NEWS CLIPS

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Cuomo Vetoes Wage-Theft Protections

Steve Wishnia - Labor Press - January 2, 2020

ALBANY, N.Y.—Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Jan. 1 quietly vetoed a bill that would have allowed workers to put liens on the property of employers they’ve accused of wage theft.

The Securing Wages Earned Against Theft (SWEAT) bill, passed by the state Legislature last June, would have established an “employee’s lien” to parallel the “mechanic’s lien” that a landscaper or construction contractor can put on the property of homeowners who haven’t paid their bills. That would have enabled workers who have filed wage-theft allegations to freeze their employers’ assets while their claims are pending, “to ensure the money is there when the case is over,” state Sen. Jessica Ramos (D-Queens) and Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal (D-Manhattan), the bill’s lead sponsors, said in a joint statement Jan. 1. The 10 largest shareholders (or those with the 10 largest ownership interests) of a business would have been personally liable, and the state Department of Labor and Attorney General’s office would have also been able to seek liens.

Gov. Cuomo’s veto message said that he supported the legislation’s intent “wholeheartedly,” but he objected that it would allow workers or the state to put a lien on employers’ property before the courts or state agencies had issued a judgment against them. He suggested that would be considered “inadequate due process.” He also said the bill “creates a broad definition of ‘employer’ that includes business entities, owners, and lower-level managers and subordinates.”

“Along with a diverse coalition of more than 100 advocacy organizations and workers, and after years of hard work, we are deeply disappointed by the veto of the SWEAT Bill,” Ramos and Rosenthal said. “This veto hurts the thousands of workers who have been left holding the bag.”

Supporters of the bill argue that putting liens on employers’ property before claims are resolved is essential to ensure that workers who win back pay are actually able to collect it. Ramos and Rosenthal wrote last year that the legislation was necessary because “in too many instances, exploitative employers dissipate their assets or dissolve their business to avoid paying wages they owe to their employees,” and that by the time workers are awarded a judgment, “there are few, if any, assets to be found.”

“The problem is how easy it is for employers to transfer assets under current law,” Flushing Workers Center organizer Sarah Ahn told LaborPress. “If we didn’t have this problem, we wouldn’t have drafted a bill.”

At the Indus Valley restaurant on the Upper West Side, a group of about 10 delivery workers whose employer had paid them less than minimum wage and stolen their tips won $700,000 in 2015. But the owner changed the name of the restaurant to Manhattan Valley, and the workers only collected $110,000. The only reason they got even that, former deliveryman Solomon Perez told LaborPress at a rally outside the governor’s Manhattan offices Nov. 20, was because the “supposed new owner” owed money to the old owner, so the judge had him pay it to the workers instead.

In another case, the owners of a Chinatown restaurant where workers had won a wage-theft judgment transferred their assets and reopened under a new name, former waiter Jinming Vincent Cao told the Nov. 20 rally. The workers got nothing. “They don’t even run away,” Cao added. “We see them walking around Chinatown.” Cuomo’s veto message echoed the National Federation of Independent Businesses’ arguments. “This legislation puts in place a presumption of guilt on employers as employees would be allowed to put liens on personal or company property on a mere claim of wage and hour violations,” the small-business lobby told its members last June. “The bill also expands the definition of employer to include many parties who have no control over pay practices.”
The NFIB also argued that the bill was unnecessary because there already are state and federal statutes to address wage and hour violations.

Only one other state, Wisconsin, allows wage-theft liens against employers “based solely on allegations, rather than a finding of liability,” the “preventive labor relations” law firm Jackson Lewis wrote in June.

Ahn calls those arguments “fake.” The employees’ lien is modeled on the mechanics’ lien, “which has existed for centuries,” she says. “There is judicial review. It just flips what comes first.”

The bill would have held workers who file fraudulent charges liable for the defendants’ legal costs, she added.

“We really feel that he’s failed working people,” she said of Cuomo. “We crafted this very carefully from the experiences of workers on the ground. We know the obstacles they face.”

The Senate’s 42-20 vote to pass the bill had the two-thirds majority needed to override a veto, but the Assembly’s 87-58 approval was not. Ramos and Rosenthal said they and the SWEAT Coalition are “resolved to continue fighting in 2020.”
Kecia Jolley is getting a pay raise this week. But she's still making minimum wage.

Jolley works as a grocery store cashier in Missouri — one of nearly two dozen states that increased their minimum wages on Jan. 1. Economists say those mandatory wage hikes are an important factor boosting pay for workers at the bottom of the income ladder.

Jolley's Friday paycheck will be the first to reflect Missouri's 2020 minimum of $9.45 an hour, up from $8.60 last year.

"I think that I'll be better off," she says. "But I think that it's going to still be a struggle."

Jolley says her paycheck will still barely cover rent and utilities. She relies on food stamps and school lunches to help feed her three children — ages 6, 11 and 14. Jolley is grateful that a ballot measure passed by Missouri voters in 2018 calls for three additional increases in the minimum wage over the next three years. By 2023, the minimum will climb to $12 an hour.

"I would consider that at least a decent living wage," Jolley says. "Then people can pay their bills. They can possibly get a few things on their 'wants' list every month. Like, kids need new clothes. Or — I'm a girl. I ran out of mascara, like, a month ago. Luxury items such as new socks."

While the federal minimum wage hasn't changed in more than a decade — it's still $7.25 an hour — many cities and states have adopted higher thresholds. In Arizona, Colorado and Maine the minimum wage is already $12 an hour. Minimums are higher still in California, Massachusetts and Washington state. Cuomo's administration has until fall 2020 to decide when the minimum wage should reach $15 in Hudson Valley and upstate communities facing struggling economies.
Women can close the pay gap by forming unions

BY KAYLA BLADO & KATIE BARROWS, OPINION CONTRIBUTORS - The Hill

In 2018, women once again came home with over 16 percent less money in their paychecks. Tuesday is Equal Pay Day, which means women had to work until April 2 — 92 days longer — to be paid the same amount as a comparable man in 2018. For many women of color, this gap is much worse. For the past 15 years, the gender wage gap has barely budged and persists across all wage levels and among employees at every education level. More and more, women are turning to their unions to implement workplace tools to narrow the gender wage gap.

In 2016, women in unions were paid 23 percent higher wages than those not in a union. Moreover, unions have narrowed the gender wage gap to just 6 percent. Plus, those of us in unions are also more likely to have various types of paid leave to balance work and family. The union contracts of our fellow Nonprofit Professional Employees Union (NPEU) members provide real-world examples of workplace policies that unions have negotiated to narrow the gender pay gap.

NPEU members have worked to combat a cycle that keeps a woman’s pay lower than a man’s. Employers often base pay scales on salary history. If a woman was discriminated against in her first job, she will continue to be paid less in subsequent jobs.

Several of our member organizations have negotiated to prohibit salary history disclosure for those applying for open positions. Pay scales with standardized pay rates make compensation more transparent. NPEU members at multiple organizations have negotiated for clear and open pay scales that allow employees to identify their salary by job title, experience, skills and training.

This allows employees to know what their colleagues are being paid and make sure they are not being paid less for equal work. Other NPEU members secured an annual pay equity review in their union contract. This gives them a yearly opportunity to work with their employer to review salaries and close the gender gap. Only 17 percent of workers in the United States have paid leave through their employers. Many of our members have negotiated for 8-12 weeks of paid leave upon the birth or adoption of a child.

Paid family leave for all employees helps eliminate the stigma associated with having a child and the impact on women’s wages by allowing new parents to take time off without leaving the workforce.

Additionally, most NPEU members earn between 10 and 12 sick leave days per year, which gives employees another tool to help with family responsibilities. Our NPEU contracts also ensure that anti-discrimination policies are followed. A common component of union contracts are procedures to deal with contract violations, like not following anti-discrimination policies.

These procedures allow us to hold our employers accountable to make sure discrimination is not ignored.

Unions give employees a voice to make change when inequities exist in the workplace. Additionally, organizations with unionized staff have contracts with clear and fair processes that employers cannot ignore. Coming together in union is one of the best ways employees can empower themselves to make their workplace better. If you are frustrated by the lack of progress to narrow the gender wage gap and are looking for a way to “celebrate” Equal Pay Day, consider talking to your coworkers about forming a union.

By joining together, you will have the collective power to negotiate for workplace policies that increase equity, as well as for better pay, benefits and working conditions.
The American labor movement has been under attack for decades, but you wouldn’t know it from watching the Democratic primary debates. On Tuesday evening, moderators mentioned unions once — specifically a labor federation, the AFL-CIO, and only to ask Bernie Sanders why he opposed the USMCA trade deal that the union endorsed.

This meager exchange is still something of an improvement on most previous debates. When unions have come up at all, it’s usually thanks to the candidates, who invoke “good union jobs” to polish their economic proposals or to criticize Medicare for All.

To date, debate moderators themselves have not asked candidates a single direct question about labor rights. That’s a serious oversight, and it should be remedied by the moderators of the next Democratic debate in February.

If they don’t, not only will they misjudge the true import of the debate’s location — in Las Vegas, the home of the powerful Culinary Workers union — they’ll miss the point of the debates themselves. These monthly spectacles are supposed to have a purpose: They’re opportunities for voters to hear from candidates on the most urgent issues of our time.

Instead, we’ve endured months of barely distinguishable debates marked by nearly identical questions about Medicare for All. Certainly no one would seriously dispute that health-care reform is important; it is both a priority for voters and a litmus test distinguishing the field’s progressives from its moderates. But unions merit at least a fraction of the same attention.

Good union jobs really are in decline. From 2018 to 2019, a mere 10 percent of all employed Americans said they belonged to a union, Gallup reported last August, down from 20.1 percent in 1983. Union losses are concentrated in the private sector, where only 6 percent of workers are union members.

Those figures stand in sharp contrast with the U.K., where just over 23 percent of the overall workforce belonged to unions in 2018, a category that includes 13.4 percent of private-sector workers.

The U.S. has such low rates of union membership largely because its labor laws are much weaker than those of many other developed nations. The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 substantially restricted the rights of unions and expanded those of employers.

Decades of right-to-work laws followed its passage, sapping the labor movement’s former strength until it reached its present state of decline. The labor movement isn’t dead; workers still unionize, strike, and win important gains, as the teachers-strike wave helps prove.

