

Union numbers in United States held steady in 2013

Washington again the fourth-most unionized state, while Oregon drops to 12th

Union membership held steady in 2013 at 11.3 percent of the U.S. workforce, according to the latest annual report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a unit of the U.S. Department of Labor. Slight growth in the workforce meant there were 162,000 more union members in 2013 than in 2012, bringing total U.S. union membership to a little over 14.5 million.

That's still down quite a bit from 1983 — the first year for which comparable data are available — when there were 17.7 million union workers, and union members made up 20.1 percent of the workforce. But it suggests union membership decline may have slowed or stopped for the time being.

Besides union members, another 1.5

million workers were represented by a union but chose not to become members. That brings the total represented by a union to 16 million, 12.4 percent of the workforce.

The union membership figures varied by occupation, industry, and by age, gender, and race:

- Public sector workers had a union membership rate of 35.3 percent, five times the rate of private sector workers, 6.7 percent.

- Unionization was highest in education, library, and protective services occupations, at 35.3 percent. Other heavily unionized sectors included utilities at 25.6 percent, transportation and warehousing at 19.6 percent, telecommunications at 14.4 percent, construction at 14.1 percent, and manufacturing at 10.1 percent. The least unionized industry sectors were agriculture and finance, where only 1.0 percent of workers were union members, and food and beverage services, 1.3 percent. Farming, fishing and forestry were the least unionized occupations, at 2.1 percent.

- Older workers were up to three times as likely to be union members: Over 15 percent of workers 45 to 64 were union members, compared with 11.0 percent for workers 25 to 34 and 4.8 percent for workers under 25.

- Men had slightly higher rates (13.0 percent) than women (11.8 percent.)

- Black workers were most likely to be in a union (15.0 percent) compared to whites (12.2 percent), Asians (10.4 percent) and Hispanics (10.3 percent).

New York had the highest union

membership rate in the nation (24.4 percent), followed by Alaska (23.1 percent) and Hawaii (22.1 percent). North Carolina had the lowest rate (3.0 percent), followed by Arkansas (3.5 percent) and South Carolina and Mississippi (3.7 percent).

Washington ranked fourth most unionized, at 18.9 percent. Oregon ranked Number 12, at 13.9 percent. That was down from ninth place (15.7 percent) in 2012, and seventh place (17.1 percent) in 2011. Among other neighboring states, California had 16.4 percent, Nevada had 14.6 percent, and Idaho had 4.7 percent.

The data on union membership were collected as part of the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly sample survey of about 60,000 households covering employment in the civilian non-institutional population. The BLS union membership report is a pretty accurate depiction of trends at the national level, but at the state level, data can be misinterpreted because minor year-to-year fluctuations — particularly in less populous states — may not be statistically significant. Oregon's percentage in the survey has fluctuated in the last 10 years, with a low of 13.8 percent in 2006 and a high of 17.1 percent in 2011.

Given that caveat, Oregon's union membership was estimated at 208,000 in 2013, while Washington had an estimated 546,000 union members.

The report also showed that union members out-earn nonunion workers, on average. Full-time union workers had

median weekly earnings of \$950 compared to \$750 for nonunion workers. The difference was even bigger in some occupations: Median weekly earnings for union construction workers was \$1,096, compared to \$713 for nonunion. Collective bargaining agreements account for some of the earnings difference, but not all: Union workers are more likely to work in high-wage states and at larger employers, and are somewhat more likely to work in higher-wage occupations and industries.

In a statement accompanying this year's report, U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez said the decline in union membership in recent decades has contributed to more working families

struggling to get by. "Workers' ability to form unions and engage in collective bargaining has been a cornerstone of a strong middle class," Perez declared. "When workers have a seat at the table, they are better able to bargain for their fair share of the value they helped create; and that leads to greater economic security and economic mobility for everyone."

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