



## What working families want

By Richard Trumka National AFL-CIO president

# The freedom to join together, and an economy that works for all

Last year, in communities all across the country, millions of Americans mobilized and called for an economy that works for all of us. From state houses and governors mansions to Capitol Hill, we elected advocates who committed themselves to advancing that cause. That election was defined by a movement of hard-working people who stood together to reject the meager crumbs we are being handed and reclaim what is rightfully ours.

In electing more than 900 union members to office, we secured a great opportunity to right the structural wrongs of our economy. Our mission was not simply to rack up victories on election night last November. We changed the rulemakers. Now it is time for them to change the rules. As legislators move past the manufactured crisis that defined the first weeks of the 116th Congress, working people are ready to fight for that change.

Above all, that means affirming our ability to have a real voice on the job. A recent study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that half of all nonunion workers, or more than 60 million Americans, would choose to

join a union if they were given the chance, yet aspiring union members continue to face countless obstacles. The power of working people must be unleashed. Whether we work for private companies or public employers, in an office or a mine or a factory, all of us have the right to freely negotiate higher wages and better working conditions.

Congress should modernize the badly outdated National Labor Relations Act to truly protect our freedom to organize and mobilize together. Top lawmakers have put forth promising proposals that would ensure workers can organize a union without facing scorched earth tactics and hostile campaigns from corporations. If workers sign up for a union, they deserve to know their decision is protected by law. It is not the job of executives, governors, or right-wing operatives to make those decisions for them.

However, our fight will not end with one piece of legislation. An agenda for working families means building a fairer economy and a more just society for everyone in our country, whether you are in a union or not. That means

achieving full employment where every American is able to access a good job, passing a \$15 federal minimum wage, and refusing to approve any trade agreement that lacks enforceable labor protections.

It means providing a secure and prosperous future for all our families by expanding Social Security, strengthening our pensions, and making a serious federal investment in our infrastructure. It means defending the health and lives of working people by shoring up the Affordable Care Act, removing onerous taxes on health insurance plans negotiated by workers, expanding Medicare coverage to more people, and lowering prescription drug costs. It means passing laws that ensure paid sick and family leave.

All of these guarantees are long overdue for working people, but there is arguably no task so vital as defending our right to safety and dignity on the job. Congress should also extend comprehensive federal protections, including the Equality Act, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and Temporary Protected Status, to LGBTQ and immigrant workers, whose liveli-

hoods and families too often rest on the whims of their employers.

As one of a handful of men in my family to survive the scourge of black lung in the coal mines of Pennsylvania, I cannot overstate the dire need for broadly strengthened safety regulations, including the expansion of Occupational Safety and Health Administration coverage to all workers, toughened federal enforcement, and ironclad whistleblower protections.

Corporations and right-wing interests continue to try their best to deny working people our fair share of the enormous wealth that we produce every day. In November, we stood up to change that twisted status quo. We made our voices heard at the ballot box, and we intend to hold the people we elected accountable to an economic agenda that will raise wages, move our country forward, and lead to better lives for all of us.

Richard Trumka is the president of the national AFL-CIO. He previously served as secretary treasurer and is former president of the United Mine Workers.

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