



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

Opening Statement of Rep. Fred Keller (R-PA), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections
"Unsafe and Untenable: Examining Workplace Protections for Warehouse Workers"
November 17, 2022

(As prepared for delivery)

"The risks of working in a warehouse are real and one witness here today has lost a loved one due to an accident. We offer our sincere condolences and assure you that we are committed to the laws mandating safe working conditions, not just in warehouses, but all across our great nation.

"Over the past decade, employment in the warehousing and storage sector has grown rapidly. Warehousing and delivery companies expanded business operations to meet an increased demand for online merchandise and millions of Americans rely on that for delivery of goods and services, it was certainly highlighted during the pandemic. The efforts of warehouse workers were invaluable.

"Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, all workers have the right to a safe and healthy workplace. Through my experience in the private sector, I have seen firsthand that the vast majority of America's job creators, our constituents, the people we represent, are committed to ensuring that the people who work on their teams, that come to their business every day go home to their families each night safe and healthy. Private sector businesses are embracing new technologies and best-in-class safety innovations to protect their workers from occupational hazards in warehouses. The federal government should be supportive of these efforts.

"But the Democrats refuse to recognize that the vast majority of job creators, the people we represent, are dedicated to improving health and safety for warehouse workers. Attacking the industry after it stepped up to the plate during the pandemic is dangerous and grossly unfair. Sending the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), with its aggressive playbook, after business owners will not make warehouses safer, but it will harm our economy and workforce.

"Democrats' so-called solutions to warehouse safety are misguided. More punishment, more unions, and more federal control is not the answer. In fact, we talk about federal control, I walk through the Capitol, and I see numerous OSHA violations right here in this building, where fire extinguishers are covered with things sitting in front of them. We as Congress ought to make sure that we are leading by example, whether it's a warehouse, whether it's a factory—no matter where it is, people deserve to have a safe working environment. Most of our job creators are committed to that endeavor, because the people that come to work as part of their team are family, are friends, are members of the community. They need to be safe and healthy for everyone to succeed.

“The Democrats’ continued use of OSHA to export more top-down federal control over the workplace is authoritarian. If we are going into a recession, as some experts predict, then this is the worst time for the federal government to tighten its grip on any industry.

“Furthermore, demonizing job creators, again the people for which we work as well as their employees, is no way to keep workplaces safe. If Democrats were serious about improving workplace safety in warehouses, they would adopt policies to collaborate with employers to prevent accidents before they happen. Vilifying employers who share the common goal of keeping their workers safe is counterproductive. The best way to increase safety in warehouses is through increased compliance assistance, partnership programs, and education.

“So, why aren’t Democrats focused on this? Because worker safety is not the Democrats’ true focus or end goal. Democrats’ real priority in going after warehouses is mass unionization. Democrats are intent on driving all workers into unions, regardless of their preference.

“By mischaracterizing employers’ safety records and cherry-picking data, Democrats hope to get away with exerting more federal control and more union control over business owners. While we support commonsense safety precautions in the warehouse industry and in the workplace overall, Democrats are taking this a bridge too far.

“As Republicans, we believe private enterprise should dictate productivity and the pace of warehouse work, not Washington bureaucrats.

“Bottom line, ensuring safe workplaces is a priority for job creators and this Committee. But more punishment, more unions, and more federal control won’t achieve our shared goal of worker safety. They will, however, hurt opportunities for job creators to grow their businesses and hire new workers. If we are truly concerned about workplace safety, we would lead by example right here in the United States Capitol and make sure that the employees that work here are not exposed to hazards.”

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