. There’s a bit of give and take, too: Even if unions do depress economic growth to a small extent, that could be worth the cost if it guarantees that the remaining growth benefits the lower and middle classes, instead of the super wealthy, to an extent that is not true today.

Besides, some countries with strong unions still have really strong economies. Experts pointed out that Norway has much higher union membership than the US, with more than half of workers in unions, but still a lower unemployment rate (3.4 percent) than America (3.7 percent). Norway is also a far more economically egalitarian country than the US. Yes, there are big differences between the economies of Norway and the US, but the numbers at least suggest that higher union density isn’t incompatible with a healthy economy.

Separately, I also worried about unions protecting their worst members — whether that’s people who were “lazy” and created more work for everyone else, or those who were sexual harassers or worse. Police unions are particularly notorious in this regard; many defend their worst members after shootings, blame the victims of such shootings, and even claim that “blue racism” against police officers is as bad as actual racism.
But how unions deal with their worst members really falls on individual unions and their members to decide. Unions can be democratic, and they can determine what they value and create agreements that reflect that. We didn’t want to be a police union at Vox, so while our contract provides more general protections for members, it’s still very much possible to fire people for, say, plagiarism or sexual harassment.

Marissa Brookes, a political scientist focused on unions at the University of California Riverside, put it this way: The union “is not good or bad. It has the potential to create a great deal of good if we steer it toward diversity and equality. But like any organization, it can be captured by bias, captured by special interests.”

If the United States were to see more unions, some of them would undoubtedly be bad, just as some governments, politicians, and corporations are corrupt. But the downside of bad unions, or unions’ potentially negative effects on employment or economic growth, would have to be weighed with the proven benefits unions have on net for workers’ wages and overall inequality.

Policy reforms can encourage more unions
Historically, economist Richard Freeman found in 1997, unions have grown in spurts. He argued that there needed to be a push from the bottom up to a certain level of density or membership, at which point unions would rapidly expand as they gain more members and resources to mobilize.

For this to happen again, there needs to be more interest in unions. There need to be more workers like those of Vox Media and other digital media outlets, but in all sectors, willing to organize and with the ability to actually do it.

A survey released last year found there’s already solid public support for unionizing. Researchers Thomas Kochan, Duanyi Yang, William Kimball, and Erin Kelly wrote, “To put these findings in perspective, if all of the non-union workers who have a desire to join a union had the opportunity do so, union membership could increase by approximately 58 million workers, essentially quadrupling the number currently represented by a union, which would raise union density to 54%.”

That’s not quite how unionizing works. Workers can’t just sign up to be in a union; each workplace has to go through the arduous organizing process and get at least half of their qualifying coworkers to support it. But the finding indicates that there’s a lot of support for unions — which is backed by Gallup’s surveys too.

So why haven’t more workplaces organized? By and large, for the same reason that unions collapsed in the first place, experts told me: Union-unfriendly laws and regulations made it easy for employers to shut down unions. So with the dawn of globalization and other shifts in the economy (from more competition abroad to a more fractured business environment), many companies didn’t hesitate — especially with the support of politicians like Reagan — to take advantage of the weak laws to tear down unions.

Kate Andrias, a legal scholar focused on labor law at the University of Michigan, described current federal labor laws as heavily tilted against unions.

One example: Penalties for violations of labor laws are extremely weak, to the point “that it’s actually economically rational for employers to engage in them,” Andrias explained.

Imagine that an employee manages to win an unfair labor practice claim in front of the National Labor Relations Board, which is already a difficult challenge. For that victory, she’d only be entitled to back pay minus any wages earned in the interim, Andrias said. Especially for a bigger company, paying part of a worker’s wage just isn’t a significant penalty.
A lot of anti-union conduct is also legal, such as replacing striking workers. And the laws and rules themselves are largely outdated, because they were built for direct employer-employee relations instead of the tangle of subcontracting that’s become more common in recent decades.

“The weaknesses were always in the law,” Andrias said. “But there was a shift — that historians write about — in which employers began much more aggressively exploiting those weaknesses in the 1980s.”

Among the union-friendly experts I spoke to, they generally echoed the same goal for labor policy: create a system of sectoral bargaining. This kind of system, used in some countries in Europe, essentially creates unions for entire industries. So fast-food workers, say, would all be represented by a single union that would negotiate a baseline contract with the whole industry, from McDonald’s to Taco Bell. This would help address concerns about how unions can work in a more fractured economy and lead to universal or near-universal union density.

But that’s probably not going to happen in the US anytime soon, given that even milder reforms foundered while Congress and the White House were held by Democrats. In the meantime, Andrias said, there are some smaller ways that unions could get a policy boost at the federal level: increase penalties for violating the law, bar employers from permanently replacing workers who strike, eliminate prohibitions on secondary boycotts, and shorten time periods for representation elections (to prevent employers from stalling the process), among other fixes.

Short of that, people could start today by trying to organize their own workplaces. As noted above, it’s not an easy process. It is definitely risky.

But unions are worth it. It’s still weird to write that, nearly two years after I tweeted about lazy workers taking advantage of Vox Media’s union.

But as I dug deeper and deeper into the research, and as I engaged in the actual organizing and bargaining processes, I was repeatedly proven wrong, in large part because I initially focused way too much on the bad examples of unions instead of the good ones. When you stack up all the research and look at the broader picture, though, the net effect of unions — bad examples included — is good for the typical worker.

I hope more Americans go through the transformation that I did. We’d all be better for it.
If you’re looking for ways to entertain the kids this summer, why not take some day trips that celebrate union workers? Here are some sites that will be enjoyable and educational for kids and adults alike:

City of Workers, City of Struggle – This exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York, 1120 Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street, explores the fascinating history of Labor in NYC, and how the Labor movement changed New York.

New York Transit Museum – Located below ground in a historic 1936 IND subway station at the corner of Boerum Place and Schermerhorn Street in Brooklyn Heights, the museum tells the story of New York’s transit system. Displays include historical subway cars and turnstiles through the decades, interactive exhibits, and a history of the work that went into the construction of the tunnels and tracks.

Firefighter museums – The New York metropolitan area is home to several museums dedicated to firefighters that are great for the whole family. They cover history, fire safety and prevention, and will give kids a taste of what it’s like to be a firefighter.

