

Building a Stronger Wisconsin and Honoring the Work of Workers

By: State Senator Brad Pfaff (D-Onalaska)

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: unions built the middle class and are the pathway to prosperity. It is workers – those who are doing the hard work day in and day out, building our main streets, keeping our communities safe and healthy, repairing our homes, teaching our kids – that make our country and our state great. Unfortunately, at a time when income inequality is soaring and Wall Street turns a massive profit, workers are struggling to make ends meet.

As organized labor did in the 19th century, I believe strong unions, where workers have a seat at the table, are vital to rebuilding and strengthening the middle class. I was proud to introduce legislation with my Democratic colleagues that would restore workers' voices in the workplace and build a stronger Wisconsin economy for every person. At the beginning of September, I authored four proposals to do the following:

Restore Prevailing Wage Laws - Prevailing wage laws ensure workers on publicly funded projects earn fair wages and benefits that reflect local standards. These laws prevent a race to the bottom in labor costs while laborers deliver high-quality work and better value for taxpayers. The repeal of prevailing wage laws by Republicans led to lower worker wages and had no significant impact on the cost of public construction projects.

Address Worker Misclassification - This proposal strengthens the penalty assigned to companies that intentionally misclassify employees as independent contractors. When workers are misclassified as independent contractors, they lose out on critical protections, benefits, and labor rights, including minimum wage, overtime pay, unemployment insurance, the right to form a union, and anti-discrimination protections.

Repeal "Right-to-Work" Laws - Repealing "Right-to-Work" laws would restore Wisconsinites' rights to organize unions and improve workplace conditions and pay. Historically, "right-to-work" states experience lower wages and higher workplace fatality rates, in part because these laws undermine and weaken unions.

Restore Project Labor Agreements – Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) create a consistent set of rules and regulations for a construction project, including the scope of the project, working conditions, safety protocols, union wages, budgetary parameters, and production timelines. PLAs create a level playing field for both union and nonunion workers by ensuring safe, high-quality work and fair compensation, thus keeping our workers local and our economy strong.

People in western Wisconsin work hard. People who work hard deserve to earn a livable wage, fair benefits, and experience safe working conditions. The bills I proposed would help prevent employers from taking advantage of workers, improve taxpayers' value on publicly-funded construction projects, and ensure workers have a voice in their workplace.

Unions lift all workers—union and nonunion—across many sectors and industries by raising overall wages and benefits. Our bills put workers first, ahead of big corporations. Together, we can and will build a stronger Wisconsin.