But the movement’s woes demand swift attention from the next president of the United States, and debate moderators should ask candidates about their plans.

Ask them to explain the decline in union membership. They should be able to clearly identify the laws and organizations responsible for bankrolling the legal cases, policies, and politicians responsible for stripping labor rights from American workers.

Ask them about the PRO Act, introduced in the House last May.
Some candidates co-sponsored the bill, which would repeal portions of Taft-Hartley; others aren’t in Congress, and their positions are not as well known.

What would they do to expand collective bargaining rights and the right to strike? Would they extend organizing rights to domestic workers? To farmworkers?

Are they really willing to rein in the privileges legislators have granted to employers?

How would they make sure that employers can’t drag out the bargaining process for months and even years?

These would all be important questions even if there weren’t two billionaire businessmen in the race, but the presence of Tom Steyer and Michael Bloomberg creates additional urgency. If the rich are going to try to buy the presidency, the press ought to fulfill its basic function and hold them to account. Make them explain what, if anything, they’d do to protect the rights of American workers.

Union density may sound like an esoteric subject. But it has dramatic real-world consequences for working people. Research connects the nation’s decline in union membership to an overall rise in income inequality. Put in simpler, debate-ready terms, workers suffer when unions suffer.

Voters deserve to know if candidates understand that connection.
Martin Luther King Jr., union man

Peter Cole  - The Conversation - January 18, 2020

If Martin Luther King Jr. still lived, he’d probably tell people to join unions.

King understood racial equality was inextricably linked to economics. He asked, “What good does it do to be able to eat at a lunch counter if you can’t buy a hamburger?”

Those disadvantages have persisted. Today, for instance, the wealth of the average white family is more than 20 times that of a black one.

King’s solution was unionism.

The union newspaper reported that King appealed in his Sept. 21, 1967 address to Local 10 ‘for unity between the labor movement and the Negro freedom movement.’ The Dispatcher archives, ILWU

Convergence of needs

In 1961, King spoke before the AFL-CIO, the nation’s largest and most powerful labor organization, to explain why he felt unions were essential to civil rights progress.

“Negroes are almost entirely a working people,” he said. “Our needs are identical with labor’s needs – decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children and respect in the community.”

My new book, “Dockworker Power: Race and Activism in Durban and the San Francisco Bay Area,” chronicles King’s relationship with a labor union that was, perhaps, the most racially progressive in the country. That was Local 10 of the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union, or ILWU.

ILWU Local 10 represented workers who loaded and unloaded cargo from ships throughout San Francisco Bay’s waterfront. Its members’ commitment to racial equality may be as surprising as it is unknown.

In 1967, the year before his murder, King visited ILWU Local 10 to see what interracial unionism looked like. King met with these unionists at their hall in a then-thriving, portside neighborhood – now a gentrified tourist area best known for Fisherman’s Wharf, Pier 39.

While King knew about this union, ILWU history isn’t widely known off the waterfront.

Civil rights on the waterfront

Dockworkers had suffered for decades from a hiring system compared to a “slave auction.” Once hired, they routinely worked 24 to 36 hour shifts, experienced among the highest rates of injury and death of any job, and endured abusive bosses. And they did so for incredibly low wages.

Marching in the San Francisco Waterfront Strike of 1934. San Francisco Public Library

In 1934, San Francisco longshoremen – who were non-union since employers had crushed their union in 1919 – reorganized and led a coast-wide “Big Strike.”

In the throes of the Great Depression, these increasingly militant and radicalized dockworkers walked off the job. After 83 days on strike, they won a huge victory: wage increases, a coast-wide contract and union-controlled hiring halls.
Soon, these “wharf rats,” among the region’s poorest and most exploited workers, became “lords of the docks,” commanding the highest wages and best conditions of any blue-collar worker in the region.

At its inception, Local 10’s membership was 99 percent white. But Harry Bridges, the union’s charismatic leader, joined with fellow union radicals to commit to racial equality in its ranks.

Originally from Australia, Bridges started working on the San Francisco waterfront in the early 1920s. It was during the Big Strike that he emerged as a leader.

Bridges coordinated during the strike with C.L. Dellums, the leading black unionist in the Bay Area, and made sure the handful of black dockworkers would not cross picket lines as replacement workers. Bridges promised they would get a fair deal in the new union. One of the union’s first moves after the strike was integrating work gangs that previously had been segregated.

Local 10 overcame pervasive discrimination
Cleophas Williams, a black man originally from Arkansas, was among those who got into Local 10 in 1944. He belonged to a wave of African-Americans who, due to the massive labor shortage caused by World War II, fled the racism and discriminatory laws of the Jim Crow South for better lives – and better jobs – outside of it. Hundreds of thousands of blacks moved to the Bay Area, and tens of thousands found jobs in the booming shipbuilding industry.

Black workers in shipbuilding experienced pervasive discrimination. Employers shunted them off into less attractive jobs and paid them less. Similarly, the main shipbuilders’ union proved hostile to black workers who, when allowed in, were placed in segregated locals.

A few thousand black men, including Williams, were hired as longshoremen during the war. He later recalled to historian Harvey Schwartz: “When I first came on the waterfront, many black workers felt that Local 10 was a utopia.” During the war, when white foremen and military officers hurled racist epithets at black longshoremen, this union defended them. Black members received equal pay and were dispatched the same as all others.

For Williams, this union was a revelation. Literally the first white people he ever met who opposed white supremacy belonged to Local 10. These longshoremen were not simply anti-racists, they were communists and socialists.

Leftist unions like the ILWU embraced black workers because, reflecting their ideology, they contended workers were stronger when united. They also knew that, countless times, employers had broken strikes and destroyed unions by playing workers of different ethnicities, genders, nationalities and races against each other. For instance, when 350,000 workers went out during the mammoth Steel Strike of 1919, employers brought in tens of thousands of African-Americans to work as replacements.

Some black dockworkers also were socialists. Paul Robeson, the globally famous singer, actor and left-wing activist had several friends, fellow socialists, in Local 10. Robeson was made an honorary ILWU member during WWII.

Martin Luther King, union member

In 1967, King walked in Robeson’s footsteps when he was inducted into Local 10 as an honorary member, the same year Williams became the first black person elected president of Local 10. By that year, roughly half of its members were African-American.
King addressed these dockworkers, declaring, “I don’t feel like a stranger here in the midst of the ILWU. We have been strengthened and energized by the support you have given to our struggles. … We’ve learned from labor the meaning of power.”

Many years later, Williams discussed King’s speech with me: “He talked about the economics of discrimination. … What he said is what Bridges had been saying all along,” about workers benefiting by attacking racism and forming interracial unions.

Eight months later, in Memphis to organize a union, King was assassinated.

The day after his death, longshoremen shut down the ports of San Francisco and Oakland, as they still do when one of their own dies on the job. Nine ILWU members attended King’s funeral in Atlanta, including Bridges and Williams, honoring the man who called unions “the first anti-poverty program.”
Opinion: New York’s New Bail Laws Harm Public Safety

Judges should be able to remand suspects they determine to be dangerous.


Last April, the New York State Legislature passed an ill-considered set of criminal justice reforms that were buried in the state budget bill. As those reforms have taken effect, it has become clear that they present a significant challenge to public safety.

The New York Police Department favors criminal justice reforms and bail reform, but within a framework that is fair both to the victims of crimes and to those accused of committing them. The time has come to rethink these reforms to achieve the desired goal of a fairer criminal justice system that doesn’t undermine, but supports, public safety.

New York is not a jurisdiction that overincarcerates. Arrests are down 46 percent since 2013. Eighty-seven percent of arrested persons are released without bail within 24 hours of arrest. The city has the lowest jail incarceration rate compared to the five largest cities in the country, half the rate of Los Angeles and one-third that of Houston. The Rikers Island jail population is 51 percent lower since 2013 and down 74 percent from its high in 1993.

New York is now the only state in the nation that requires judges to entirely disregard the threat to public safety posed by accused persons in determining whether to hold them pending trial or to impose conditions for their release. In addition, the new law constrains judges from holding repeat offenders with long records of both crime and absconding trial. It eliminates cash bail and the possibility of detention for a wide array of offenses, including weapons possession, trafficking of fentanyl and other drugs, many hate-crime assaults, the promotion of child prostitution, serial arson, and certain burglaries and robberies.

According to our calculation, 738 people arrested on burglary and robbery charges in 2018 would have been released without bail or remand under the new law, despite the fact that their collective records comprise 9,926 arrests for crimes including 1,134 robberies, 891 assaults, 524 burglaries, 334 weapons charges, 48 sex crimes (including 15 rapes), and 25 murders or attempted murders. These are not the types of offenders who should be freed to continue their criminal activity. Judges should assess their risk to public safety.

The new law’s requirements also threaten to inundate police agencies and district attorneys with the sheer volume of paperwork that must be provided to defendants’ attorneys within 15 days of arraignment under new discovery rules. Valid evidence can be suppressed and solid cases can be dismissed on the grounds of incomplete discovery, even when such failures are inadvertent and immaterial. The financial cost of compliance is also substantial — in the tens of millions of dollars across the state.

The combination of two other factors — fewer people held pending trial and the early release of the names and contact information of victims and witnesses — places some of these victims and witnesses at risk of intimidation or retaliation. Violent criminals are being returned to the community and will know the names of their accusers and where to find them. As any detective will tell you, one of the main concerns of witnesses is whether the defendant will learn their identities. The likely outcome will be many fewer people coming forward to help the police build solid cases against criminals.

Defendants should have all relevant evidence before accepting any plea bargain and should not be receiving discovery materials on the very eve of trial, but the pendulum has swung too far against the interests of victims, witnesses and police investigations.
The N.Y.P.D. proposes three critical changes to current law to preserve public safety while still improving the fairness of the trial process.

First, in a staggered discovery process, defendants would receive the data they need to make an informed decision about plea bargains within 15 days of arraignment. Additional evidentiary material would be provided at reasonable intervals before trial.

Second, to protect victims and witnesses, we would revise the rules about the release of sensitive information about their identities to suspects. Right now, the burden is on the district attorney to make the case that this information should be withheld to ensure witness safety. The burden should shift to the defense to establish that revealing this information is critical to the case. The presumption of protection for witnesses will encourage more cooperation, prevent witness intimidation and allow judges to carefully decide when and how witness identities are released.