Fire Zone, 34 West 51st Street, New York, NY 10020

New York City Fire Museum, 278 Spring Street, New York, NY 10013

Nassau County Firefighters Museum, 399 Charles Lindbergh Boulevard at the Cradle of Aviation Museum, Uniondale, NY 11530

Newark Fire Museum, 49 Washington Street at the Newark Museum, Newark, NJ 07102 Learn more

FASNY Museum of Firefighting, 117 Harry Howard Avenue, Hudson, NY 12534

The National 9/11 Memorial & Museum – A beautiful and touching museum that pays respects to those who lost their lives on 9/11 and to all responders. 180 Greenwich St, World Trade Center, New York City, NY

Brooklyn Bridge – Why not acknowledge the workers who build and maintain our bridges – including ditch diggers, welders and other iron workers, bridge painters, and electricians – by taking a walk across the charming Brooklyn Bridge? It provides an especially enjoyable walk across the East River due to its dedicated walkways. Learn more

We have so much to be thankful for, and we’re fortunate to have so many venues where we can show our appreciation for the hard-working men and women who keep our city running.
SEIU President Mary Kay Henry to launch 'Unions for All' push in Milwaukee speech
Bill Glauber - The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - August 20, 2019

(MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN) – National Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President Mary Kay Henry has unveiled an ambitious "Unions for All" proposal - and Democratic Presidential Candidates had better take notice.

The two million-Member Union's endorsement is up for grabs and contingent on a candidate backing the proposal that aims to overhaul the Nation's Labor Laws and give Workers easier access to joining a Union.

Henry outlined the initiative in a speech to SEIU Members and other workers at Turner Hall Ballroom in Milwaukee, which is just down the street from Fiserv Forum, the main venue of the 2020 Democratic National Convention.

"We think Working People all across this country are going to want to hear from Democratic Leaders on how they'll drive the change we need," Henry said in an interview with The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "Milwaukee matters in terms of who needs to show up and vote in the election. Milwaukee knows the important tradition of Unions. There is a history of Unionizing in Milwaukee and Wisconsin."

Henry acknowledged Labor setbacks in the State under former Republican Governor Scott Walker, who implemented Act 10 and signed Right-To-Work (for less) Legislation, but she held up a Labor Agreement at Fiserv Forum as a model - with the National Basketball Association’s (NBA) Milwaukee Bucks requiring contractors to pay their Workers a minimum of $12.50 an hour, increasing to $15 by 2023.

Peter Rickman, the President of the Milwaukee Area Service and Hospitality Workers Organization, said: "The model here is that no matter who the employer is, Workers in the Deer District not only have a Minimum Wage closer to a Living Wage, but that they can join a Union and bargain a contract."

The prevalence of Workplace Violence in health care remains higher than most professions.

According to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), approximately 75% of nearly 25,000 workplace assaults reported annually in health care and social service settings.

The National Crime Victimization Survey showed Health Care Workers have a 20% higher chance of being the victim of Workplace Violence than other Workers.

The American College of Emergency Physicians reported that 70% of Emergency Physicians have reported acts of violence against them, yet only 3% pressed charges.

“So many people ‘don’t want to talk about it.’ ‘They think they will be in trouble if they talk at work about being assaulted,’” Simpson said.

According to Henry, the "Unions for All" proposal is based on four principles beginning with a push for industry-wide bargaining to negotiate wages, benefits and working conditions nationwide.

For instance, she said the next President should "convene McDonald's, Burger King" and other major Fast-Food Chains "to negotiate better wages and working conditions."
She said the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) "should be a floor, not a ceiling, so that cities and states can innovate."

The third principle is to ensure "that every public dollar is used to create good, Union Jobs and that every Federal Worker and contractor makes at least $15 an hour and has the opportunity to join a Union."

And the fourth principle is to put "good Union Jobs at the center of any major economic proposal."

Henry said it is "important that we demand more and push the imagination of the presidential field." "When you allow more Unions for Working People, everybody benefits, not just Union Members. So it's a good economic stimulus program to kick stagnant wages in the butt and get wages rising for everybody in this country," she said.
Nurses Say Violent Assaults Against Health Care Workers Are A ‘Silent’ Epidemic
Western NY Labor via Nurse.org - August 21, 2019

With only six months on the job as a Registered Nurse (RN), Angela Simpson got hit hard on the top of her head by an agitated dementia patient.

His IV had stopped - which hurt him, and she was trying to help him.

“It ‘shocked me, so I jumped back.’ ‘He was on his way to punch me a second time’,” the Maryland Nurse says.

But she was able to avoid another hit.

“It was ‘so alarming and so unnatural, but I felt like I had gone through some christening experience’ and I was ‘no longer the new girl,” she says.

She considered herself lucky because she walked away with a bump on her head.

In health care, there remains a big cloak of secrecy over Workers defending themselves from abusive patients and never reporting the incidents.

According to the American Nurses Association (ANA), 1 out of 4 Nurses are assaulted on the job.

After hearing too many sad and horrific stories of Nurses, Doctors and others getting hurt, maimed or killed in their jobs, Simpson founded in 2017 and serves as National Director of the not-for-profit Silent No More Foundation.

She has been building the organization with a growing number of members on the Silent No More Foundation Facebook Page and an affiliated Facebook Group Page for more private interaction. Anyone interested can join one or both.

She has gained very committed volunteers who are lobbying State Legislators to get more Protection Laws.

She also inspired thousands of interested people to contact their House representatives during the organization’s National Call-In Day in mid July.

Simpson is a Registered Nurse with a tablet and a stethoscope.

Her husband is a Corrections Officer.

“It is ‘more likely’ that I will be hurt on the job by an assault ‘than him.’ ‘He gets to use pepper spray and has a bullet-proof vest and he has others to back him up.’ ‘He has the right to defend himself,’” she says.

Health Care Workers continually become the subjects of patients, family members or inmates’ rage, confusion or anxiety.

Studies show over and over again that violence against Health Care Workers has become a rising epidemic.
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“So many people ‘don’t want to talk about it.’ ‘They think they will be in trouble if they talk at work about being assaulted,’” Simpson said.
The New York State Public Employees Federation has endorsed Austin Morgan for election to the State Senate in New York’s 57th District, covering Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua and southern Livingston counties.

The seat, formerly held by Catharine Young, will be filled this fall in a special election. The Public Employees Federation (PEF) represents 54,000 professionals across New York State, including nurses, accountants, engineers, parole officers, road and bridge workers, and employees at local correctional facilities, youth centers, psychiatric centers and other health care facilities.

