



# R4: ACTION NOW

ISSUE 3

JUNE 2024



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## 2024 ELECTIONS



### ARE YOU REGISTERED?

- VISIT [CAN I VOTE](#) AND SELECT "VOTER REGISTRATION STATUS".
- CHOOSE YOUR STATE. YOU WILL BE TAKEN TO A PAGE ON YOUR STATE'S ELECTION WEBSITE.
- CHECK TO SEE IF YOU ARE REGISTERED (30 DAYS AHEAD OF ELECTION FOR SOME STATES REQUIRED).

### HOW WILL YOU VOTE?

- VISIT [EARLY VOTING](#) AND SELECT YOUR STATE TO FIND OUT ALL OF YOUR VOTING OPTIONS ON OR BEFORE ELECTION DAY.

## FOLLOW REGION 4

## FACEBOOK



## OUR FUTURE IS ALSO AT THE BALLOT BOX

We hear it all the time in Ottawa and across the Region: everyone is frustrated with the current state of politics in our country. While we largely share that sentiment, we must continue active engagement in the political process because it is vital to our survival. As you'll see a few examples of in this 3rd edition of the R4 newsletter, legislation at the federal and state levels can significantly help or harm our ability to win and enforce better wages and benefits at the bargaining table. The effect of legislation goes much deeper than contract bargaining and enforcement. Several of our Region 4 communities and far too many of our members have recently felt the effect of poor trade policy that still enables, if not encourages, corporations to move work beyond our borders. Yet here at home, the war against workers rages on while states loosen child labor laws, engage in indentured servitude, and limit access to voting. Make no mistake, slogans and themes such as "right to work" or "increasing opportunities for minors" are purely intended to check labor's resurrected power and keep money in the hands of the already rich.

Over 50 years ago, Walter Reuther said it this way: "There is a direct relationship between the ballot box and the bread box, and what the union fights for and wins at the bargaining table can be taken away in the legislative halls." As we have seen, gains won at the bargaining table have been taken away due to poor trade policy. The best wages and benefit packages quickly become worthless if our jobs are not protected here at home. Corporations have violated strong contractual job security protections, without as much as a slap on the wrist, thanks to their anti-union political puppets. So, we cannot depend on contracts alone. It is imperative that we elect labor friendly candidates to office who will support a strong and worker friendly NLRB, pass legislation making it easier for workers to organize, and to incent corporations to invest here in the USA, the same place they make their profits.

An attack on any worker is an attack on every worker. We don't have to like every worker, every co-worker, their lifestyle, or even how they got to the USA. But if they can be exploited, so can you. Our common enemy, the Billionaire's Club, needs to be what bonds us in SOLIDARITY.



## AN ATTACK ON THE NLRB IS AN ATTACK ON THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

In July of 2021 Joe Biden appointed Jennifer Abruzzo as General Counsel of the National Labor Relations Board. She has been promoting her pro-union agenda at the agency ever since. Abruzzo's goals include speeding up the unionization process, hitting back against "captive audience" meetings wherein employees are forced to listen to anti-union rhetoric, and pursuing cases where employers have refused to recognize a union when a majority of workers have signed cards to join. Abruzzo's goal is to reverse precedent and her leadership at the NLRB is timely, arising in a reenergized American labor movement. She is seizing the moment, using the tools of the NLRB to promote the pro-worker statute originally intended at the agency.

However, a pro-worker agenda typically results in anti-worker retaliation. Space X CEO, Elon Musk, filed suit against the NLRB in January, claiming their in-house enforcement proceedings violate the U.S. Constitution. The suit comes in response to several cases brought against Space X for improper firing of employees and complaints over the company's severance agreements. Amazon, Starbucks, and Trader Joe's have now raised similar arguments in their cases with the NLRB. Many are referring to Musk's suit as his personal crusade to dismantle the regulatory agency. Musk's hope is that the case will make it to the current Supreme Court, which has signaled its willingness to reconsider the authority of regulatory agencies to administer the law. According to labor law professor, Anne Marie Lofaso, "While these arguments are frivolous in terms of what the law is now, they're not frivolous knowing this Supreme Court is interested in potentially dismantling parts of the administrative state."