Finally, the N.Y.P.D. believes significant bail reform can be achieved, as long as judges are granted the discretion to remand suspects whom they determine to be genuinely dangerous, including chronic repeat offenders. We can trust New York State’s judges to use this discretion wisely and only for individuals who pose a real threat to the public or who continuously flout the justice system. The inequities of the bail process can be eliminated, and the interests of public safety served.

The April bail reforms were passed without any meaningful input from police agencies or district attorneys in the state, an extraordinary oversight that should not be repeated. Law enforcement should be at the table. We can help shape a law that will protect both defendants and the public.
ALBANY – Gov. Andrew Cuomo proposed a $178 billion budget Tuesday that closes a $6 billion shortfall through reducing the growth in Medicaid, limiting aid to local programs and expecting tax revenue to grow by $2 billion.

The budget includes spending from the state and federal government, and it would limit the state spending piece to $105.8 billion — up 1.9%, Cuomo said. Overall spending would grow 6%.

The budget would increase school aid, legalize recreational marijuana, expand a new child tax credit, reduce business taxes and continue an already planned tax cut for the middle class.

"This budget is a roadmap for delivering progressive results for the people of this state and addressing the imminent challenges of our time by advancing social, racial and economic justice," Cuomo said.

Cuomo, however, didn't include any expansions to gambling in New York, as the industry had hoped. A state study on whether to add mobile sports betting and allow full-scale casinos in the New York City area is expected in April.

The state Legislature will now deliberate over the Democratic governor's 10th budget proposal of his tenure in hopes of having an on-time deal for the start of the fiscal year April 1.

Here's what you need to know:

How does New York close a $6 billion budget gap?
The budget gap is the largest since the $10 billion one Cuomo faced when he first took office in 2011.

About one third of the gap is due to growing costs for Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor and disabled.

This year, he is proposing some basic, yet nebulous, ways to close most of the shortfall:

$2.5 billion through Medicaid restructuring based on recommendations from a Medicaid Redesign Team
$2 billion in expected more tax receipts

$1.8 billion in reduced spending to local assistance programs from "targeted actions and the continuation of prior-year cost containment."

Republicans criticized the plan for a lack of detail.

"Andrew Cuomo has run New York’s budget into the red to the tune of at least $6 billion, but all we heard from him was dishonest rhetoric, obfuscation, and his fuzzy Albany math," state GOP chairman Nick Langworthy said in a statement.

More: New York faces its largest budget crisis in a decade. This is the reason why.

Tax cuts for New Yorkers will continue
New York started lowering middle class income taxes in 2012, and the budget would continue the planned re-
duction, which is expected to continue through 2025.

In tax year 2020, middle-class New Yorkers are expected to save $1.8 billion, Cuomo said.

Under the new rates, tax rate will drop to 6.09% in the $43,000-$161,550 income bracket, and 6.41% in the
$161,550-$323,200 income bracket.

Businesses will also get a tax break. The income tax rate would drop from 6.5% to 4% for businesses with 100
or fewer employees and with net income below $390,000.

Health-care groups warned about cuts in their industry.

"We remain committed to working with the Executive and Legislature to address the structural deficit and pro-
tect the coverage and services for the millions of New Yorkers who rely on our member Medicaid plans," Eric
Linzer, president of the state Health Plan Association, said in a statement.

Cuomo wants to expand a child tax credit

Cuomo proposed expanding an Empire State Child Credit.

"Too often, parents incur significant childcare costs in order to work or forego employment entirely due to unaf-
fordable expenses," Cuomo's budget briefing book said.

New York is one of only six states providing a state-specific credit, and it has been equal to 33% of the pre-2018
Federal Child Tax Credit, or $100 per qualifying child aged 4 to 16, whichever is greater.

The budget would expand the credit to include children under age 4. It would aid nearly 400,000 families whose
income is $50,000 or less.

Here's how much school aid would grow

Despite the deficit, Cuomo proposed an increase in school aid of $826 million, a 3% increase.

He said 80% of the money would go to poorer districts, and he proposed to overhaul the school-aid formula so
less goes to wealthy school districts that rely mainly on property taxes to fund their schools.

Overall, school aid would grow to $28.5 billion — by far the most per capita in the nation.

School advocates are pressing for $2 billion more in school aid for the coming year.

"What we know is true is: education is the civil rights issue of our day," Jasmine Gripper, executive director for
the Alliance for Quality Education, a labor-backed group, said in a statement.

"It is New York State’s responsibility to use its funding to achieve equity and fund poorer schools."

More: Why NY’s school-aid formula is flunking

Cuomo again proposes legalizing recreational marijuana

After failing to get approval in the state Senate, Cuomo again is proposing the Cannabis Regulation and Taxa-
tion Act.
In May 2018, Cuomo announced a plan to invest $150 billion in the state's infrastructure through 2024.

Now he wants to expand the investment to $175 billion to fund transportation and mass transit systems, affordable housing, schools, park facilities and energy efficiency programs.

The plan also includes the Restore Mother Nature Bond Act: a $3 billion borrowing plan that would need voter approval this November to upgrade the state's environmental protection plans.

Local governments would face a squeeze
In addition to $1.8 billion in reduced spending, local governments would face a squeeze on their Medicaid costs.

Cuomo railed against counties, who have had a cap on their Medicaid costs since 2015 — which the governor and the Legislature agreed to.

But Cuomo said with rising health-care costs, local governments need to do more to curb costs.

So he proposed that in order to keep having their Medicaid costs capped, they would have to adhere to the property tax cap and not increase their health-care spending by more than 3%.

If they don't, counties would have to pay the additional cost.

Another hit to local governments: Cuomo would eliminate the aid some receive from hosting video-lottery terminals in their communities.

Only Yonkers would be able to keep the roughly $20 million it gets each year from Empire City Casino at Yonkers Raceway because the money goes directly to school aid, Cuomo said.

"Once again, counties stand united behind lowering the cost of Medicaid and improving the quality of care for those in need. We will review what is under local control to accomplish this," the state Association of Counties said.
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No one knows whether the coronavirus will substantially threaten the U.S., where it has already been detected, but one thing is certain: American hospitals aren’t ready for the deadly virus or a future global contagion. Travelers from China’s Wuhan region are being diverted to five U.S. airports, where they can be screened. That’s sensible, but it’s no substitute for improving hospital readiness.

If the virus becomes a domestic threat, American public safety will depend on what hospitals do when someone unknowingly infected with the coronavirus shows up in the emergency room. That is the lesson of severe acute respiratory syndrome, better known as SARS, which is caused by another coronavirus.

Canada learned it the hard way in 2003, as deaths from SARS soared in the province of Ontario. Seventy-seven percent of people infected with SARS there contracted it in the hospital. They were patients, visitors and health-care workers. Another 17% got it at home, often from a health-care worker who lived with them. In short, SARS started as a travel infection but rapidly became a hospital infection because of lax infection-control standards. The same laxity is found in most U.S. hospitals today.

On March 7, 2003, two undiagnosed men with the SARS virus went to the hospital in two different Canadian cities. In Vancouver, the disease didn’t spread. But in Toronto, one infection was allowed to become a deadly outbreak, which killed 44 people in two months. For most hospitals in Ontario, “infection control was not a high priority,” according to the SARS Commission’s final report, delivered to the government of Ontario in January 2007.

In Vancouver, by contrast, “a robust worker safety and infection control culture” enabled the hospital to contain the virus, the report found. The Vancouver man with SARS felt ill after a trip to Asia and went to the hospital. Because of his symptoms, the staff whisked him out of the crowded ER within five minutes. Caregivers wore tight, moisture-proof masks and disposable gowns to protect themselves.

The same evening, the Toronto man, whose mother had come from Hong Kong two weeks earlier, went to the hospital with feverish symptoms. For 16 hours he was kept in a packed emergency department. His virus infected the man in the adjacent bed, who had come to the ER with heart problems, and another man three beds away with shortness of breath. Those two other men went home within hours but were later rushed back to the hospital, where they spread the virus to paramedics, ER staff, other ER visitors, a housekeeper working in the ER, a physician, two hospital technologists and, later, staff and patients in the critical-care units.

Poor adherence to infection-control protocols was to blame. Staff failed to wear masks and disposable gowns and didn’t wear face shields while inserting breathing tubes down patients’ airways. After the initial Toronto patient was finally admitted to a hospital room, it took five more hours for him to be isolated.

Even if this new virus peters out—the World Health Organization decided Thursday not to declare a “global health emergency”—improving infection control in U.S. emergency rooms wouldn’t be a wasted effort. It would save lives every day.

Sloppy infection control isn’t only a Canadian problem. A June 2017 literature review of shortcomings in U.S. emergency rooms found a lack of adequate distance between patients, use of contaminated equipment, failure to use shields to protect health-care workers who are intubating patients, and failure to ask coughing patients to wear masks.
During the SARS outbreak in Toronto, doctors and nurses brought the virus home to their families. That could happen here in America. Hospital workers routinely wear contaminated uniforms after work, taking them home and sometimes even into restaurants.

Have precautions improved in response to recent global health threats, such as SARS and Ebola? Yes, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention deserves some credit. The CDC conducted “mystery patient” drills at ERs in 49 New York City hospitals, sending in 95 patients pretending to have symptoms of measles and Middle East respiratory syndrome. In 78% of cases, the ER staff gave these patients masks and isolated them quickly. Even so, only 36% of health-care staff washed their hands. The CDC found “suboptimal adherence to key infection control practices.”

It’s a nationwide problem. More than 70,000 U.S. patients die each year from infections they contract in hospitals. The CDC warns that if you don’t have the flu and go to an emergency room, you’re at risk of getting it there. Contaminated beds, furniture and medical equipment allow bacterial infections to race through hospitals. What’s to stop the coronavirus? The CDC warns that you can pick up the virus by touching a chair or doorknob with the virus on it.

This latest coronavirus should be a red flag for American hospitals, which need to get serious about infection control. Even if luck holds, and the new virus doesn’t spread further, better infection control will still save tens of thousands of lives a year. It’s a no-brainer.
TROY reverse decision, re-opens Uncle Sam Parking Garage

Steve Hughes and Lauren Stanforth - Times Union - January 26, 2020

TROY — Just one day after saying they didn’t have enough answers to satisfy safety concerns about the Uncle Sam Parking Garage, Troy officials said it will re-open on Monday.