After a local interview, followed by regional and state committee votes to endorse, PEF President Wayne Spence wrote in a letter to the Morgan for Senate campaign: “We know that you appreciate and value the work performed by public employees in your district and around the state. You also understand the needs of working men and women and their families and support the programs and services that address these needs. We look forward to working with you in the NYS Senate and wish you well in the upcoming campaign.”

Morgan said, “I am extremely proud that PEF recognizes the truth in this race: Austin Morgan is the one who stands and fights for working men and women. For years, this union endorsed Cathy Young, and now they are choosing me to continue her work. The bedrock of our campaign has always been creating an economy that works for the working class. That is my number one priority. This is about our families, our freedoms, and our future.”

Morgan has also been previously endorsed by the Rural Caucus of the New York State Young Democrats, and Run For Something, an organization that supports young, first-time candidates for local office.

Austin Morgan is a son of Freedom, NY, rooted in the proud working-class tradition of the region. As a first-generation graduate of Cornell University, an educator, a former business manager, and a former State Senate employee, Morgan said he has the experience and vision necessary to lead the 57th district. Morgan believes that a fresh perspective and new energy are key to restoring the promise of our communities.

“Albany has forgotten Freedom for decades, along with too many of the towns and villages we call home. I am running to change that,” Morgan said. “We need a State Senator in the majority with a vested interest in our future — someone with the plans and power to create positive growth, not someone who will sit on the sidelines and tow the party line. It’s time to put people over politics and help our counties.”
Bernie Sanders' plan to rebuild labor unions would be a huge win for working Americans
Ryan Cooper - The Week - August 22, 2019

David Portnoy, the founder of the fratty oaf website Barstool Sports, recently got national press attention for flagrantly violating labor law on Twitter. After sharing an article about how much he hates unions, he threatened that if any of his employees talked to a labor reporter, "I will fire you on the spot."

According to the Department of Labor, the National Labor Relations Act "forbids employers from interfering with employees in the exercise of rights to form, join or assist a labor organization for collective bargaining." Portney is now under investigation by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). But, in a mark of the moribund status of American labor law, it is virtually certain that he will not be meaningfully punished — as other right-wing publishers have not in similar circumstances.

Luckily — for Barstool Sports employees but also for anybody who currently has a job, plans to get one in the future, or whose friends and family work — Bernie Sanders is riding to the rescue with a proposal for what would be the most sweeping pro-union program in the history of the United States. It's not just high time employers were forced to obey the dang law, it's also a long overdue way to help the American worker.

Unions used to be the foundation of the American middle class, and their deliberate destruction is one major reason why the American economy is so hideously unequal (and prone to crisis). As Vox's German Lopez writes:

Unions were crucial to some of the biggest gains in this area in the past century, from the New Deal to the Affordable Care Act. In doing this, unions also help address income and wealth inequality, which have fueled social and political discord in the US in recent decades. Based on reviews of the research, the decline in unions — of about 66 percent since the 1940s and '50s — can explain about 10 to 30 percent of the rise in inequality we've seen in the past several decades. [Vox]

Probably the core of the Sanders plan is a total overhaul of the basic structure of union organizing. Currently, American unions are organized separately at each individual workplace: First you identify your bargaining unit and a union to join, then you send the NLRB cards proving at least 30 percent of the workforce wants a union, then you hold an election, and if you get a majority, hey presto, you're unionized! It's not that tough in theory, but in practice there are multiple legal opportunities for employers to trip up or stall the process — and a great many illegal ones that they usually get away with.

Sanders would replace that with sectoral bargaining, as seen in much of Europe. Under this model all the unions and all the employers in a particular industry negotiate a bargain for wages and benefits, and then the government extends the contract to cover every employee in the industry — whether they are members of a union or not. As Dylan Matthews argues, this would drastically reduce the incentive for individual bosses to stop their workers from organizing, and stop investors from strategically directing capital to non-union firms.

He would also streamline and upgrade the union formation process in several ways. Instead of the two-step process above, unions could be certified with a simple majority petition. He would establish a legal right to unionize, remove the ability of employers to reject a first contract, and make it easier to force them into binding arbitration. He would stop employers from being able to escape unionization by labeling their employees as supervisors or independent contractors, and ban them from forcing their workers to attend anti-union harangues. He would classify franchises like McDonald's as "joint employers," allowing such employees to unionize under the corporate parent instead of store-by-store. He would ban contract-infringing state laws which forbid employers from signing closed shop agreements with unions, and mandate that businesses that merge must honor their existing union contracts.
Then Sanders would clean up a number of smaller labor items. He would end at-will employment, requiring employers to show "just cause" before they terminated someone. He would re-legalize solidarity boycotts (where a union in one firm takes collective action to support workers outside their own workplace), and ban permanent replacement of striking workers. And he would reverse the 2014 law signed by President Obama which made it easier to cut benefits for multi-employer pensions.

Finally, Sanders would ensure that existing union members do well under Medicare-for-All. He would require that employers with union-negotiated health benefits give any savings they obtain from universal Medicare back to employees in wages or benefits. (The objective here is clearly to get the big unions on board the Medicare-for-All train.)

Of course, writing a new bill would not guarantee the law wouldn't be ignored as the NLRA currently is. But writing a new, more aggressive law is a time-tested way to shake off the legal dust — as the 1965 Civil Rights Act did for the 1875 law of the same name. However, Sanders would still definitely need to find some hardened pro-union legal experts to appoint to the NLRB — something that should be done even if reforms can't be passed. A law is only as strong as its enforcement mechanism.

At any rate, if actually implemented, this would upend American political economy. Union organizing would explode overnight, working-class wages would soar, and the income of executives and investors would fall sharply. It would be a glorious victory for nearly all of the American people — which is why big business will fight it to their dying breath. But it's just possible that under President Sanders, we could enjoy the spectacle of scofflaw bosses like David Portney being hauled out of their offices by federal marshals.
**Cuomo administration in early talks about police agency merger**  
David Lombardo - Times Union - August 23, 2019

ALBANY — Speculation about the state Park police being absorbed into the State Police has returned, with efficiency and salary improvements being mentioned as potential benefits.

A merger is on the wish list of the union representing the about 270 police officers in the state Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, which maintains that the administrative change would make the state's 180 parks safer and save taxpayers money in the long run.

The change would also result in better financial perks for the park police officers, including improved disability and retirement benefits, which their union says would help address retention challenges.

"We've heard from a number of different sources that something is happening about a possible merger, but when we've approached the agency about it they've been tight lipped," said Daniel De Federicis, executive director of the Police Benevolent Association of New York State, which represents park police officers.

