

*James P. Hoffa*

## Unions can jump-start economy

**W**atching the response of the Teamsters and other unions' members to the devastation of Hurricane Harvey made Labor Day this year more meaningful than ever.

The Teamsters have always been an early responder in times of crisis, donating and distributing emergency supplies, coordinating logistics, raising money for those in need and more. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Superstorm Sandy and countless other catastrophes, we have been there to help.

We face many challenges, but we are up for the fight. Even as elected officials throughout the country have increasingly bought into corporate propaganda that argues more jobs will come if states do away with collective bargaining rights, unions aren't backing down. When members are affected—whether from an employer, legislation unfair to working families or even natural disasters—the union family stands together.

Unions have a decades-long history of growing wealth for workers. Today, the median union worker makes more than \$10,000 a year more than the median non-union worker nationwide. They are also much more likely to have retirement security due to a pension. But lawmakers are

increasingly tamping down on workers' rights.

We see it here in Michigan, a right to work state, where proposed changes would limit union negotiating for state employees. Under the plan, for example, unionized state employees could not bargain for enhanced job protections. This is just part of a continuing effort to weaken collective bargaining rights.

The U.S. economy benefits more Americans when unions are strong. As Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Laureate and chief economist for the Roosevelt Institute, pointed out in "Rewriting the Rules of the American Economy" last year, "As unions fade, so too does their ability to raise wages in the broader economy."

Working people want the freedom to join together and negotiate a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. And when they have more money to spend, they buy more products, creating more jobs and better wages for all workers.

Some are taking a stand for union rights. Workers in Missouri made their voice heard last month when they gathered three times the number of petitions needed to stop the implementation of a right to work law there. The Teamsters and other unions refused to accept the passage of legislation that would have curtailed workers' rights, and did something about it. Now state voters will determine the fate

of the measure in November 2018.

But that's not all. Across the country, there are people who are standing up and fighting back. Many did so this past weekend, when workers came together on Labor Day from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to Detroit and Boston to demand to be heard. They know that their value together is much greater than it is apart.

Here is the reality – the American Dream is slipping away for too many. Corporate offshoring and globalization have pushed U.S. wages down and put working people's health and safety at risk. Workers are tired of empty promises.

Working people should have the free-

dom and rights to negotiate a fair return on their work. While politicians fight with each other over how to fix income and gender inequality, the Teamsters and other unions have been effectively combating these issues successfully for decades. And that was something to celebrate on Labor Day. *(Published in the Detroit News, Sept. 6, 2017.)*



JAMES P. HOFFA  
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## NLRB union buster . . . , cont.

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the NLRB, the federal agency charged with protecting the rights, wages and working conditions of workers.

In 1981, Robb filed unfair labor practice charges against PATCO on behalf of the Federal Labor Relations after the court ruled that the controllers' strike was illegal. The FLRA case led to the decertification of PATCO, and Regan subsequently banned most of the striking workers from federal service for the rest of their lives.

Robb's high-profile union-busting activities didn't end with PATCO. In 2014, He was hired by Dominion Nuclear power plant when the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IPEW) began organizing the company's

workers.

His law firm's website boasts that Robb represented a major national corporation in a National Labor Relations Board representation case proceeding, which had 34 days of hearings over three months to resolve 80 contested classifications covering hundreds of employees.

The Trump administration's previous NLRB nominees all have connections to union busting, and the expected nomination of Robb would effectively make the NLRB—responsible for protecting workers' rights—an anti-labor agency. Many unions warned their members before the election that Donald Trump was not and never will be supportive of working men and women.

## VAIRMA: threats skew . . . , cont.

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down with a company president to negotiate a labor agreement, free from government meddling, and based on the real worth of a worker's labor.

Nowadays it often takes hundreds of hours of negotiations between company lawyers, who are often expensive hired gun union-busters with evil intentions. Across the negotiating table are representatives of local unions that can't come close to matching corporate money, which is a huge disadvantage in collective bargaining.

But while the labor movement has been losing strength – from 12 percent private sector union density in 1980 to about eight percent today – we are enduring, and finally beginning to gain some ground, still negotiating solid contracts with good wages and benefits.

It can be done, but it is so much more

difficult nowadays thanks to the politicians, both Democrats and Republicans who haven't voted to lower the barriers to union organizing since the National Labor Relations Act was enacted in 1935.

So the key to eventually turning the tables on the union busters is politics. We must elect candidates who realize that labor's strength is the strength of the middle class and, therefore the nation's strength.

If you want to help, you can join DRIVE, the Teamsters' political action committee, which supports pro-worker candidates.

In fact, you might even offer a membership to your nonunion friends. Tell them the truth: That unions set prevailing wage standards for all workers, union and nonunion. If the unions do well, nonunion workers will get a raise, too, and stifle the urge to become a scab.

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