Knocking down the administrative authority of the NLRB would severely damage workers' ability to organize and protect themselves from unfair labor practices in the United States. Protections have been in place since 1935 with the passing of the National Labor Relations Act which led to the creation of the NLRB. Musk knows this, as do the corporate leaders joining his crusade. For almost 90 years, this small, regulatory agency has been challenged by expensive corporate legal teams, threatened with funding cuts by Congress, and undermined by anti-worker administrations. The current strength shown by Abruzzo in guiding the NLRB is both opportune for the growth of unions and inconvenient for employers with workers fighting to organize.

The potential stand-off between the NLRB and large corporations at the Supreme Court illustrates just how critical it is to have the most pro-worker agenda possible emanating from the White House. The President appoints regulators and judges and the agencies and courts they lead determine every day outcomes for working people. For the American Labor Movement to grow, thrive, and expand into the future we need more appointments like Jennifer Abruzzo leading the institutions built from the labor legacies of our past.

## STATES CHALLENGE 'CAPTIVE AUDIENCE' MEETINGS

Since the 2010 landmark *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision, federal law has protected an employer's ability to force workers into listening to political, religious, or anti-union views on work time. Under current federal labor and employment laws, these "captive audience" meetings are perfectly legal and often lead to threats, discipline, or termination when employees object to coercion or refuse to attend meetings.

Captive-audience meetings have become one of employers' preferred union-busting tactics, impacting our ability to organize and advocate for workplace change. At these meetings workers have no right to ask questions or offer opposing dialog. An analysis of NLRB election documents indicate that 89% of all employers conduct captive audience meetings in response to organizing efforts.



## 18 STATES RESPOND

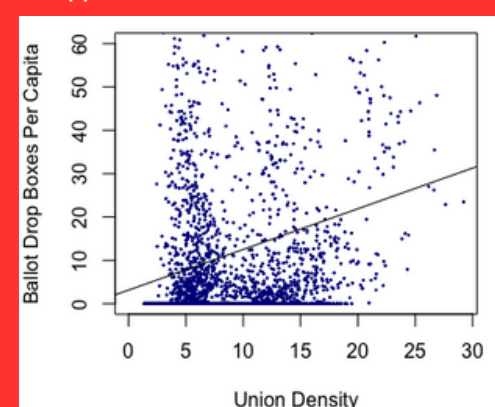
Within Region 4, Illinois, Colorado, and Minnesota have joined the 18 states that have so far introduced or enacted bills to protect workers from unwanted political or religious speech unrelated to job tasks or performance.

In Illinois, the Worker Freedom of Speech Act provides that an employer may not discharge, discipline, or otherwise penalize, an employee declining to attend captive audience meetings or receive communication intended to coerce them. The Act has passed the IL House and Senate and is headed to the Governor's desk. Thus far, 22.7 million workers have their rights and freedoms protected across seven states with laws enacted, including Minnesota. If all 18 states succeed, 63.7 million workers could stand to benefit.

# UNIONS LEAD THE STRUGGLE TO DEFEND VOTING RIGHTS

Labor Unions have been leading the struggle to defend voting rights at all levels of government. According to a recent report of the *Economic Policy Institute*, labor union density significantly impacted the density of ballot drop boxes in the 2022 midterm elections. A highly secure way to increase access to voting, the availability of ballot boxes reduces uncounted absentee ballots received by clerk's offices on election day.

Controlling for all other variables in the data collected on all 17,935 drop boxes available in 2022, researchers found that every 1% increase in county-level union density was associated with a 9.8% increase in ballot boxes available per capita. Likewise, drops in union density suggest the disappearance of voter access.



Ballot drop boxes had been used for over a decade in Wisconsin before the 2022 supreme court ban on them. In the 2020 elections, 40% of voters across the United States voted by absentee drop box. Bipartisan Election Commissions in Wisconsin and other states have approved unstaffed ballot drop boxes and note their popularity of use by disabled and elderly voters.