New York State Troopers PBA President Thomas Munger also confirmed that "high-level talks" about the proposal are going on.

Cuomo senior adviser Richard Azzopardi said discussions of a merger were at a preliminary stage.

"We're always examining ways to create efficiencies and better deploy resource and this is something we're looking at to see if it makes sense," Azzopardi said.

Sen. Andrew Gounardes, a Brooklyn Democrat who sponsors legislation merging the police forces, believes it would strengthen the park police and address their high turnover rates.

"It would also create efficiencies and improvements by sharing trainings, equipment and more," Gounardes said.

It's those efficiencies, as well as reduced costs associated with replacing officers, that would make a merger beneficial to state taxpayers, according to the PBA of NYS. The potential savings would largely come from reduced academy classes, which they claim would offset the costs associated with paying higher benefits.

A merger could be good or bad for the State Police, depending on how it's handled, according to the troopers' union. A successful integration, Munger said, would include giving the State Police the funds to assume new responsibilities and officers.

"From day one, the governor has preached consolidation of services," he said. "With that in mind, we'll support the governor if this is his goal."

The State Police agency has absorbed other law enforcement officers in the past, including the Parkway Police on Long Island in 1980 and the Capitol police in 1997.

"We're not reinventing the wheel," Munger said.

Manuel Vilar, a PBA of NYS board member and Park police sergeant, said the parks officers don't have the resources to adequately meet all their responsibilities at once.
A merger wouldn't necessarily address staffing concerns at the parks, but it would ensure access to a larger pool of officers, especially during periods of peak demand.

Vilar also said it made sense to have the officers working under an agency solely dedicated solely to policing.

In recent years, the officers with the two police forces have begun to work more closely together, including in emergencies and for major events, such as the ongoing New York State Fair in Syracuse.

Bipartisan legislation was overwhelming approved this spring that would address one of the concerns of Park police officers by providing them - as well as Environmental Conservation officers and forest rangers - the same accidental disability benefits as State Police officers.

The legislation has yet to be sent to the governor for his signature.

Cuomo vetoed a comparable measure last year because it would mean a one-time payment of $2.2 million and an additional $350,000 in recurring costs. He also contended in his veto message that improved disability rights "could have been negotiated as part of the collective bargaining process."
The National Labor Relations Board may soon change the rules on how profane, verbally abusive, and racially insensitive labor activists can be and still be protected under the National Labor Relations Act.

The board, the main federal labor law enforcement agency, is seeking public comment on the subject for an upcoming case.

"We will be requesting public briefing on whether to adhere to, modify, or overrule the standard applied in previous cases in which extremely profane or racially offensive language was judged not to lose the protection of the NLRA," said NLRB Chairman John Ring in a letter Wednesday to Democratic Sen. Patty Murray, the ranking minority member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee.

The board is seeking public comment on a 2017 case called General Motors LLC, currently still before the board.

The case involves whether a worker who was a union official lost NLRA protection because he threatened to "shove" an item up the backside of a supervisor and spoke in "slave-like vernacular."

The NLRB is concerned that the existing policy of declaring such profane speech to be protected by the act may be outside what is considered acceptable workplace behavior, said a knowledgeable source. The issue that has come up in several recent cases before the board.

The act protects workers engaged in what is called "concerted protected activity" — organizing for a union or operating as a union official — from being fired.

The standard is meant to protect workers making critical statements or allegations regarding the employer. The law assumes that firing a worker engaged in such activity is retaliation by the employer.

However in some recent cases, such as the General Motors one, workers engaged in union activity have been documented making verbally abusive or harassing statements to others that have little to do with union matters.

In the 2016 case Cooper Tire and Rubber, the then-Democratic majority board ordered a manufacturer to pay restitution to the employees it fired because they shouted racial epithets at replacement workers who crossed a picket line.

The five-member board currently only has four members and the term of Democratic appointee Lauren McFerran ends in December. The board is hoping to get as much done as it can before her term expires, because it is unclear when the Senate will fill its vacancies.
 Fifty Years after Stonewall: LGBTQ Workers Seek Equality
Saurav Sarkar - Labor Notes - August 23, 2019

This summer marked the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising, where police raids on a New York bar led to six days of protests and clashes, sparking the modern lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movement. We decided to take a look around the country at some of the organizing by LGBTQ workers and allies in the labor movement today. Here’s a flavor of what’s happening in the post-marriage equality era. —Editors

LGBTQ workers continue to face discrimination and unemployment at higher rates than the population as a whole.

Nine percent of LGBT people in the United States are unemployed, according to UCLA’s Williams Institute, compared to 5 percent of the entire U.S. population. And 27 percent have limited access to adequate food, compared to 15 percent.

So you might expect unions and LGBTQ organizations to be spending lots of time and resources supporting workers fighting for fair access to good jobs.

But on the contrary, says the new National LGBTQ Workers Center, mainstream queer and trans rights organizations are not attentive to economic justice issues—and the labor movement is frequently out of touch with LGBTQ workers.

The worker center was founded last year by Joan Jones, a former Service Employees (SEIU) organizer and educator, and seven other LGBTQ people of color. It’s headquartered in Chicago and entirely volunteer-run at the moment. The group is seeking new board members and Chicagoland planning committee members.

“What we don’t want is to create another microcosm of the labor movement where people feel left out,” said Jones.

The group aims to develop a mass membership base, with leadership specifically from those sections of the LGBTQ community that are most marginalized: people of color, especially Black people, and transgender people. There are 2 million LGBTQ people of color in the United States.

It also plans to create a hotline in Illinois for workers to report discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Through this hotline, the center hopes to map where discrimination is taking place, support workers who feel isolated, and bring together LGBTQ workers who work in the same industry or the same neighborhood.

The group’s first major step was a recent study on LGBTQ workers conducted with the Movement Advancement Project. Next up will be an economic justice summit in Chicago in September. Participants will discuss what a movement for economic justice for the LGBTQ community looks like.

PRIDE IN EASTERN MASS
The Eastern Massachusetts chapter of Pride at Work—an AFL-CIO-affiliated caucus—also organizes LGBTQ workers, but its work is more rooted in the institutional labor movement.

“We don’t want to silo ourselves off as LGBT workers and union activists,” said Gerry Scoppettuolo, a retiree with a background as an organizer for SEIU and the Teachers (AFT).
The group organized an open forum in June. Forty people showed up to discuss the history and activities of
the Pride at Work chapter and issues like workplace harassment, discriminatory firings, and how to teach man-
agement and co-workers the basics about gender issues. The forum also covered subjects that affect all work-
kers, like hours and wages. Young workers mostly not in unions got a chance to learn about building power as
LGBTQ workers.