The city ordered the garage to temporarily close on Saturday after officials said they received an independent assessment report Friday from the owner, Bryce Companies. Troy spokesman John Salka said that report discussed safety concerns - but there were no details provided in the report about what those concerns were.

Mayor Patrick Madden’s office said the city received additional documentation Sunday from Bryce's engineers that eliminated concerns that there were specific conditions that made the overall garage unsafe. Salka said Sunday he had not seen the report, so he did not know what the new information was that calmed the city's fears.

Parts of the garage, however, will remain closed off Monday. Salka said he did not know if it would be entire floors, or only sections.

The initial closure on Saturday was made “in an abundance of caution,” officials said.

“Public safety remains our primary concern, and we will continue to monitor the status of work at the garage,” Madden’s office said in a statement.

The city sold the garage to Bryce in 2010 for $2.4 million. The now privately-owned facility in downtown Troy was the scene of a beam collapse in December, prompting concerns and a cordonning off of the affected area, but not a full closure.

The city's Downtown Parking Study, published in 2016, describes the garage as spanning the entire block between 3rd Street and 4th Street and has a maximum capacity of 751 vehicles. It accounted for about 18 percent of off-street parking options downtown, the study said.

On the day the beam fell, city officials said the collapse was an "isolated" situation that did not affect the three-story structure's overall integrity and said it would actively monitor the situation to ensure the public safety.

However in October, Bryce Companies had missed the deadline to provide the state-mandated assessment report of the parking garage's safety, and was fined by the city in the process. The documentation received Friday was that report, Salka said.

Troy City Council President Carmella Mantello tweeted Sunday that, "I still believe an independent (not owner) structural engineering assessment/report should be done immediately."
The AFL-CIO Department of Professional Employees has just released good news on professional union membership:

“The number of professionals in unions inched up in 2019, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (BLS) annual report on union membership. Professional union membership rose to 6.27 million, a gain of just over 90,000 members from 2018 and a new all-time high. However, the growth of the professional workforce outpaced the growth in union organizing, leading to a small decrease in union density among professional and technical employees.

‘Professionals are continuing to join unions,’ said Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) President Jennifer Dorning. ‘The modest gains made last year helped the total number of professionals in unions reach the highest level to date, clearly demonstrating continued opportunities to grow the labor movement by organizing professional and technical employees.’

Union membership among professionals has steadily increased over the course of the past 20 years with the total number of union professionals growing from 5 million to 6.27 million. Last year, DPE affiliated unions helped continue this trend by welcoming tech workers, healthcare professionals, nonprofit employees, digital journalists, federal government employees, and many other professionals into the labor movement.

Unfortunately, as union membership among professionals has grown, the overall number of union members declined in 2019, to a total of 14.6 million.

Today’s BLS report serves as a reminder that there are a lot of opportunities for union organizing in the professional workforce. Professional union membership is largely concentrated in education and healthcare, leaving many sectors and occupations with plenty of room for union organizing. Legal services; architectural, engineering and related services; and computer services are all growing sectors that employ millions of professionals and are largely unorganized.

Among the 50 million nonunion professionals, DPE research shows that a majority would support the formation of a union in their workplace. However, the same survey shows that a major obstacle to unionizing professionals is their lack of knowledge about unions, how to start one and how to identify which union is right for them.”
Workers need a bold vision to bring about a more equitable society


For the past 45 years, just about all of the income gains of America’s increasing productivity have gone to the elite and upper-middle class, while real worker wages have remained roughly flat. Today, the top one-tenth percent of earners, those earning more than $1.5m a year, own as much of the nation’s wealth as the entire bottom 90%. This obscene concentration of wealth, the likes of which hasn’t been seen since the Great Depression, is unsustainable and a threat to our democracy.

To understand how such extreme inequality has emerged, one must consider the role of race in forging political alignments. Hidden in plain sight – and too often ignored by progressives – has been the use of strategic racism to consolidate economic and political power for the few at the expense of everyone else. This strategy coerces the white working class to maintain the status quo and sacrifice their vertical positioning of growing personal inequality in exchange for the solidification of racial hierarchies and maintenance of white dominance in society.

But this is all predicated on a notion of economic value grounded in the neoliberal frame of self-interested resource and tribal accumulation that knows no bounds. It is when the labor movement and progressives redefine value around our common humanity, morality, and shared prosperity that we can build an authentic multi-racial coalition powerful enough to advance the interests of all working people. This does not mean that we remove race from public conscious or discourse, quite the contrary. Rather we are affirmative and explicit in the need to reckon with our nation’s history of exclusion and present-day challenges to ensure true racial and economic inclusion. Otherwise, we will continue to repeat the mistakes of the past.

After the Gilded Age, which led to the Great Depression and essentially collapsed the American economy, our government ushered in a series of New Deal policies that reined in unfettered capitalism and corporate consolidation. However, to a large extent progressives sacrificed the interests of blacks by way of a Faustian bargain that convinced southern legislators to pass New Deal legislation in exchange for not disrupting Jim Crow racial hierarchies. As a result, many of the federal policies adopted in the 1930s and 1940s, which generated the largest growth in our nation’s white-asset based middle class, were racist in both design and implementation.

In the case of labor, the passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935, also known as the Wagner Act, guaranteed workers the right to organize and collectively bargain, and provided workers with critical safeguards against corporate exploitation. But this legislation intentionally (by design) excluded agricultural and domestic workers. In the 1930s, nearly half of black men and 90% of black women worked in either the agricultural or domestic sector. The same exclusions applied to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which meant that many black sharecroppers and farmers were without protection from continued exploitation by white-male plantation owners in the Jim Crow south.

It is no surprise that by the 1970s, at a time when the unionization rates of black Americans exceeded those of white Americans, there was an attack on organized labor, civil rights and government intervention more generally. Corporate elites framed the social, political, and economic gains of black Americans as a threat to the economic and cultural positioning of whites and the white working class. What followed were policies that pushed for deregulation, tax cuts for the wealthy, punitive control of the underclass, and the dismantling of labor organizing. Thinly veiled stigmatization based on anti-blackness was strategically used as political fodder to divide the working class by race, characterizing government actions on behalf of social welfare as inefficient and unfairly biased towards tipping the scales to undeserving “welfare queens”, “super predators”, and “deadbeat dads”.
This was an acceleration of a neoliberal political revolution fueled by strategic racism that still drives much of the public discourse and policy conversation in America today. Rugged individualism, personal responsibility, and “laissez-faire” economics present a seductive allegory that through hard work and ingenuity, the market can facilitate a “rags to riches” story for anyone. This narrative presumes markets to be a self-regulating, fair, “color blind” arbiter of our effort, initiative, and, overall, worth. But an honest and sobering confession of our historical sins, accompanied with redress, would counter the neoliberal frame that characterizes black, brown and poor people as “undeserving”, and, instead, pave the way for narratives that accurately frame inequality and poverty as grounded in resource deprivation and exploitation.

Race-conscious solutions must be at the center of our policy discussions. The time has come for us to demand a bold, transformative race and gender conscious economic bill of rights – one that would ensure universal access to quality jobs, health care, housing, schooling, financial services and capital for all of its citizens.

With enthusiasm, we join the Clean Slate for Worker Power project out of Harvard Law School, and endorse the slate of recommendations stemming from this project that are due out this week. This bold vision is necessary to bring about a more equitable and engaged society that rebalances the power in the workplace that has left so many workers vulnerable to the whims of a so-called “trickle down” that for the past 45 years our neoliberal political economy has yet to deliver.
Leaked Memos Show Instacart is Running a Union-Busting Campaign

Lauren Kaori Gurley - VICE.com - January 27, 2020

On February 1, 15 Instacart employees in the Chicago suburb Skokie will vote on whether to unionize with the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1546.

The Instacart workers, who pick and pack groceries at the grocery store chain Mariano’s, would be the first to unionize on the grocery delivery-app, which would send a message to the app's 142,000 other workers in the United States.

Unionizing workers tell Motherboard that Instacart has brought in several high level Instacart managers into the Mariano’s grocery store where they work in recent days. They say managers who they’ve never met before have been distributing anti-union literature and are trying to convince workers not to vote for the union. Some of these memos were obtained by Motherboard.

“I encourage you to look at all of the FACTS and vote “NO” on February 1st,” Instacart senior operations manager Chris Nolan wrote in one of the memos dated January 22. “You may be under the impression giving Local 1546 the right to represent you could give you greater control over your work life,” continues Nolan in the memo. “However, the fact is, the UFCW brings a whole set of rules members must follow.”

Another memo also signed by Nolan and circulated among workers presents a list of “facts” about unions. These facts suggest that the union would serve to drain workers paychecks. “FACT #1 LOCAL 1546 DUES ARE EXPENSIVE… FACT #2 IF LOCAL 1546 WINS THIS ELECTION, THEY WILL WANT TO MAKE SURE ANY CONTRACT NEGOTIATED BETWEEN IT AND INSTACART GUARANTEES THE UNION WILL BE PAID BY YOU,” a memo dated January 21 reads.

Despite giving these threatening memos to employees, Instacart told Motherboard that it "support[s] employee freedom and choice."

“Up to 15 part-time employees in Skokie, Illinois, are expected to participate in an election on Saturday, February 1, to vote on whether or not to unionize,” a spokesperson from Instacart’s headquarters in San Francisco said. “We support employee freedom and choice, respect our employees’ rights to consider unionization and will honor the outcome of the election process.”

In recent months, Instacart has faced a series of gig worker-led strikes and protests led by the app’s gig workers over pay cuts. In November, several thousand Instacart workers launched a three-day strike, demanding the app reinstate a 10 percent default tip. Days later, the app eliminated its “quality” bonus—a reward for good service, which can account for up to 40 percent of pay— causing widespread outrage among workers and customers alike on social media.

