

Republicans in Congress gunning for OT pay

Oregon Rep. Walden, Washington Rep. Herrera Butler cosponsor bill to replace overtime pay with comp time

WASHINGTON, D.C. — House Republicans have introduced a bill (H.R. 1406) that would end the 40-hour work week, dismantling an important component of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 and hurting middle-class families across the country.

Sponsored by Rep. Martha Roby (Ala.), the dubiously-titled "Working Families Flexibility Act" (H.R. 1406) would remove the requirement that employers pay a cash premium for overtime work and instead allow them to

offer employees compensatory time off. The effect would be an FLSA that is undermined of its only incentive against excessive hours, and a cheaper way for employers to demand mandatory overtime.

The House Education and the Workforce Committee on April 17 passed H.R. 1406 out of committee on a partisan vote.

Democrats offered several amendments to give workers flexibility without jeopardizing their overtime pay. One, presented by Oregon Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici, would protect comp time wages by requiring that unpaid overtime wages be deposited into an interest-bearing account, protected from bankruptcy.

"H.R. 1406 is effectively an interest-free loan made by a worker to his or her employer," Bonamici said. "While

holding these wages, employers can use the dollars for any purpose they choose. They can even deposit the wages into an account and keep the interest."

Republicans on the committee voted unanimously against each of the Democratic amendments.

Rep. George Miller of California, the senior Democrat on the committee, said the bill will not provide greater flexibility to working families.

"This bill is not about providing employees with greater flexibility. It's about providing employers with greater flexibility," he said.

H.R. 1406 could go to the House floor at any time. The bill has 166 cosponsors — all Republicans — including Oregon Congressman Greg Walden and Washington Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler.

Machinists International Union President Tom Buffenbarger wrote a letter to Congress encouraging them to vote against the bill.

"Employers can already work within the existing laws to allow workers adjusting work schedules around family needs without changing the 40-hour workweek," Buffenbarger wrote. "Comp time proposals let the employer decide whether workers can use any accrued compensatory time. Additionally, nothing would prevent the employer from forcing workers to take time off individually or limiting whether workers can use the compensatory time at all if it is too burdensome to the workload."

Eileen Appelbaum, a senior econo-

mist with the Center for Economic Policy and Research, says the bill is not just a problem for individual workers. "The labor market remains a wild card in an economy still struggling to solidify a fragile recovery," she said. "With nearly 12 million people counted as unemployed and another 7.6 million part-time workers looking for full-time hours, both Republicans and Democrats in Congress have promised to focus on job creation. This comp time bill does exactly the opposite. Instead of encouraging employers to increase hiring when business picks up and help jump start a more robust recovery, it gives them a strong incentive to increase the overtime hours of current employees instead."

Young union members to discuss future May 23

Young union members will talk about the future of organized labor and then "Party Like It's 1999" Thursday, May 23, at the Vancouver Hilton and Convention Center.

The event for young workers, put on by young workers, is sponsored by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Y.O.U.N.G. (Young Organizing Unionists of the Next Generation). It is being held in conjunction with AFGE District 11's annual training day.

A panel of young union members

will be featured at a "Solidarity Symposium" from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Following the symposium, AFGE District 11 will hold a political action committee benefit with music, dancing, light refreshments, and a silent auction.

"The theme — This is OUR Movement — was determined based upon the fact that it is we, the younger generation, that must step up and take responsibility, leadership roles, understand different methods of organizing and mobilizing which may resonate more with a younger demographic,"

said Amanda Schroeder, national women's advisory coordinator for AFGE District 11, and a member of the AFL-CIO's Oregon YELL (Young Emerging Labor Leaders).

The event is free and open to all young workers, laborers, student groups, and constituency groups. RSVP through Facebook at www.facebook.com/events/150670848430397/ or email Schroeder at amandaschroeder.nwacd11@yahoo.com. She also can be reached by phone at 503-936-0253.

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