The organization has also joined picket lines at the 2018 Marriott hotel strike and helped workers at a local
bookstore to develop contract language. A chapter member and other LGBTQ workers who are members of
Auto Workers Local 1596 at Harvard Book Store (not affiliated with Harvard University) led an effort to resus-
citiate their inactive union, institute gender-neutral language throughout the contract, and include gender identity
in the nondiscrimination clause.

The chapter’s priority is organizing. “We want to support and organize LGBT and other workers irrespective of
a union being present,” said member Hersch Rothmel, an organizer at SEIU Local 888.

Pride at Work Eastern Massachusetts has close ties with Lyft and Uber drivers who are organizing, and has met
with baristas at several coffee shops. “We are organizing these workers by identifying workplace issues and
leaders,” said Rothmel.

OUT WEST
In Portland, Oregon, 80 LGBTQ workers from two dozen unions came together June 21 for a summit.

It was the sixth installment in an annual series of events on bias organized by the law firm Diamond Law. While
this event focused on anti-LGBTQ discrimination, others in the series have focused on gender or race.

The summit offered legal training, tips on bargaining and organizing, and personal perspectives from LGBTQ
union members on their activism. In a session on developing better contract language, participants discussed
how to expand the employer’s responsibilities to proactively protect employees from implicit bias.

“Right now, contractual anti-discrimination provisions say you can’t break the law,” said attorney and trainer
Barbara Diamond, an organizer of the event. “They don’t give anybody any rights beyond compliance with
laws.”

Participants developed model contract language including a transgender bill of rights which would articulate a
plan for gender transition, a right to nondiscrimination, and a right to medical services that transgender workers
need. One line reads, “The employer shall not discriminate against any employee because they are transgender
or non-binary, whether standing alone or in combination with other factors such as race or disability.”

Sarah Laslett of the University of Oregon’s Labor Education and Research Center helped develop the curric-
ulum for the workshop. She said a particular focus was on how to make the issues of LGBTQ workers “more
deply felt and more widely felt.” That is, how do you get the majority of workers to care enough to take action
on issues that don’t affect them personally?

“It depends on whether workers have done that internal organizing” to ensure that language benefiting minority
groups in the union sticks through the difficult bargaining process, she said.

Internal organizing around minority issues isn’t “rocket science,” Laslett said. It’s about one-on-one conversa-
tions, mapping the workplace, and charting. But she said it’s hard to point to good examples of such organizing
because they aren’t well known. She expressed hope that work like the summit would “allow the door to crack
open.”
State workers employed at correctional facilities have become the first group of state employees to file for recognition as a collective bargaining unit under a 2019 state law that will allow up to 20,000 workers to collectively bargain for wages and other employee benefits.

Correctional officers plan to announce filing for recognition as a unit of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) union on Friday with the state’s Government Employee-Management Relations Board, just two months after Gov. Steve Sisolak signed legislation giving state employees the right to collectively bargain.

Filing for recognition is just the first step in the process of allowing state workers to collectively bargain — a decades long-effort by organized labor groups and allies that could have major effects on both the state budget and the livelihood of tens of thousands of state workers. According to the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute, state government workers in Nevada are paid less than their private-sector counterparts when adjusted for educational attainment.

Shari Kassebaum, a correctional sergeant with the state and president of the new bargaining unit, said she was convinced that the move toward collective bargaining would improve retention and morale among state correctional officers.

“It’s going to be able to set the standards that we haven’t been able to have, and it’s going to hold accountability to the administration that we haven’t had before,” she said.

Under the legislation, which was revived and passed out on party-lines in the final few days of the legislative session, up to 11 separate bargaining units of different classes of state employees are allowed to form unions and negotiate with the state for salary and other specified benefits beginning in 2021. Those employee units include: “When there is a major event in one area of the state, they’re stripping down other areas of the state and leaving them with little to no coverage,” Vilar said. A merger wouldn’t necessarily address staffing concerns at the parks, but it would ensure access to a larger pool of officers, especially during periods of peak demand.

Labor, maintenance, custodial and institutional employees, including correctional institution employees who are not responsible for security at those institutions
Administrative and clerical employees, including legal support staff and employees whose work involves general office work, or keeping or examining records and accounts
Technical aides to professional employees, including, computer programmers, tax examiners, conservation employees and regulatory inspectors
Professional employees who do not provide health care including engineers, scientists and accountants
Professional employees who provide health care, including physical therapists and other employees in medical and other health-related professions
Employees, other than professional employees, who provide health care and personal care, including employees who provide care for children
Category I peace officers, which includes most police officers
Category II peace officers, which includes officers who work for community colleges, schools, courtrooms and some state agencies
Category III peace officers, which typically includes prison and correctional guards
Supervisory employees not otherwise included in other three bargaining units.
State employees who collectively bargain will also not have the power to negotiate over health insurance; that remains the purview of the Public Employees Benefits Program (PEBP). The state is not required to abide by union contracts on PERS retirement contributions or things such as mandatory staffing ratios.

Passage of the bill was a major win for organized labor in Nevada — lawmakers had regularly filed bills to extend collective bargaining rights to state workers since the 1970s, but had regularly been defeated outside of two bills approved by the Legislature but vetoed by the governor in 1991 and 2009.

But the tides changed Sisolak — boosted in his 2018 campaign by more than $3.7 million in spending from an AFSCME political action committee — who promised to extend collective bargaining rights to state workers on the campaign trail and after the election.

According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the percentage of Nevada workers represented by a union has slightly dipped over the last ten years (from 18.2 percent in 2008 to 15.7 percent in 2018), but still remains above the national average.

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Distinguished Concerts International New York Orchestra Musicians
‘Overwhelmingly Vote To Go Union’
AFM Local 802 News - August 25, 2019

(NEW YORK CITY) – Members of the Distinguished Concerts International New York (DCINY) Orchestra officially won their mail-ballot National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) Election earlier this month, with results as follows: 113 “Yes” votes to 14 “No” votes, which equated into 89% voting in favor of Union Representation by American Federation of Musicians (AFM) Local 802.

The DCINY is a highly-profitable concert presenter of largely choral performances at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York City.

The Musicians sought Unionization in order to address issues at work, including: A lack of health and pension benefits; Unreasonably long rehearsals with inadequate breaks; Intense, physically demanding performance days; and an Atmosphere of fear due to frequent retaliation for voicing concerns to management.