While 130,000 Instacart workers are contracted gig workers who deliver groceries to customer’s homes, the app also employs another 12,000 in-store “shoppers,” in select grocery store chains who pick and pack groceries for delivery. All of these in-store employees work less than 30 hours a week but they are legally classified as part-time employees, not contractors. “The in-store shopper role was created to promote flexibility, efficiency, and quality customer service—each of which is essential to our shopping experience and delivers positive results for both customers and our in-store shoppers,” an Instacart spokesperson told Motherboard.
Joe Loftis, an in-store Instacart worker at the Mariano’s and one of the lead organizers of the Instacart union drive, said that he decided it was time to unionize after he was written up twice when he missed work due to a few serious injuries, and noticed that his coworkers were also fed-up with the timed pace of work and frequent, seemingly arbitrary penalizations under Instacart’s algorithm.

“Being punished by a machine is what people are most upset about,” Loftis told Motherboard. “With them, you’re always guilty until proven innocent, even if there’s a glitch and the app is wrong.”

Loftis said Instacart workers at the Mariano’s earn the minimum wage, $13 an hour, work under a timer, and must meet a 72-items-per-minute quota. Because employees are capped at 29 hours a week, they do not receive healthcare benefits.

Last year, Loftis, a former Teamsters union member, says he reached out to the UFCW about unionizing, then launched the union campaign at the Mariano’s store where he works. In December, he says he convinced 15 Instacart coworkers to sign unionization cards with little resistance. Only a few workers oppose the union, he says, and he expects that Saturday’s vote will be an easy victory.

“I don’t think this will be much of a challenge. Workers are treated so badly,” Loftis said. “This is going to be a cake walk.”
ALBANY — Unemployment in the Capital Region edged higher in December, rising to 3.6 percent of the workforce from 3.5 percent last year, the New York State Department of Labor reported Tuesday. In November, the rate had been just 3.2 percent.

Two factors contributed to the higher rate: more residents were unemployed, and fewer residents were working. The workforce overall also contracted.

In all, 16,400 residents were out of work and actively seeking jobs during December in the five-county metropolitan area.

The Labor Department reported last Thursday that the number of jobs in the five-county area had increased by 2,100 over the past year, with the strongest gains in natural resources, mining and construction, up 2,000, and education and health services, up 1,100.

The largest losses over the past year came in manufacturing; transportation, warehousing and utilities; and leisure and hospitality; each down 400 jobs. The total number of jobs based in the five-county area stood at 482,200 in December.

State labor markets analyst Kevin Alexander said the labor market overall continues to be tight, and the unemployment rate was essentially flat.

"Compared to last year, it's up just a tick," Alexander said of the 0.1 percent increase. "That could be due to rounding."

Alexander said the job market continues to be tight. "There's still that mismatch of skills" between what workers have to offer and what employers are looking for. Nevertheless, "it's a strong labor market. We've been steadily growing but slowing down."

The Capital Region's 3.6 percent unemployment rate was the second lowest in the state and shared by Dutchess-Putnam and Nassau-Suffolk. The lowest, 3.2 percent, was found in the Finger Lakes college town Ithaca, and in New York City.

In New York City's case, unemployment had plummeted by 0.8 points from 4.0 percent a year earlier.

The figures are preliminary and subject to revision as more complete data are received.
Chipotle Fined for Committing Over 13,000 Child Labor Violations

Jaya Saxena - Eater.com - January 28, 2020

It’s the largest child labor penalty ever issued by a single state

Chipotle may be pulling ahead in the Bowl Bowl, but good food can’t make up for bad labor practices. Attorney General Maura Healey of Massachusetts has fined Chipotle $1.37 million for committing approximately 13,253 child labor violations, along with other wage and hour law violations.

The investigation against corporate-owned Chipotle locations began when the parent of a 16-year-old employee complained that they had worked past midnight, and a review of the company’s records showed many instances of minors working too late, too many hours, and without work permits.

The investigation also showed Chipotle did not regularly inform workers of their rights.

“Chipotle is a major national restaurant chain that employs thousands of young people across the country and it has a duty to ensure minors are safe working in its restaurants,” AG Healey said in a statement on her website. “We hope these citations send a message to other fast food chains and restaurants that they cannot violate our child labor laws and put young people at risk.”

Chipotle has been scrutinized recently for its labor practices, as workers attempt to organize against the chain’s working conditions.

After interviewing Chipotle employees for the New Republic, reporter Kim Kelly uncovered “a workplace long on manic stress and short on basic dignity and respect for workers.”

In Massachusetts, Chipotle has agreed to pay $500k of its fine to a fund to educate young people about child labor laws and workforce development, presumably so they can know when companies like Chipotle are trying to pull one over on them.
One of the most significant bills to strengthen workers’ abilities to organize in the past 80 years is headed to a vote next week in the House, where it will probably pass amid a newfound momentum for progressive legislation.

The Protecting the Right to Organize Act would amend some of the country’s decades-old labor laws to give workers more power during disputes at work, add penalties for companies that violate labor law, and grant potentially hundreds of thousands of workers collective-bargaining rights they don’t currently have. It would also weaken “right-to-work” laws in 27 states that allow employees to forgo participating in and paying dues to unions.

Although the bill is unlikely to be taken up by the Senate, it comes amid a growing conversation about workers’ rights. Strikes have surged to a level not seen since the 1980s, and 2020 candidates have rushed to picket lines to show their support for working people. The bill comes at a time when California is grappling with a new law that gives more rights to contracted workers.

“This is the most ambitious labor law reform to get to the floor of the house in a very long time,” said Sharon Block, executive director of the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School and a former member of the National Labor Relations Board. “I think it’s really important.”

The bill addresses what Democrats, union organizers and labor advocates say are fundamental weaknesses with the U.S. labor law. Republicans have argued strongly against it, saying that it will erode worker privacy and strengthen union power.

The bill would create penalties for employers that violate federal labor law by retaliating against workers who are trying to unionize. Currently, no such penalties exist.

Economists and labor law experts say that this means companies have few disincentives for breaking the law. About 40 percent of companies whose workers vote to unionize are charged with violating federal law during union campaigns, according to federal data obtained by the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute.

But this bill would give the National Labor Relations Board, which enforces federal labor law, new power to force companies to pay up to $50,000 per violation. It would also award workers’ compensation for the damages they experience when they are retaliated against, not just back pay, as they are currently entitled to.

The bill would also weigh in on the debate of who gets to be classified as a contractor or an employee. Studies over the past 30 years have estimated that hundreds of thousands to millions of workers are misclassified as contractors when they should be employees, an issue that has become the subject of intense debate in blue states like California.

The bill would change who qualifies as an employee vs. an independent contractor, but the change would apply only to workers seeking to organize or join a union. This move in particular could potentially pave the way for gig workers at companies like Lyft, Uber and DoorDash to organize with unions, if they are found to meet the bill’s new definition for employees.
The bill also prevents employers from permanently replacing strikers and allows workers to bring private lawsuits for violations of the National Labor Relations Act.

The bill would also weaken right-to-work laws passed in predominantly red states. Right now, many employees in right-to-work states don’t have to pay union fees to be represented by the union. The bill would change that by allowing unions to force workers at companies that have unions to pay union fees.

The bill has drawn sharp opposition from business and industry groups, hundreds of which have joined forces to lobby against it, saying it could threaten small businesses, curb work opportunities for gig workers, and make it harder for businesses to get legal advice on labor law. The group formed to oppose the bill, the Coalition for a Democratic Workplace, has also pointed to a provision that requires employers to provide a list of their employees’ information, including jobs, shift information, cellphone number and address, to union leadership as an NLRB-sanctioned election nears.

“We’re taking this very seriously and considering this a live-fire exercise,” said Glenn Spencer, a senior vice president at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which opposes the bill. “We think this would be a pretty existential threat to the business community. … Provision after provision, this bill is completely stacked against employers and, we think, workers, too.”

Spencer said that the bill’s move to require employers to turn over their employees’ information is particularly concerning.

The bill passed the labor committee in September, but was put on hold until early January, when 76 Democratic members of the House sent a letter to House leaders, including Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), urging them to bring the bill up for a vote. The letter’s signatories included freshman lawmakers who had flipped red districts in 2018, like Rep. Jared Golden (D-Maine) and Rep. Max Rose (D-N.Y.); long-standing members of the house like Tim Ryan (D-Ohio); and members of the Progressive Caucus like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass).

“If we get it passed, it means [Americans] will be much more likely to join a union,” said Rep. Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (D-Va.), the chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor. “Right now only 10 percent are in unions. That’s primarily because of the difficulty there is to forming a union. A lot of it is because of the lack of deterrence from unfair labor practices.”

The vote is scheduled for next week.

The Republicans who co-sponsored the bill, Reps. Jeff Van Drew and Christopher H. Smith, both of New Jersey, and Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.), did not respond to requests for comment.

The bill has 218 sponsors — the exact number of votes needed to pass a bill in the House. But it is unlikely to pass in the GOP-controlled Senate. The staff of Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), chairman of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, said in a statement that his committee would not be considering the legislation this session.
Every year, I teach a class on labor and workplace policy for graduate students at Columbia University. And every year, I begin class by asking students what comes to mind when they think about the labor movement. When I first started teaching, students mainly described unions as organizations that were once important, but probably out of date in the current economy. "Good for people who made cars," quipped one student.

This year the answers could not have been more different. Thanks to a massive wave of strikes and new efforts to unionize across tech companies and media outlets, my students saw unions in a different light. They were now interested in what unions could offer them in terms of better wages and benefits and voice on the job — and indeed, many were involved in the newly formed graduate student union at Columbia University fighting for improved health care benefits and more transparent employment policies.

This new interest is shared by much of the American workforce. The percentage of non-union members expressing interest in joining a union shot up from around a third of workers in the 1970s and 1990s to nearly half of all workers in 2017, according to polling conducted by researchers at MIT. Yet the discouraging reality is that current labor law makes it all but impossible for these workers to form or join unions at their jobs. And even in the rare cases where workers do manage to start unions, these organizations are sharply limited in the representation that they can provide to workers.

Start with the fact that only about one in 10 non-union workers say they would know how to form a union if they wanted to, according to polling I have conducted together with researchers at MIT. That's understandable because the process is long, complicated and risky for rank-and-file workers. Workers often endure threats, mandatory anti-union meetings, surveillance and even physical intimidation from their employers in the protracted process necessary to hold an election for union representation.