The newly elected 2023 WI Supreme Court is hearing arguments to overturn the 2022 ruling ahead of the 2024 elections. Election officials from the four largest counties argue that absentee ballot drop boxes have been consistently used without incident in Wisconsin and elsewhere as a secure way for voters to return their ballots.

The Labor Movement has always defended accessibility to the vote. May our organizing efforts continue to expand both our unions and the vote in our elections ahead.

# UNIONS JOIN LANDMARK CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT AGAINST FORCED PRISON LABOR

The Union of Southern Service Workers (USSW) and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) have joined current and former incarcerated people, and civil rights organizations in a class action lawsuit against the prison and parole system of Alabama and private companies, alleging their involvement in a forced labor scheme akin to modern-day slavery.

Incarcerated workers are subject to 12-15 hour work days in poor conditions, threatened if refusing work in hostile environments, and denied parole to assure reliable servitude. Alabama is one of five states remaining that pays nothing to inmates for most prison work, while reaping as much as \$450 million in profits in 2023. Civil rights lawyers have compared this forced labor scheme to the system of convict leasing that Alabama participated in after the Civil War, targeting specifically Black people. While convict leasing was formally abolished in 1928, prison labor has remained a significant source of income for the state.

In addition to the social and economic justice concerns of prison labor, the proliferation of forced labor depresses wages and working conditions for all workers, and undermines Union efforts to organize workers at employers involved in the scheme. Private companies benefiting from prison labor include food-and-beverage distributors, manufacturers, and fast-food franchisees.



Intentionally exploiting incarcerated workers for profit and denying parole to model inmates based on "institutional need" violates Alabama's State Constitution, and the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, and the First Amendment, according to the suit. Denying parole for the profitability of a person's labor is a cruel circumstance to be challenged in our federal courts in the months ahead.

As we make preparations to celebrate Juneteenth in its second year as a federally recognized holiday, we remember the long-standing efforts of brave activists, organizations, political leaders, and soldiers who fought for the liberation of Black Americans from bondage and forced servitude. Honoring the labor, liberties, and lives of each other remains a challenge and opportunity for American labor unions to champion amid systems of greed and corruption.

# BIG WORK COMP REFORM IN KANSAS

Kansas Governor, Laura Kelly, signed bipartisan legislation this spring to comprehensively update the state's worker compensation system. The *Work Comp Reform Bill* substantially increases the maximum compensation available for all injured workers or their dependents and automatically increases the maximum compensation levels to keep up with the cost of living. Described as a much needed overhaul in the state, labor organizations and businesses are praising the improvements and compromises made in coming together for better legislation, amidst a politically polar climate. The Officers of the Kansas AFL-CIO publicly thanked all of the stakeholders who met for over a year in drafting new policies, as well as elected officials for working through sticking points with everyone at the table. Kansas previously ranked toward the bottom among states for benefits and work comp process. Looking ahead, working families will have a fighting chance when work place injuries occur.



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## UAW MEMBER DELEGATES AT THE 2023 OTTAWA PRIDE PARADE



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## INCLUSION BUILDS SOLIDARITY

OUR THIRD ANNUAL LGBTQ+ CONFERENCE WILL CELEBRATE PRIDE MONTH IN JUNE. ORIGINALLY INSPIRED BY A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A REGION 4 MEMBER AND OUR FORMER ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, THIS EVENT IS CERTAINLY OUR MOST COLORFUL.

LAST YEAR OUR UAW GROUP WAS THE LARGEST GROUP TO JOIN THE OTTAWA PRIDE PARADE. PGC WAS ESTABLISHED WITH INCLUSIVITY IN MIND FOR BUILDING TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS AMONG OUR MEMBERSHIP. THAT TRADITION IS ALIVE AND WELL IN 2024.

## EVERYONE IS WELCOME!



## What will you do to GOTV?



## SIGN UP TODAY!



### Voter Registration



### Phone Banking



### Text



### Door Knocking



### Postcards