After the vote announcement, the newly-Unionized Musicians said they were “grateful for the widespread public support” they received from the larger AFM Local 802 Community during the voting period, and that they look forward to negotiating a fair Collective Bargaining Agreement with management.

“Over the past eleven years, DCINY has operated as a producer and presenter of music at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. For many of their choral concerts, DCINY assembles choirs of amateur Singers from around the world who pay a fee for the unforgettable experience of performing in one of New York’s top venues.

DCINY then hires an orchestra, soloists, and conductors to give the Choir Members a concert of a lifetime,” the new Union Members aid.

DCINY Orchestra Musicians Organizing Committee issued the following statement: While we, the Musicians of the DCINY Orchestra, enjoy the work, we do not have a contract, do not receive benefits of any kind and have no guarantee that we will be hired for future engagements.

To address these and other issues, we have courageously come together to Unionize with the support of AFM Local 802 and to negotiate a fair Collective Bargaining Agreement that allows Musicians to express our concerns without fear of retribution.
2019 Niagara-Orleans Labor Council’s Annual Labor’s Night At The Races Fundraiser ‘Breaks Own Record,’ Brings In $16,800 - Its Raised $132,300 Over 11 Years To Benefit A Variety Of United Way Of Greater Niagara Programs

Tom Campbell - Western NY Labor Today - August 26, 2019

(RANSOMVILLE, NEW YORK) – No record set seems to be safe when it comes to the outstanding job the Niagara-Orleans AFL-CIO Central Labor Council does regarding its Labor’s Night at the Races Fundraiser that’s held yearly at Ransomville Speedway.

And it shouldn’t be a surprise to all that the Labor Council sets a new fundraising record once the cars run the dirt-racing track up in Niagara County.

The recently-held 2019 event raised $116,800 - bringing its 11-year total to an amazing $132,300, all that will go to and have gone to help administer a variety of United Way of Greater Niagara programs that benefit Working People, their families and children across the region.

“We ‘just keep exceeding our goal and that tells me that there’s hope,’” Niagara-Orleans Labor Council President Jim Briggs told WNYLaborToday.com. “This is ‘very rewarding to know that its impact will benefit those who most need it.’”

The Labor Council’s Annual unique dirt track car racing event had set a new record in 2018 by raising $15,500. Previous to that, the Labor’s Night at the Races’ fundraising total had been broken by about $1,000 in each of the last three years.

When the dust settles, the dollars raised goes to benefit 44 community programs that are funded by the United Way across the Western New York County.

Those programs include - but are not limited to, the Boy’s and Girl Scouts organizations, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, youth counseling services, credit counseling services and a variety of family and health services.


“It is ‘so great to see all of Labor come together to help their communities - and it is a great tribute to Labor who support their communities the best they can.’”

A total of 700 tickets (at a cost of $17 for adults, $10 for children and a $15 ticket that did not offer a food opportunity) were sold for the event - and 645 walked through the gates of the speedway on the night of the event, Jakobi said.

A cookout was held before the race and a variety of food was offered as part of the ticket.

“It’s ‘an awesome thing,’” Jakobi continued, “and ‘it takes a lot of hard work to put it all together, but the people who attend go back to their workplaces or Union Hall and tell everyone what a blast they had - which makes more want to attend (the following year).’”
“I think my ‘most favorite thing about Labor’s Night at the Races is the comradery and solidarity of the Niaga-
ra-Orleans Labor Council’s Labor Unions and their Members who come out for the event.’ ‘We get the chance
to talk about our issues and our goals and introduce the next generation to the Union Movement,’” Briggs said.

As added attraction, a number of Union Members own and drive cars at the Ransomville Track for the Labor’s Night at the Races event, including those from the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) Ironworkers Local 9, Laborers Local 91 and the Steelworkers.

Niagara-Orleans AFL-CIO Labor Council President Briggs and Jakobi also made it a point to single out those businesses and Friends of Labor who annually help support Labor’s Night at the Races, including its major sponsors: BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York; the Law Firm of Lewis & Lewis; the Law Firm of Maxwell and Murphy and M&T Bank.

“I just want to give out a ‘huge Thank You’ to everyone who attended and supported Labor’s Night at the Races,” Briggs said. “And I want to ‘extend a special thanks’ to BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York, Lewis and Lewis, Maxwell and Murphy and M&T Bank. ‘Our success would not be realized without them.’”
The Capital District Youth Pipe Band, an ensemble of 8- to 18-year-olds playing traditional Scottish music, won the titles of World Champions and Best Drum Corps in their category at the 2019 competition held on Aug. 17 in Glasgow, Scotland.

Competing against 20 other Grade Novice B bands to win this title, the band won with a complement of bagpipers and drummers from around the eastern United States – including participants from Pennsylvania, Virginia and Florida as well as New York, Vermont and New Jersey.

They also won the 2012 World Pipe Band Championships.

Led by band director Maureen Connor, the CDYPB offers instruction on bagpipes and Scottish drumming and performs at various events and competitions, winning prizes in the eastern U.S. and Canada as well as Scotland.

On Aug. 10, the band took second place in the International Highland Games held in North Berwick, outside Edinburgh.
ALBANY — The White House ambitions of U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand were dealt a setback Wednesday, as she appears likely to be shut out from the third round of Democratic presidential debates.

It's not clear where New York's junior senator takes her campaign after this formal culling by the Democratic National Committee, which set Wednesday as the deadline to qualify for the Sept. 12 debate in Houston. Only 10 candidates met the qualifications, while nearly a dozen fell short, including Gillibrand and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Gillibrand's campaign did not respond to a request for comment on Wednesday morning.

She made slow and steady progress in August toward amassing the necessary fundraising base to qualify for the debate, but was poised to come up short of the 130,000 contributors needed, based on recently released figures.

Her campaign also failed to make any significant headway on the required 2 percent showing in four eligible polls, hitting the bare minimum threshold in a single Iowa poll. Gillibrand failed to receive any support in Wednesday's national poll of Democratic voters by Quinnipiac University, which is expected to be the final polling to qualify for the third debate.

Her campaign could theoretically return to the national stage for the fourth round of debates in October, as Gillibrand would have another month to hit the same polling and fundraising goals.

All of the trailing candidates have invested heavily in soliciting small-dollar donations, often as low as $1, in order to reach the contributor thresholds required to participate in the debates. In most cases, these fundraising efforts end up costing more money than they generate.