Although employers are legally barred from disciplining or firing workers involved in the union organizing process, many employers do so anyway because the penalties are so low. An employer that illegally fires a union organizer is liable only for paying the worker's back pay—minus any income the worker has earned in the meantime. One recent report estimated that employers are charged with violating federal law in over 40% of union elections. And if workers manage to win union elections against these long odds, they still have to reach a first contract. Many employers drag the process on for years until workers lose steam. Other workers, moreover, simply lack union rights altogether: agricultural workers, domestic and caretaking workers, independent contractors, anyone with any supervisory duties and public sector workers in many states cannot collectively bargain with their employers.

On top of these barriers to forming a union is the fact that current labor law makes it difficult, if not outright impossible, for unions to provide the services that workers say are most important, like having a voice when it comes to management decisions or health and retirement coverage they can take with them between jobs. Together with researchers at MIT's Sloan School of Management, I have been conducting nationally representative surveys of American workers to understand the forms of labor representation that workers would most value.

Our research found that workers highly valued traditional collective bargaining, as well as sectoral or regional bargaining that would allow labor organizations to set standards across an industry or state. Workers also prized labor organizations that could offer extra unemployment benefits, health insurance, retirement coverage, job training and skills development. And workers liked the idea of giving labor organizations more input into how they do their day-to-day jobs as well as weighing in on decisions made at the firm-wide level about business operations.
In all these cases, current federal labor rules make it all but impossible for unions to offer these services on a widespread basis. (Unions, for instance, can bargain with multiple employers—but only if all those employers voluntarily agree to do so.)

The upshot is that even where they exist now, unions are handicapped by outdated laws built for a post-war economy. Although workers want and need unions that can operate across different sectors, American labor law is built around unions that organize and bargain at a single plant, factory or store. Given these obstacles, expanding worker voice will require more than tinkering around the edges of existing law. Instead, we need to start from scratch.

The good news is that there is a growing consensus around the need for such an approach. For the first time in recent political history, the major Democratic presidential candidates have all included ambitious proposals for labor law reform as part of their platforms. Meanwhile, the House is considering the PRO Act — endorsed by nearly all Democrats — which would substantially boost workers' ability to form and join effective unions. Unions are thinking bigger, too: Both the American Federation of Labor and Service Employees International Union have announced proposals for broadening the scope of labor cooperation and bargaining at the sector-wide level.

And the Clean Slate for Worker Power initiative at Harvard Law School recently released a sweeping set of proposals aimed at empowering workers — both by expanding traditional unions but also by creating other alternative mechanisms for worker voice.

Establishing a new system of laws governing the workplace is not going to be easy, nor would the proposals described above solve all the problems of economic and political inequality facing the United States.

These kinds of ambitious labor reforms would go far in giving workers the voice and representation they say they want at work. As one of my students expressed at the end of last semester, while they might not always be perfect, unions are still the best shot that workers have of securing dignity and rights on the job.
Could This Happen Here, In The U.S.?: “ Strikes Cause Problems”-Head Of Powerful Union Tells French President Of ‘Trouble To Come Unless He Cancels’ Pension Reforms

Western NY Labor Today via The Guardian - January 31, 2020

(PARIS, FRANCE) - The Union Leader heading protests against France’s bitterly contested pension reforms has accused French President Emmanuel Macron of playing with fire and showing contempt for the country’s Workers. Philippe Martinez, head of the powerful CGT, said Macron and his government were “disconnected” from the real world and their advisers needed to “shake the hands of a few who actually work.”

He defended Electricity Workers who pulled the plug on homes and businesses, warning that forcing pension reforms through against public opposition could boost the Far Right. “People ‘are angry to say the very least, especially young Workers who believe their entire generation is being sacrificed,’” Martinez said. “Macron ‘is so sure of himself, but he’s playing with fire.’”

Martinez was speaking as ministers approved the reform bill - paving the way for its introduction to Parliament next month, and demonstrators took to the streets again in a show of defiance following a return to work by Transport Staff after a record six-week Strike.

The Council of State, the Government’s Legal Adviser, has also criticized the Reform Law as “imprecise” and “patchy,” and said that it had been given insufficient time to study the bill.

Martinez’s warning echoes that of Jean Grosset, of the Left-Leaning Think Tank Jean Jaurès Foundation, who told The Observer in December: “If there’s no dialogue, no attempt to compromise, just force, it will leave traces of rancor in the country, which (the government) will pay for one day or another, most likely through the ballot box.”

Sitting in the conference room of the CGT’s headquarters in Paris after returning from the protests on the back of a motorbike, Martinez insisted the Union - the oldest, second-biggest and most powerful in France, was on the right side of the pension dispute.

“We’re ‘not the villainous little Gaulois the president says we are,’” he says. “We’ve been called ‘militant and not reformist, but I dispute these labels.’ ‘We are not against reform, we want it but not this reform.’ ‘We believe we can improve the current system and have made many proposals, but this government doesn’t negotiate.’ We have a president ‘who thinks he’s always right so it’s difficult to discuss anything.’ ‘And when discussions don’t work, there are conflicts.’”

Martinez is the diminutive but formidable figurehead of French Unionism.

His instantly recognizable face, with drooping moustache, is usually portrayed scowling, belying a dry humor. It has appeared on news kiosks and recent magazine covers as the face of the man who wants to “ruin France.”

In 2016 he was spearheading strikes, blockades and demonstrations against changes to Labor Laws pushed through by the then Socialist President, François Hollande.

Back then he was headlined “the man who wants to bring France to its knees.” Then, as now, there were weeks of protests and industrial action.

The Labor Law was eventually passed.
Poughkeepsie trench collapse:
How responders safely extricated two men
Katelyn Cordero - Poughkeepsie Journal - January 31, 2020

City of Poughkeepsie Firefighters and Department of Public Works employees sawed through lumber in front of a Dwight Street home on Friday afternoon.

Just steps away, two men were trapped in a trench. They were roughly 10 feet under the ground, submerged up to their waists in dirt. But before they could be extricated, responders needed to be certain the perimeter of the trench would not cave in on them.

So, firefighters and employees unloaded lumber from trailers, cut it down to fit the gap in the ground and affixed it to metal supports.

While they worked, other responders talked with the men in the trench, as they had since arriving on the scene just after 2 p.m. They tried to keep the men calm and assess any medical needs.

Soon, firefighters entered the trench to try and loosen — slowly — the men from the mud and clay. They used buckets to scoop out the dirt.

Central Hudson Gas & Electric workers joined them, as did EMTs, who hooked the victims up to IVs and supplied them with blankets. Though temperatures were in the 40s, the ground was colder, and wet.

“it was a really slow process,” City of Poughkeepsie Fire Department Lt. Paul Bucher said. “Most of the stuff we do — fires and car accidents and stuff like that — we do it as quickly as possible. But, these special operations we do it very slow to make sure there is no further collapse and to make sure not to hurt them or get any of us hurt.”

Just before 4 p.m., roughly two hours after emergency responders were alerted to the collapsed trench, they moved one victim out of the hole on a stretcher. Roughly 30 minutes later, after using a Central Hudson tool called an “air spade” to loosen the ground, they pulled free the second man.

Both appeared to be shivering and Bucher believes they were in shock. The men were taken by ambulance to area hospitals to be evaluated; city Fire Chief Mark Johnson said the second man extracted sustained an arm injury of some kind.

Mayor Rob Rolison noted, "They were in there for over two hours. It's cold, it's not the best position to be in. You know, compression injuries and things that can happen — hypothermia; even though it's not that cold out today, it's cold enough where you have to worry about that, as well."

The men had been working on a sewer line in front of the residence when the trench caved in.

Rolison referred to them as "two very lucky individuals ... "It could have been a lot worse, initially, for them." He credited first responders with "methodically" working to free the workers, and said the victims "looked to be in pretty good shape, and it's a great outcome."

City firefighters had previously undergone training for such trench emergencies, and Bucher said the incident went as smooth as that training — though the trench was deeper than on what they had practiced.
The Opioid Epidemic’s Impact On Workers’ Compensation

Naeisha Rose - Labor Press - January 31, 2020

New York, NY – In combatting the nation’s opioid epidemic the federal government may have unintentionally increased the amount of workers’ compensation denials across the country, resulting in victims not receiving immediate treatment after an accident in the workplace.

In 2018, a report revealed that nearly 70-percent of workers’ compensation claims were denied, according to Risk & Insurance, a digital magazine that focuses on risk management and commercial insurance. The report was based on research conducted by Lockton companies, a global risk management firm. The data was based on denials that were conducted from 2013 to 2017.

The research concluded that of the 67-percent of claims that were denied by claim adjusters and employers within a year in the United States, that the amount of converted money that was awarded on average was 55-percent higher than the original claim, however, the tactic still remains.

Denied litigated claims resulted in the average net claim compensation ballooning to $36,991 for claims that would have paid out around $10,153, according to the research.

In 2019, the Labor Department issued a statement that it would set limitations on prescriptions for those hurt on the job with a seven-day supply of opioid painkillers, with only the option for three refills within the first 28 days, as reported by the Associated Press. Anything beyond that would require a medical certification.

With more and more workers denied workers’ compensation, as well as treatment, they have been turning to pharmacies, like Franklin Rx in L.I. to meet their needs, according to COO Jonathan Mordechaev.

“We are a full-service specialty pharmacy handling individual needs after vehicle accidents or workplace injuries,” Mordechaev said. “The first step is to reach out to an attorney, followed by seeking medical attention.”

After a workplace injury, many workers are often in need of some type of medication to aid in the healing process, according to Mordechaev.

“We assist in getting their medication approved through the proper insurance,” said Mordechaev. “We do the legwork and all the background for them in order for them to obtain their medication without paying out of pocket, because often times they tend to use their private insurance, which they are not supposed to be doing.”

The problem that those who are denied workers’ compensation face is that insurance carriers want to know if the medication is medically necessary.

Franklin Rx will reach out to the victim’s attorneys and physicians to help them in the process and make sure it is delivered for them.

“The last thing you want to do is to be thinking about that,” said Mordachaev. “This is done from the comfort of their home and everything is delivered to them.”

Injured victims don’t have to wait online to only learn that a medication is not covered or out of stock at a time that is not convenient, according to the COO. To help those who are injured representatives of Franklin Rx need a claim number, the date of injury and their carrier. They also try to make sure that patients are getting diagnosed correctly.
John C. Merlino, Esq., a partner at William Schwitzer & Associates and a labor activist, sees both sides to the dilemma when it comes to injured workers obtaining the medical treatment.

