

NATIONAL

Democrats: Which side are you on?

Forty Senate Democrats and 114 House Democrats are committing to a dramatic re-write of America's broken labor law

They won't be able to pass it until they retake the U.S. Senate, but Democrats in Congress have begun lining up behind a dramatic reform of the National Labor Relations Act, America's basic (and very weak) labor law. Known as the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, or PRO Act, the bill would:

- Repeal state 'right-to-work' laws;
- End prohibitions on secondary "solidarity" strikes; protect workers' right to strike intermittently; and bar the permanent replacement of striking workers;
- Threaten meaningful monetary penalties when employers terminate workers for union involvement, and require the government to immediately seek an

injunction to reinstate the fired employee; impose liability on corporate directors and officers for such violations; and let workers sue in court when employers retaliate against them for supporting a union;

- Require mediation and arbitration if union and employer can't agree on a first contract;
- Ban employers from forcing workers to attend anti-union meetings, and from "misclassifying" employees as independent contractors.

HR 2474, the House version of the bill, has 114 cosponsors, including Suzanne Bonamici and Peter DeFazio of Oregon. The Senate version, S.1306, is sponsored by Patty Murray of Washington and cosponsored by Washington's Maria Cantwell, Oregon's Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, and 37 others. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka testified in favor of the bill at a House subcommittee hearing May 8.

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PEOPLE

IAM's Britt Cornman retires

Britt Cornman, assistant directing business representative of Machinists District Lodge W24, is retiring May 17 after decades in the union movement. District Lodge W24 is the coordinating body for local Machinists union lodges in Oregon and Southwest Washington. It negotiates and enforces contracts for about 9,120 workers at lumber mills, machine shops, and manufacturers including Boeing and Daimler.



Britt Cornman

Cornman, 61, worked in mines, oil fields, mills, for a railroad carrier, in construction, and on the assembly line. His commitment to the labor movement nearly got him killed.

Cornman spent his childhood in La Grande and Cascade Locks, Oregon, where his father worked for Union Pacific railroad as a freight agent. After graduating from high school in 1976, Cornman went to work at the local sawmill, pulling dry chain and loading trains with lumber. He also worked in a Wyoming oil field, did construction, got married, and joined his father at Union Pacific in 1979, where he worked as a switchman, brakeman, and footboard

yard master, assembling train cars full of the industrial chemical soda ash from Wyoming's Green River mines. At the railroad, he became an active member of United Transportation Union.

"Reaganomics got me in 1982," says Cornman, referring to President Ronald Reagan's economic policies, which led to a severe recession — and his layoff from the railroad. Cornman found work in an open pit coal mine in Wyoming, first as a mechanic's helper, then as an oiler and operator on gigantic Bucyrus-Erie mining machines. That job, too, ended in layoff after a Reagan-era deregulation of the coal industry.

In 1987, Britt, his wife Stacey, and their three children moved to Elko, Nevada, where he went to work as a heavy equipment operator in an open pit gold mine. Approached by the United Steelworkers (USW), Cornman took the lead as a volunteer union organizer at the mine. But management's anti-union campaign was vicious. One day, his manager assigned him to use a piece of mining equipment that had faulty brakes. On a steep road leading into the pit, the brakes gave out.

Thinking quickly, he lowered the machine's blade to save himself from going over the edge and plummeting hundreds of feet. He later learned from a mechanic co-worker that the manager had known the brakes were faulty. Cornman is convinced the manager wanted him dead. Later on, another known union supporter had a hole shot through his bedroom window.

Not long after the brakes failed on his machine, at a mandatory company meeting, the mine manager provoked and berated Cornman about the union in front of his co-workers. When Cornman spoke up for the union, his foreman grabbed him by the arm and ordered him to leave.

"We think you're on drugs, to speak up like that in front of the manager," Cornman remembers the foreman said. Cornman was ordered to go to a lab for a drug test. Suspecting foul play, the USW staff organizer arranged for Cornman to get an independent drug test. The union test came back clean. A month later, the company said its test had showed the presence of marijuana, and fired him.

The USW filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and the agency determined that Cornman had been fired illegally for his union

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