Leading up to the third round of debates, Gillibrand's campaign ramped up these efforts, including a fundraising appeal from her son and a $1 T-shirt promotion.

While Gillibrand failed to register in national and early primary state polls, her popularity has also waned in her home state since launching her presidential campaign, according to the Siena Research Institute polling.

Multiple Democratic presidential hopefuls dropped out of the race in the run-up to the qualification deadline for the third debate — including Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, who hit the fundraising threshold.

Gillibrand briefly stole the campaign spotlight during the second round of debates with a zinger about needing to "Clorox the Oval Office" if she took occupancy of the White House. For the most part, though, she has flown under the radar except for stories about how her campaign failed to get off the ground, and the continued fundraising fallout from her swift condemnation of her former Senate colleague Al Franken in the wake of multiple allegations of inappropriate conduct toward women.

The candidates who qualified for the September debate are former Vice President Joe Biden, U.S. senators Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, former Rep. Beto O'Rourke, former cabinet Secretary Julián Castro and tech executive Andrew Yang, who spent his early childhood years in Schenectady.
New York, NY – An agreement in July between city and union officials was a re-opener on a contract that has allowed the union, DC 1707, to focus on challenges to pay parity for teachers in day care centers vs. Board of Education teachers. LaborPress spoke to Indira Mohan, currently Organizing Director at DC 1707, and, as of September 1, Associate Director of Organizing at DC 37 (the unions are unifying), about the organizing efforts and the historic agreement.

“The agreement provided pay raises for certified teachers (BA or MA degrees) of $17,000 to $20,000, so they are on par with salaries in public schools. That alone is a huge accomplishment,” Mohan said. “Our union has been fighting for this for decades. We were able to get to this point because the directors in our centers were having trouble retaining qualified staff. Our teachers would leave [the centers] stranded at the start of the school year. [We didn’t have] consistent care for people in community-based settings and those who do work in those settings.

A few factors came together: the pressure we’ve been putting on the city for a long time, the unification with our sister union (DC 37), and the Mayor [Bill de Blasio] who understands what we’ve been dealing with for a long time.

[Also], the memorandum of agreement provides for affordable health care. It improves upon the current health care, with ongoing discussions for improved care in 2020…there is also a free career ladder open to all members in the contract with B.A. or M.A.’s in Early Childhood Education at CUNY institutions, and subsidized tuition re-imbursement at any other college or university. The information can be found on our campaign website, at www.childcaretimeisnow.org.

After the agreement, it still had to be ratified. In the meantime, we were getting phone calls from those interested in joining the union. So after the agreement was ratified on August 1st, we began a focused effort to go out and try to meet some people who had reached out to us and those who we knew were not part of the union. Our goal was to make sure every person who could benefit from this agreement could, [but] they had to be part of the union. It was a great opportunity to speak to those workers not part of the union to let them know they had the right to be part of the union and also that they would benefit immediately should they decide to join the union.

In most traditional organizing campaigns, you don’t necessarily have the chance to speak to the employer early in the process. In this case we felt it was important to do so. The school year was going to start. [We wanted to hear] ‘Yes, I can afford to hold on to my teachers, and I want to pay them.’ We’ve spoken to directors and teachers and gotten a very positive response. They are excited and want to fight for even [further] improved benefits.

Summer has been a challenge [for organizing]. Many teachers are on break. [But] we have ten meetings this week. This is a back-to-school prep week. Our contacts will pick up even more.

Last week, the Department of Education had a new employee orientation for early childhood educators and we had a table and spoke to folks there.”

Asked about possible impediments to organizing, Mohan said, “You are always going to have an employer who is in this for the wrong reason – beyond taking care of the kids – they just want to hold onto power. But having talks with the director ahead of time really helps.”
In a surprise move, more than 20,000 union workers for AT&T in the Southeast went out on strike as of midnight Friday, officials said.

Members of the Communication Workers of America — including 4,000 in Georgia — charged the huge telecommunications company with unfair labor practices during negotiations aimed at securing a new contract. The previous agreement expired Aug. 3. Since then, the talks have gone nowhere because the company has made sure that an agreement cannot happen said Richard Honeycutt, the union’s vice president for the Southeast in a statement issued late Friday.

“Our talks have stalled because it has become clear that AT&T has not sent negotiators who have the power to make decisions so we can move forward toward a new contract.” The company, which is based in Dallas, has annual revenue of about $170 billion a year. It includes the remnants of Atlanta-based BellSouth, which for more than two decades was the largest of the seven regional phone companies.

Company officials said they were blindsided and mystified by the strike call. “We’re baffled as to why union leadership would call one when we’re offering terms that would help our employees — some of whom average from $121,000 to $134,000 in total compensation — be even better off,” said AT&T spokesman Jim Kimberly.

Company officials were adamant about being prepared for a walk-out. In the days before the contract expired, AT&T officials said they would be prepared for a strike and that business operations would go on smoothly with managers, executives and contractors picking up the slack.

“We’re prepared for a strike and in the event of a work stoppage, we will continue working hard to serve our customers,” Kimberly said on Friday night Union leaders scoffed at the notion, arguing that the company will have to prioritize work delaying new installations and non-emergency maintenance. Reports on Saturday indicated union members were picketing at some AT&T sites, including in Georgia, Florida and Alabama.

The union said it has filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board, arguing that the company has not bargained in good faith. The union’s Southeast region includes technicians, customer service representatives and others who “install, maintain and support” the company’s landline and internet line services. The region includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Union officials have said that the key issues are job security and a steady rise in healthcare costs. The timing of the strike gives the union leverage in some ways, but favors the huge company in others. To the workers advantage is a tight labor market in which a low unemployment rate has many employers complaining of a shortage in skilled workers. But changes in technology allow the company’s day-to-day operations to continue smoothly, which may encourage AT&T to try waiting out the strike.

And the federal agency that the union is making its complaints to, the NLRB, has become more conservative over the years even as the influence of unions nationally has shrunk. Moreover, the South has long been a region with fewer union members and governments that are typically not sympathetic.

That backdrop has made many Southern unions reluctant to strike. But some telecom workers have said they are under continued pressure, that wages are rising more slowly than costs while the company shifts to lower-paid jobs and contract workers.
The pink storm is upon us.

You’ve seen them - walkers wearing headbands, leis, sneakers, shirts, wands, wings - you name it, all in the color pink and in the name of taking on breast cancer.

Educators will be stepping out again this Fall for the annual Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walks to raise funds for the American Cancer Society, with the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) Union continuing its pivotal role as a flagship sponsor.

