

# The LABOR Paper

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## WITH STRONG UNION SUPPORT, LAWMAKERS REINTRODUCE PRO ACT

by Mark Gruenberg, PAI Staff Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — With strong union support, a bipartisan group of lawmakers—led by Sen. Bernie Sanders, Ind-Vt., accompanied by other Democrats and Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., reintroduced the Protect The Right To Organize (PRO) Act, labor's top legislative priority.

But while the March 5 press conference turned into a parade of endorsements—led by Sanders, AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y.—its prospects are uncertain at best in the Republican-led Senate and virtually DOA in the highly partisan Republican-led House Education and the Workforce Committee.

Even Sanders recognized the problem, by implication, when he mentioned that when he chaired the Senate Labor Committee in the last Congress, the panel approved it. What he did not say is that it was by a party-line vote.

Further, “sadly, it never came to a vote” on the Senate floor, Sanders said. Schumer, then majority leader, wouldn't call it up unless Sanders could find enough senators to halt a planned Republican filibuster, orchestrated by the corporate class. He couldn't. Sanders, politely, didn't say that.

That won't stop Sanders, the federation, House Education and Workforce top Democrat Bobby Scott of Virginia and their allies from trying again. After all, the story they heard from Kieran Cuadras, of Wells Fargo Workers United, a Communications Workers-aided campaign, spurred them on.

Cuadras works in the financial services sector. It's one of the least unionized. As recent prosecutions, scandals, high interest rates charged to borrowers and low interest or none paid to depositors, it's also among the most corrupt in its executive suites and trading arms.

Indeed, it was a massive scandal at Wells Fargo, where its traders fabricated accounts in customers' names, then reaped the proceeds, that prompted the unionization drive. The Wells Fargo Workers United won, but with a struggle marked by rampant criminal labor law-breaking by the bank.

Cuadras, a 22-year Wells Fargo worker, as a teller, branch manager and investigator, helped lead the campaign. She's familiar with unions, as her husband is a Laborer.

After the massive federal fine for the scan-

dal “I'd like to say things have changed” at the bank, Cuadras said. “But I saw first-hand how Wells Fargo still uses shortcuts to create the illusion of fewer complaints” investigators must solve. “They're closing too many investigations prematurely. Managers pressure workers on ‘meeting sales outcomes,’ which is just code (words) for sales quotas.”

“We chose to form a union to change the policies that led to the fake accounts scandal and to protect our jobs from being outsourced,” she said. Then the trouble began.

Wells Fargo managers called workers into private one-by-one conference calls and quizzed them about the union. They held so-called “captive audience” meetings—now outlawed in several states—featuring anti-union harangues full of lies about how the union “would take their money.” Lawyers from a top union-buster, Littler Mendelson, led those sessions, the NLRB reports. Managers even threatened the workers would be fired.

And just before the union election last October, that's what Wells Fargo bosses did. They fired, illegally, a dozen leaders of the organizing drive, Cuadras included. The union won anyway, but Wells Fargo is appealing the victory and refuses to bargain. And all the tactics it used, except the captive audience meetings, but especially the firing threat and actual firings, broke labor law.

“CEOs have got to be held accountable for their illegal union-busting” said Cuadras. Which is the point of the legislation.

The PRO Act is designed to halt those abuses and enact protections, including mandatory arbitration of first contract disputes, card-check recognition, and higher fines for labor law-breaking, though not jail terms for malefactors. It would be the most consequential pro-worker labor law rewrite in decades.

The abuses have mounted ever since the Republican-crafted Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 emasculated the original New Deal era National Labor Relations Act. It turned organizing drives into obstacle courses for workers seeking rights on the job. As speakers at the PRO Act session pointed out, it's profitable for firms to break the law against their workers, because penalties are so light.

AFL-CIO President Shuler declared the time is politically right to pass the PRO Act.

PRO Act

Continued on page 2



In the 3/20/25 of *The Labor Paper*, see an in depth interview with Robert Bruno, Professor and Director, Labor Education Program, University of Illinois, School of Labor and Employment Relations. He will discuss the future of organized labor under the new administration.

## AFL-CIO APPLAUDS COURT VICTORY ON NLRB HEAD

AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler issued the following statement in response to a ruling from the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia that President Trump did not have the legal authority to fire Gwynne Wilcox from her position as a member of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB):

“We commend the court's decision to uphold the integrity and independence of the NLRB, an agency that upholds workers' freedom to form a union. More than a month after Trump effectively shut down the NLRB by illegally firing Gwynne Wilcox, denying it the quorum it needs to hold union-busters accountable, the court ordered Wilcox immediately returned to her seat, allowing the NLRB to get back to its essential work. The court also sent an important message that a president cannot undermine an independent agency by simply removing a member of the board because he disagrees with her decisions. Working people around the country count on equal justice and fair decision-making from an independent NLRB—and today, because of Wilcox's commitment to the mission of the NLRB and her refusal to stand by as Trump illegally removed her from the board, the NLRB can get back to work.”

# MONTANA LABOR UNIONS RALLY AGAINST RIGHT TO WORK

Hundreds of working people stood up at the Capitol in Helena, Montana, and rallied for their freedom of speech, their freedom to negotiate, and their freedom to work with dignity and respect. Earlier this week, "Right to Work" legislation was voted down in Senate Business, Labor, and Economic Affairs by a vote of 7-5.

Workers bargain for a fair deal everyday in communities across the state and know a bad deal when they see it. The fight for a brighter future for Montana's workers and our communities continues!

*"We're all red-blooded Americans," said the Montana AFL-CIO's Adam Haight during a rally in front of the state Capitol. "We're just not bootlickers for billionaires."*



Union labor supporters gather on the steps of the Montana State Capitol on Feb. 28 for a pro-union rally. Picture: THOM BRIDGE, Independent Record

## PRO Act

Continued from page 1

Organized labor's popularity—a 70%-71% approval rating in the last two yearly Gallup polls, is at an all-time high. "Every other issue splits right down the middle," she noted.

Though Shuler didn't say so, the mass and illegal firings of federal workers—union and non-union—by Trump and his puppeteer, Elon Musk, have driven union membership up since Trump took over.

The Government Employees set a goal of adding 25,000 new members, net, for this year. They exceeded it on February 10. And National Federation of Federal Employees President Randy Erwin reports his union, a Machinists sector, has added 10,000 members since Trump's inauguration.

"Workers are seeing (corporate profits) go up and up," Shuler said, prompting Sanders to say that in the last 52 years, not only has union density declined, due to corporate hate, but so have wages, adjusted for inflation. "A union member makes more money, has more power and has more of a voice on the job," the AFL-CIO leader added. But the corporate bosses hate unions so much "because they think we're a threat" to their hegemony.

"Workers are unified," she declared. "They see the rules are written for the richest and most powerful, and they want to stand up for fairness and opportunity."

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