“The reason the majority of injured workers’ requests for medication get denied is, in part, due to the narcotic epidemic that is currently occurring in the United States,” said Merlino. “The carriers will deny injured workers because the doctors have to express what is the medical necessity to continue with a certain narcotic medication, and need to balance the long term affect which can be detrimental to the person.”

Doctors are becoming more aware and conscious of what they are prescribing to patients, especially when it comes to narcotics, according to Merlino.

“I’m noticing doctors being more cautious because they do not want to be in violation of any regulatory laws and they see what is occurring, they don’t want [addiction] to happen to their patients,” said Merlino. “I’ve seen a decline in dependency and an increase in awareness.”

Merlino has noticed physicians are taking a more holistic approach in treating patients who are on workers’ compensation.

“I’m seeing more dietary treatment, aqua-therapy and other modalities of treatment post-operative where medication is not the main modality,” said Merlino. “Doctors tend to cut patients off the medication sooner [from narcotics] so patients do not run the risk addiction in the future.”

Merlino has noticed an increased trend of patients getting acupuncture as well, along with topical creams versus narcotics for pain management, but acknowledges that this approach doesn’t necessarily work for everyone.

“Every person is obviously different,” said Merlino. “Carriers need to understand this and the quicker a claimant gets the needed treatment the faster they can get back to work, especially when it comes to surgeries.”

Merlino has had several clients who had injuries where surgery is indicated, but the carriers will fight tooth-and-nail and push unnecessary litigation, to either prolong the inevitable or seek to get the necessary surgery denied by a law judge. Litigation with carriers can end up going on for several months or even up to a year, added the partner.

“It’s a waste of the board’s time and resources, and it’s prolonging an injured worker from healing and getting better in an effort to go back to work,” said Merlino. “Prolonging the treatment that is needed it is not going to help the injured party or the carrier from saving resources.”

“Carriers,” said Merlino “Must stop playing with their lives and understand injured workers’ want to get back to work to support their families.”

Adjusters are getting their marching orders from the big insurance companies that are only looking at the dollars-and-cents in a foolish manner, according to Merlino.

“Unfortunately, it’s a game big insurance companies are playing and who’s paying for it are the hardworking men and women who get injured at work.” said Merlino.

“You can have somebody that fell 20 feet off a scaffold and then you can have somebody that fell six feet, both are injured. The mechanism of injury or the severity thereof should not be the sole factor in determining which injured worker gets authorization for treatment.”
Merlino fears that some of these victims might self-medicate while waiting for authorization from the carriers [surgery, physical therapy, injections] to be sorted out through lengthy litigation and/or ridiculous “red tape.”

“There has to be a happy medium, carriers must understand it’s a case-by-case situation when it comes to treatment and medications, it’s not a cookie-cutter guideline,” said Merlino. “Some of the carrier’s medical consultants do an exam in 15 minutes and then they offer an opinion on whether or not someone needs surgery, injections, physical therapy, which is ridiculous and the carriers get away with this.”

These long litigation processes tend to result in the injured parties turning to unemployment compensation for wage replacement and their private insurance for medical treatment all to avoid delays in getting the benefits needed.

“It’s cost-shifting,” said Merlino. “They are preventing injured people from saying that they got injured at work so that they can get the treatment they need to go back to work. That’s wrong!”
Governor Cuomo Deploys 26 Bilingual Mental Health Professionals and 25 State Building Inspectors to Puerto Rico Following String of Devastating Earthquakes

Governor.ny.gov news - CNN - February 1, 2020

Bilingual Mental Health Professionals Will Provide Support to Trauma-Impacted Residents

Team of Building Inspectors and Assessors Will Conduct Damage and Code Compliance Assessments

Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul Will Lead Delegation to Puerto Rico Today Following Governor Cuomo's Trip to the Island on January 14 and 15.

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the deployment of 26 bilingual mental health professionals and 25 state building inspectors to Puerto Rico to assist in the recovery efforts as the island continues to recoup from a string of devastating earthquakes. Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul will lead a delegation to Puerto Rico today along with the deployments and visit the towns of Peñuelas, Guayanilla and Yauco to tour earthquake affected areas. The deployments follow a series of initial damage assessments conducted by the Governor and his delegation during their trip to Puerto Rico on January 14 and 15.

"While the federal administration has turned its back on Puerto Rico, New York is continuing to step up to extend a helping hand," Governor Cuomo said. "The people of Puerto Rico are suffering and they still need our help. This deployment of mental health professionals and experts on the structural assessment team will help ensure the safety of our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico and help them cope as they rebuild and restore their lives."

"We are committed to continuing our efforts to support Puerto Rico and assist in recovery and rebuilding," said Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul. "I'll be joining Secretary of State Rossana Rosado in leading a state delegation of mental health professionals and building inspectors to assess damage from earthquakes and provide individuals and families with the care and services they need following the devastation. While the federal government turns its back on our brothers and sisters, we remain steadfast in helping to ensure the health and safety of those in Puerto Rico and build back better and stronger."

The team of 26 bilingual mental health professionals are from six of the Greater New York Hospital Association's member hospital systems: Montefiore Medical Center, Mount Sinai, Northwell Health, Medysis Health Network, New York Presbyterian and Catholic Health Services of Long Island. The mental health professionals will be integrated into the work of the Puerto Rican Mental Health Agency---the Mental Services Administration Health and Addiction - and deploy to shelters in Guanica, Guayanilla and Ponce. Three staffed from the Greater New York Hospital Association will join the team of mental health professionals. The findings from this first deployment will be used to determine a strategy for a second deployment of mental health professionals later this year.

The Greater New York Hospital Association will also work with New York-Presbyterian Hospital to develop a comprehensive, long-term mental health and telemedicine program for Puerto Rico's residents. The State and GNYHA will partner with the Center for Body-Mind Medicine to deploy up to 15 mental health professional to Puerto Rico, to help address the long-term impact of these traumatic events, especially in children.

The New York contingent of building inspectors consists of 19 experts from the State Office of Fire Prevention and Control, as well as six from the Department of State, who are trained to assess buildings and facilities that have suffered damage from disasters and emergencies.
As part of this deployment, the building inspection team will be tasked with inspecting a portion of the Island's 35,000 damaged buildings. Once in Puerto Rico, inspectors will be dispatched to locations in need of inspections and report findings back to Puerto Rico Planning and Housing Authority Officials.

During each inspection, the New York team members will look for things that may impact the structural integrity of buildings such as leaning walls, compromised supports, severe stress cracks, and other criteria that would limit the use of a building until it can be rendered safe for occupancy.

The team will depart for Puerto Rico on February 3rd. Their mission is expected to last for 14 days.

This deployment of mental health professionals and experts on the structural assessment team will help ensure the safety of our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico and help them cope as they rebuild and restore their lives.

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
Greater New York Hospital Association President Kenneth E. Raske said, "New York's hospital community stands in solidarity with Puerto Rico and is honored to help deploy bilingual mental health professionals to the Island in the wake of these terrible earthquakes. GNYHA thanks Governor Cuomo for once again taking the lead in bringing much-needed aid to the people of Puerto Rico, and is proud to once again work with him on these efforts."

New York State Secretary of State Rossana Rosado said, "New York continues to stand with Puerto Rico, and I am proud to be part of the team that is helping our neighbors rebuild and recover from the destructive earthquakes. I am grateful for Governor Cuomo's unwavering support and for our tremendous workforce for their willingness to use their expertise to assist the people of Puerto Rico."

New York State Homeland Security and Emergency Services Commissioner Patrick A. Murphy said, "Puerto Rico has gone through so much over the past several years and we are proud to help in any way we can as earthquakes continue to ravage the island. Whether it's this team of building inspectors, or a future need that has yet to be identified, New York stands ready to assist our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters in rebuilding and recovering as quickly as possible."

Office of Mental Health Commissioner Dr. Ann Sullivan said, "Natural disasters cause great stress and confusion for families and individuals and can lead to or exacerbate depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. The people of Puerto Rico have experienced so much devastation in recent months and will benefit greatly from the expertise of the bilingual mental health professionals arriving on the island Monday.

Governor Cuomo has once again demonstrated a strong commitment to assisting and supporting our most vulnerable citizens."

Since this series of devastating earthquakes began several weeks ago, New York has stood shoulder to shoulder with Puerto Rico and has worked to support the Island's recovery any way it can.

Not only has the Governor personally traveled to the island to survey damage and promote solidarity, but he has deployed engineers and utility experts from the New York Power Authority to address power outages caused by the earthquakes and work to stabilize the island's power system to help mitigate the repeated power outages.

The state has also provided hundreds of blankets, pillows and emergency kits to those affected and joined with the Greater New York Hospital Association to authorize the deployment of bilingual mental health professionals to support people on the island who are suffering from the trauma of the disaster.
Prior to the earthquakes, Governor Cuomo has continuously directed critical resources to communities in need following Hurricane Maria's landfall in September 2017. In the immediate aftermath, New York established the Empire State Relief and Recovery Effort, ultimately distributing at least 4,400 pallets of supplies collected from 13 donation sites across the state. New York State also deployed more than 1,000 personnel, including hundreds of utility workers and power experts, to help with power restoration and grid stabilization.

Under the Governor's leadership, New York State has dedicated approximately $13 million to support the more than 11,000 displaced Hurricane Maria victims living in New York. Part of this funding is being directed to organizations who connect vulnerable Puerto Ricans to needed services such as employment, housing, benefits counseling and health care. Governor Cuomo has also committed up to $11 million dollars in housing and workforce funding for displaced Puerto Ricans: a $1 million program to provide robust case management services to displaced Puerto Ricans, and up to $10 million in job training and placement.

NYPA is presently offering continued consultation on a wide-range of issues relating to the rebuilding of Puerto Rico's grid, focusing specifically on these areas: technical assistance and advocacy, reforming management and operations, and strengthening emergency preparedness. Between the months of November 2017 and April 2018, more than 450 New York State utility personnel, led by NYPA, went to Puerto Rico to help restore power. The New York State utility crews, under NYPA's leadership, consisted primarily of transmission and distribution experts, damage assessors and general support staff, who undertook repairs to transmission lines and other electric infrastructure work focusing its initial power restoration efforts in San Juan. They brought with them hundreds of bucket trucks, diggers, excavators and other specialized equipment to complete the necessary repairs to damaged transmission and distribution lines and worked 16-hour days, seven days-a-week to help restore power. The NYS utility workers then joined with utility workers from around the country—led by the Edison Electric Institute, the American Public Power Association and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association—to help restore power to other areas of the island.