According to the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ACS), it is estimated that 41,260 women and 500 men will die from breast cancer this year.

Walkers are fighting against those daunting statistics and have their own strong numbers.

Last year, NYSUT Members generated more than $722,270 in donations for ACS.

Money raised via the Making Strides walks is earmarked for research, education and support services.

“Every year, thousands of NYSUT Members come together at annual Making Strides walks to raise awareness and funds to support the mission of the American Cancer Society,” ACS Community Development’s Katie Goepfrich said.

“NYSUT continues to be a proud partner with the ACS,” said NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer Philippe Abraham.

SAVE THE DATE: Join Team NYSUT

12: Buffalo, Jamestown

13: Syracuse

20: Albany, Bronx, Plattsburgh, Hudson Valley, Brooklyn, Jones Beach, Central Park, Utica, Queens, Staten Island, Rochester, Westchester

27: Riverhead, Glens Falls

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that not counting some kinds of skin cancer, breast cancer in the United States is: The most common cancer in women, no matter race or ethnicity; The most common cause of death from cancer among Hispanic Women; The second most common cause of death from cancer among White, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native Women.
WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Sixty-four percent of Americans approve of labor unions, surpassing 60% for the third consecutive year and up 16 percentage points from its 2009 low point. This comes 125 years after President Grover Cleveland signed a law establishing the Labor Day holiday after a period of labor unrest in the U.S.

Union approval averaged 68% between Gallup's initial measurement in 1936 and 1967, and consistently exceeded 60% during that time. Since 1967, approval has been 10 points lower on average, and has only occasionally surpassed 60%. The current 64% reading is one of the highest union approval ratings Gallup has recorded over the past 50 years, topped only in March 1999 (66%), August 1999 (65%) and August 2003 (65%) surveys.

Higher public support for unions in the past few years likely reflects the relatively good economic conditions in place, particularly low unemployment. By contrast, the lowest union approval ratings in Gallup history came from 2009 through 2012, years of high unemployment that followed the Great Recession. Gallup also observed relatively low union approval during the poor economic times in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Democrats, independents and Republicans are all more likely to view unions positively now than they were at the low point a decade ago. Notably, since 2009, union approval has increased among each party group by 16 or 17 points. Democrats (82%) remain far more likely than Republicans (45%) to approve of unions.

In addition to partisanship, union affiliation is a significant driver of union approval. Specifically, 86% of U.S. adults living in a household with a union member approve of unions, compared with 60% of those in nonunion households.

According to the 2019 survey, 14% of Americans reside in a union household, and 10% of working adults are personally members of labor unions.
With ‘So Much’ For The Western New York Labor Movement ‘To Celebrate This Year,’ It’s Announced The Victorious Wendt Workers Will Serve As The Grand Marshals Of The 2019 Buffalo AFL-CIO Labor Day Parade

Tom Campbell - Western NY Labor Today - August 29, 2019

(SOUTH BUFFALO, NEW YORK) – From local SPoT Coffee Workers’ amazingly short organizing victory to achieving a major contract that covers 7,200 Health Care Workers employed by the Kaleida Health System, there is so much for the Western New York Labor Movement to celebrate on Labor Day when their annual parade takes place in South Buffalo.

But one victory - one that took more than two years to achieve, will take center stage on Monday (September 2nd) when the area’s Unions and their Members gather to march in their annual parade that squarely places the spotlight on the importance of Organized Labor and its many achievements brought about over the years through hard work, perseverance and solidarity.

On Wednesday (August 28th), the Buffalo AFL-CIO Central Labor Council and the Western New York AFL-CIO Area Labor Federation (WNYALF) joined together to announce that the Workers employed by the Suburban Cheektowaga Wendt Corporation will serve as the 2019 Grand Marshals of the Buffalo Labor Council’s Labor Day Parade.

“We celebrate the ‘greatest Workers in the world,” Buffalo Labor Council President John Mudie - who also serves as President of Communications Workers of America (CWA) President Local 1122, proudly told those assembled inside the South Buffalo Irish Center.

“We ‘welcome’ the SPoT Workers into the Labor Movement ‘and we celebrate the recent’ Kaleida contract win for the Communications Workers of America, 1199 Service Employees International Union and Operating Engineers Local 17), and a tentative agreement ‘that was just reached’ at Canisius College by SEIU Local 200,” Mudie said.

Then the Buffalo AFL-CIO President turned to several of the Wendt Workers who were at the event in order to recognize their great achievement and tenacity in staying the course and finally reaching an agreement after such a long period of time.

“This is ‘all about’ Organized Labor ‘making a mark.’ These Workers at Wendt ‘stood together and got it done.’ It ‘epitomizes (the Labor Movement) and its great leadership,’” Mudie said.

Despite an aggressive, company-funded Anti-Union Campaign, Workers employed at Wendt - a Cheektowaga-based auto shredding manufacturer, voted by a 70% margin to form a Union in June 2017 in order to affiliate with Ironworkers Local 576.

While there still has yet been no official word released, WNYLaborToday.com learned the agreement was a two-year deal with “significant” wage gains for the Workers who stuck together through an arduous process through the cold of Winter and heat of Summer.

“We are ‘thrilled that this struggle is ending,’” WNYALF President Richard Lipsitz told WNYLaborToday.com at the time. “This is ‘what Organized Labor is all about’ - ‘this is what we do, having a positive impact on the standard of living for Working People and we need to make the general public more aware of that.’ The WNY-ALF and area Labor ‘have been proud supporters of this effort.’”

“This is a ‘tremendous’ victory,” another Labor Leader - who had knowledge of the agreement, but who did not want to be identified, told Your On-Line Labor Newspaper at the time. “The Workers ‘stuck together and won together.’”

Also speaking at Wednesday’s announcement, WNYALF President Lipsitz also told those in attendance: “(The Labor Movement) ‘celebrates once a year as we defend the living standards of every’ Worker. Our Labor Federation ‘unites all’ Unions ‘to defend those living standards and that can only be done when we organize.’ ‘It is now time to come together and have a good time with our friends and allies.’”

State Senator Tim Kennedy of Buffalo was also on hand to present the Wendt Workers with a New York State Proclamation signed by Governor Andrew Cuomo, congratulating them on their victory (Pictured Below/ WNYLaborToday.com Photo), saying: “They ‘did not back down.’ ‘They won an old school fight.’ ‘They had their backs against the walls, but did what was right.’ ‘They banded together to make it happen.’”