



Who's on our side?

By Graham Trainor Oregon AFL-CIO President

Working women need more than lip service every month

Devastating. Erasing a decade of progress. Impossible choices.

These are just a few examples of how we hear about the experiences of working women, especially women of color, being described over the past year and throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to the first known case of the virus, the Oregon labor movement often talked about gender inequities and aimed to address them through policies like the Oregon Equal Pay Act of 2017 and the Oregon Workplace Fairness Act of 2019. Stats that showcase wage disparities include the fact that women working full-time still, in 2020, made just 82 cents to every dollar earned by men. Compounding this effect, the wage gap of many women of color is not only wider than the overall gender wage gap, but it is also closing more slowly.

We believe that true, equitable justice cannot be achieved until these barriers, as well as so many others that hold back workers based on the color of their skin, their national origin, their gender, or their sexual orientation, have been dismantled, eliminated, and thrown in the ash heap of history.

Fast forward to March 2020 when our nation and the world were rocked by

a deadly global pandemic. While failed leadership exacerbated the impacts of what has been such a devastating period in our history, crises like we are facing consistently and unwaveringly showcase who wins and who gets left behind in our society. Unfortunately, as we honor and celebrate Women's History Month, we know that working women and women of color have been hit with more than a double whammy.

In the past year, more than 2 million women have often been left with no choice but to leave their jobs during what has often and rightly been described as the "she-cession," bringing the participation of women in the labor force to the lowest level in more than 30 years. According to a recently released report by the National Women's Law Center, women have lost almost one million more jobs than men during the pandemic.

Devastating is clearly an understatement to describe this experience felt and faced by working women over the past year.

In a September 2020 *New York Times* article entitled "Pandemic Will 'Take Our Women 10 Years Back' in the Workplace," the journalist peels back the layers of these intersecting chal-

lenges. Facing hobbling schools and child care options, working mothers have had to make impossible choices that showcase even more clearly the disparities in our economic system. Even with greater work flexibility in those industries where it is feasible, women have borne the brunt of the impacts of school and child care shutdowns.

But to look even closer at essential and frontline workers, those who don't have the ability to telework and manage the exposure risk of themselves and their families, showcases a major driver in how women of color have fallen even further behind over the past year.

In the labor movement, we know that one of the greatest weapons to tackle these types of workplace inequities, from the gender pay gap to racial disparities, is a union contract. That's why reforming our nation's arcane and outdated labor laws is a critical component to the National AFL-CIO's "Workers First Agenda" in Congress. We also know that the Biden Administration's game-changing American Rescue Plan has many critical investments, from childcare support to COBRA subsidies to direct payments to working Americans, aimed at targeting the immediate need as a result of the pandemic.

To truly honor and celebrate Women's History Month, it will require a recommitment, especially by men and male leaders. We have to prioritize passing policies like HB 2474, which modernizes the Oregon Family Medical Leave Act, and SB 483, which adds protections against retaliation. We need to make changes right here in Oregon that will help level the playing field, made even more uneven in the past year, and rebuild from the pandemic in a way that is laser-focused on dismantling these barriers facing working women.

If we want to see the kinds of transformational changes towards justice and fairness for women in the workplace, Congress must pass the most comprehensive worker-empowerment and scale-tipping bill we've seen in generations, the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. And if we're truly committed to gender justice, the labor movement must maintain a clear and intersectional focus on the hard work of dismantling the systems and the policies that hold working women and women of color back *every single day*. Full stop.

The Oregon AFL-CIO is a 138,000-member-strong federation of labor unions.



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Ladder Safety and How It Affects Everyone

THE NUMBERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

+137

ladder injuries every day*

113

deaths caused by falls each year*

6-10 ft.

The most common ladder falls happen between 6 and 10 feet off the ground

WHETHER YOU'RE USING A LADDER AT HOME OR AT WORK, THESE NUMBERS AFFECT YOU.

2 most common ladder accidents include**:

1. Missing the last step when climbing down
2. Overreaching

**Occupational Ladder Fall Injuries* - United States, 2011, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
***ALI Ladder Safety Training and Citation Report* - United States, 2018, American Ladder Institute

Take safety into your own hands by taking ladder safety seriously. Visit www.LadderSafetyMonth.com to learn more.

National Ladder Safety Month is presented by

