House Education and Workforce Committee

Written Testimony

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Introduction

Good morning. My name is Terry Bowman. I'm grateful for the opportunity to testify at this field hearing.

I'm an Incoming Quality Technician at Ford Motor Company's Rawsonville plant in Michigan. I have worked at Ford for over 30 years, and my family has worked at the company for three generations. Relocating from Tennessee, my father and some of his siblings moved to Michigan in the 50's. We have all been represented by the United Auto Workers, though none of us ever got to vote for unionization. I have been forced into union representation my entire career. My family and I never had the chance to vote if we wanted to be unionized or not, and therefore exert more control over our own workplace and futures. Unionization was forced upon us simply because we wanted to provide for our families, and help put America on wheels. Our

family story is a common one in Michigan. I also serve as chairman of the Institute for the American Worker, an organization that advocates for polices that empower workers with freedom, information, and protections they need to make employment and representation decisions that are best for them. I4AW recently found that only 4.9% of private-sector union members actually voted for their union.[1]

My message today is simple. Workers like me need more freedom, information, and protections, so that we can do what's best for ourselves. This vision will not be achieved by simply giving more power to union officials. As I can attest, that typically means taking power and dignity away from workers. That's the last thing my fellow workers and I need. We need reforms that put us in the driver's seat.

Legislative Threats Facing Workers

I am particularly concerned by two pieces of legislation that are either under consideration or soon could be in Congress:

- The **Faster Labor Contracts Act** would hurt workers while falsely claiming to help them. This legislation would give a government-appointed arbitration panel the ability to force workers into union contracts without workers' approval. The mandatory contracts could

[1] https://www.wsj.com/opinion/workers-of-the-world-vote-unions-voting-election-36f9087a

also include politicized issues that many workers don't support, including anti-Israel policies and health coverage for abortions and transgender procedures.[2] Bottom line, workers should be able to vote on any contract that covers them. I hope our lawmakers reject any policy that would strip workers of their right to vote on a union contract. It's bad enough that workers like me have been forced into unions elected by previous generations. It would be even worse if workers were forced into new union contracts without a vote.

- The **PRO Act** contains a slew of policies that claim to be pro-worker but are in fact anti-worker. It would prevent more workers from becoming independent contractors with greater flexibility; ban employers from holding meetings that give workers more information about the effects of unionization; repeal state Right-to-Work laws that free workers from paying mandatory union dues or fees as a condition of employment; and allow unions to gain monopoly representation without giving workers a chance to vote. The PRO Act would also implement the Faster Labor Contracts Act, depriving workers of the chance to vote on their union contract. This legislation could come up in the next session of Congress, and it should be recognized as a threat to workers' rights.

These policies will not empower workers. They will only empower union officials, which is profoundly different. Congress should instead promote real reforms that actually benefit workers like me.

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[2] https://www.wsj.com/opinion/politics-has-taken-over-my-union-4585cde2

Real Reforms That Workers Need

Given my experience as a 30-year autoworker and forced-union member, I believe that workers most need reforms in three key areas.

First, workers need better laws to ensure that unionization elections reflect workers' true wishes.

The union that represents me, the United Auto Workers, recently demonstrated the need for this reform. The UAW's president, Shawn Fain, was re-elected in October—but less than 10% of eligible members participated in the election.[3] Crucially, many of those who did vote were graduate students, not auto workers like me, calling into question whether the United Auto Workers is accurately named. Many autoworkers I have talked to feel the UAW is abandoning its traditional workforce in favor of workers in higher education.[4] The election outcome may have been very different had more eligible members voted.

The same lessons hold in the workplace itself. Unions should not be given monopoly representation unless a significant percentage of workers vote in unionization elections. That's key to ensuring that the election actually reflects workers' will. A union should have to win the

[3] https://www.autonews.com/opinion/editorials/an-editorial-uaw-election-shawn-fain-2028-1014/
[4] https://www.nationalreview.com/2024/09/the-uaw-puts-academics-ahead-of-autoworkers/

support of a majority of **all** the workers it would represent, not just a majority of those who happen to show up. Today's rules can let a smaller group of workers decide for everyone else. But in my experience, many workers skip union elections because they don't want a union. A non-vote shouldn't be counted as a "yes". The Worker Enfranchisement Act is a strong step in the right direction: it would require that a quorum of workers—a threshold of two-thirds of eligible workers—participate in an election for the results to be valid. That's doubly important because once a union is elected, future generations of workers are forced to join it without a vote at all, as my family and I have learned firsthand. The initial election should have the involvement of as many workers as possible, for their sake and for the sake of future generations.

Second, workers need laws that protect our rights and privacy—especially a guaranteed secret-ballot election.

Right now, under federal law, unions are able to organize workplaces using a system known as card check, in which unions can publicly ask workers to support unionization. That's right; an actual union organizer can walk right up to a worker in a public setting, with witnesses all around, hand them a card, and ask them to sign it. This shocking reality is a flagrant example of a need for changes in worker protection. Unfortunately, this system encourages intimidation and harassment, including at workers' homes.[5] To protect our privacy and ensure that we can vote our conscience without fear of pressure or reprisal, workers need a guaranteed secret-

[5] https://www.mackinac.org/S2019-09

ballot election. The Employee Rights Act includes this pro-worker reform, bringing unionization elections in line with the same secret-ballot voting system that Americans use in every election for public office.

Third and finally, workers need greater transparency, so we can access that information that can inform our decision about unionization and workplace representation.

Last year, this committee requested information on transparency, and I submitted recommendations on a slew of necessary reforms.[6] The committee's Republican members ultimately introduced a package of five bills to improve the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act, and I would like to praise three bills in particular. The Fair Access to Justice for Union Members act would give union members more options to defend their rights, outside of lengthy and often unfair internal hearing procedures. The Ask the Union Members Act would require contract votes to be held by secret ballot and bar unions from authorizing a strike without a majority vote. That's similar to one of the recommendations I made to the committee. Rep. Mark Harris, in whose district we're in today, sponsored these bills, and I'm grateful for his defense of workers like me. Lastly, The Endorsement Transparency Act would require union executives to poll its members, and share the results with them, before endorsing a candidate for President of the United States without the will of workers they claim to represent. If passed, The Endorsement Transparency Act could turn a union endorsement into a

[6] https://i4aw.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Bowman-Comment_-Ed-and-Workforce.pdf

meaningful one that truly represents the will of the workers instead of a directive to workers from their union executives.

I hope Congress takes up these bills. I also hope lawmakers strengthen transparency laws so that workers like me have more information about how unions spend dues money. In my experience, unions often label some of their activities as non-political, even when they're very political, and workers who opt out of union membership are still required to fund them. More transparency would help ensure that workers' money is being spent appropriately.

I want to thank the Trump administration for strengthening union transparency with its recent changes to the LM-2 reporting forms and online portal. As workers like me can attest, the old reporting system had plenty of good information, but it was difficult to access and understand. The new reporting system provides actionable and accessible information with just a few clicks on a federal website. It's now much easier to see how much unions spend, what they fund, how much officers make, and other critical data. This is exactly the kind of accessible information that workers need, and further legislative reforms would give workers even greater ability to understand what unions are doing, so we can hold them accountable and make the best decisions about the future of our workplace.

Conclusion

Workers like me need our elected leaders to fight for our interests and defend our rights. Yet I worry that many of our leaders, including some Republicans, are mistakenly doing the opposite. Instead, our leaders should pursue real reforms that empower workers, grant us more protections, and give us more personal freedom in the workplace. That's what I need in my own work in one of America's great manufacturers. That's what every worker needs to chart their own future and secure lasting success.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.