Governor Cuomo and the New York Congressional Delegation continue to advocate for Puerto Rico to receive essential federal assistance. In 2017, Governor Cuomo along with members of the New York Congressional Delegation and with Puerto Rican elected officials issued a Build Back Better Assessment Report. The report identified specific sectors needing investments, including housing, power grid and resiliency, and agriculture, among others.

After the 2018 summer, Governor Cuomo announced the successful completion of the summer-long NY Stands with Puerto Rico Recovery and Rebuilding Initiative. Throughout the summer, more than 650 SUNY and CUNY students, as well as skilled labor volunteers, traveled to island communities still recovering from Hurricanes Maria and Irma to provide assistance to those in need. Over the course of five deployments, volunteers logged in nearly 41,000 hours cleaning, restoring, and rebuilding homes. The goal to renovate 150 homes was far exceeded, with a total of 178 homes restored over 10 weeks.

Under the direction of Governor Cuomo, SUNY’s and CUNY’s respective Board of Trustees passed resolutions in the fall of 2017 authorizing campuses to provide students from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands impacted by hurricanes Maria and Irma with the ability to pay tuition at the in-state rate for the 2017-2018 academic year. Both systems renewed the granting of in-state tuition for the 2018-2019 academic year.
New York, NY – In a little over a week, approximately 4,000 building service workers could either be lifted out of poverty or remain there with or without the stroke of Governor Andrew Cuomo’s pen, according to 32BJ SEIU Vice President John Santos.

“The governor is holding two bills of ours right now,” Santos said at a Thursday afternoon rally held for struggling Con Edison workers at Pershing Square. “We want to make sure that he signs the bills and help them get living wages at their jobs.”

The rally was supposed to be held outside the governor’s Third Avenue offices, but became so large that it had to be moved a few blocks over to accommodate protestors.

The Prevailing Wage legislation consists of two bills that, if enacted, would give Con Edison workers better pay and benefits, but it would need to be signed by Feb. 7.

“These workers deserve respect and dignity,” Santos said as the workers chanted, “sign the bill!”

State Assemblyman Michael Blake (D-Bronx) agreed.

“Anyone that is working should get quality wages,” said Blake. “These are the things that make it fair for our communities whether you are a cleaner, doing maintenance, no matter your job there has to be dignity with that.”

People who are working shouldn’t be living paycheck-to-paycheck, Blake emphasized.

“You’re wondering whether you are paying your rent, whether you are going to put food on the table,” the assembly member said. “We have to remind people that poverty and the feeling of [being] poor is not tied to a number. That’s a day-to-day mindset where you are trying to figure it out.”

Building service worker Carlos Moncayo echoed that sentiment.

“I have been working at 418 Central Park West for seven-and-a-half years,” Moncayo said. “I make $18.50/hour, have unaffordable health insurance and no retirement.”

Moncayo said he is depending on Cuomo to sign the legislation so that he can take care of his family.

“My wife has a medical condition and our medical bills are through the roof! Having affordable health insurance would change our lives dramatically,” he said. ” It would also give me the ability to help my young grandkids financially. I want nothing more than to continue to provide for my family and making the family-sustaining wage would allow me to do that.”

Moncayo pledged that 32BJ will continue fighting for the bill until there are better standards at Con Edison.

“I have no idea what will happen, but I will be speaking to his office everyday and we will be back in the next couple days if we don’t hear anything,” Santos said. “We are going to put some pressure on the governor.”
The Union that Brings You the Super Bowl
For the past 29 years, this is how the IBEW broadcasts the big game

IBEW Media Center - UComm Blog - February 1, 2020

Football fans across the world aren’t likely to realize it, but in most years, IBEW members are as critical to their Super Bowl viewing experience as chicken wings and guacamole.

Sunday night marks the 29th time that IBEW professionals have provided the pictures and sound from the big game. This year, Fox Sports will broadcast the game between the Kansas City Chiefs and San Francisco 49ers from Miami’s Hard Rock Stadium. Last year’s Super Bowl on CBS averaged 98 million viewers and had an estimated total viewership of 149,000,000 people in the United States.

More than 400 IBEW members are in South Florida working as camera operators, sound mixers, graphic artists, replay technicians and other responsibilities. The IBEW has had a relationship with Fox Sports since the early 1990s, when the network was just beginning its sports division. This will be the ninth Super Bowl televised by the network.

“We’re incredibly proud of our long-standing partnership with Fox Sports and thankful that it gives our talented and hard-working members a chance to work on the biggest stage of all,” International President Lonnie R. Stephenson said. “They always do us proud, and I expect nothing different on Sunday. They’re the best at what they do.”

The IBEW has a relationship with another Super Bowl broadcaster, CBS, dating back to 1939, when it was a radio company. Members have provided the behind-the-scenes personnel for the 20 Super Bowls televised by that network. That means IBEW members have worked 29 of the 54 Super Bowls played – more than half.

Other IBEW members are in and around Miami working for local television stations and other production companies covering the game and events leading up to it.

“As I visited the stadium this week, I saw firsthand all the hard work and knowledge required to prepare for the most-watched television event of the year,” Broadcasting & Telecommunications Director Robert Prunn said.

“Fox Sports is a great partner of the IBEW, and our members contribute so much to the success of all sporting events on the network. The Super Bowl is always fun to watch, and I hope it means a little more to the rest of our members knowing that their brothers and sisters are bringing the game into our living rooms.”

IBEW members and labor allies can assure their Super Bowl snacks are union-made by checking out these lists of food and beverage companies that employ union workers.
13 Labor Events And Organizers Who We Should Teach About During Black History Month

Buzz Feed - February 1, 2020

As Black History Month draws to a close, we want to continue to share and celebrate a labor history that is often overlooked. Recognizing and honoring the important contributions that black people have made to American history matters. From notable women leaders to the desegregation of union organizing, here’s a list of important black contributions to labor history that should be taught all year long.

1. Bayard Rustin
Bayard Rustin has been described as the man homophobia almost erased from history. Rustin was an active member of the civil rights and labor movements and the primary organizer of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Rustin believed that economic justice and workers’ rights were a key part of the fight for civil rights for black Americans. Rustin became the first executive director of the AFL-CIO’s A. Philip Randolph Institute.

2. Pullman Porters
In the late 1860s, George Pullman hired former slaves to work on his railroad sleeping cars. He exploited their labor, with each porter making the equivalent of about $22,000 a year (in today’s dollars) while working under unfair conditions, including 100-hour workweeks. These workers formed a union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; in 1925, it became the first African-American labor union to receive a charter in the American Federation of Labor.

3. Rosina Tucker
Rosina Tucker was an important figure in the foundation of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Tucker was married to a railroad porter and became involved in the union. She visited the homes of over 300 workers to secretly collect their union dues, and in 1938 she was elected secretary-treasurer of the union’s auxiliary. She continued her union involvement, helping organize teachers, laundry workers and railway clerks in Washington, D.C.

4. Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike
In 1968, sanitation workers in Memphis, Tenn., members of AFSCME Local 1733, went on strike after years of discrimination and dangerous working conditions. The union strikers carried the now famous “I Am a Man” signs. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. visited the striking workers in April 1968, and delivered his “I’ve Been to the Mountain Top” speech the day before he was assassinated at a motel in Memphis.

5. Mary Church Terrell
Mary Church Terrell was one of the first African-American women to earn a college degree. She worked for suffrage and civil rights, helping found the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. She was also a charter member of AFT’s first higher education local at Howard University.

6. Ben Fletcher
Ben Fletcher was an African-American labor activist in the early 20th century. He was a leader in IWW Local 8, a radical union of longshoremen in Philadelphia. Companies would often try to divide workers based on race, but Local 8 and Fletcher’s leadership showed that when workers rejected racism and stuck together, they would lift each other up.
7. Chicago Flat Janitors
In the 1920s, the Chicago Flat Janitors were an integrated local union, which was considered radical at the time. The union worked to include black members in leadership roles, including its vice president, Seymour Miller. The union eventually grew and today is known as the Service Employees International Union, or SEIU.

8. Edgar Nixon
Edgar Nixon was a civil rights leader and union organizer in Alabama. He played a key role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, even bailing Rosa Parks out of jail after her arrest in December 1955 for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, just a few days before the boycott began. Prior to organizing the bus boycott, Nixon organized and led the Montgomery branch of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. called him “one of the chief voices of the Negro community in the area of civil rights.” Nixon continued to support civil rights causes until his death in 1987.

The Supreme Court’s landmark 1954 ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, requiring school desegregation, had the support of unionized teachers. In fact an AFT local, the Teachers Guild — a precursor of New York City’s United Federation of Teachers—filed an amicus brief on behalf of the plaintiffs.

10. Lucy Parsons
Lucy Parsons was a radical labor organizer born in Texas. In the early 1870s, she and her husband had to flee Texas because of intolerant reactions to their interracial marriage. Throughout her subsequent career in Chicago, she wrote for various leftist and labor publications. In 1905, she participated in the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World. In 2004, the city of Chicago named a park after her.

11. Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
In 1972, more than 1,200 black union leaders and members met in Chicago and founded the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. Since its formation, the organization has worked to raise black voices in the labor movement.

12. The 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom
The 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was organized by Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph and had support from other labor unions and labor activists, including the United Auto Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. Two of the official speakers at the event were labor leaders; Randolph and UAW President Walter Reuther. Union members from around the country, including busloads of teachers from New York, came to the event. After the march, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. sent a letter, which included a handwritten note, to then-United Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker thanking him for his help.

13. A. Philip Randolph
Randolph is one of the most important figures in both black history and labor history. In addition to his work with the Pullman porters (see No. 2, above) and the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, he prominently pushed for civil rights during World War II. He planned a 100,000 person march on Washington during the war, which led President Franklin D. Roosevelt to sign an executive order ending discrimination in defense industries. After the order was signed, the march was canceled.