

The Montana AFL-CIO

PUBLIC POLICY POSITION STATEMENTS



The statements contained herein reflect the views of the Montana AFL-CIO, which is a federation of labor organizations representing 50,000 Montana working families.

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE A UNION

The right to form a union and engage in collective bargaining is enshrined in U.S. and international human rights laws, but for many U.S. workers it is a right that exists only on paper. Far too often, workers who want to stand together to form unions face intense intimidation aimed at suppressing their freedoms to unionize and bargain collectively. Workers and their families have suffered due to the suppression of these basic freedoms.

Management should not get to dictate whether workers can unionize and should not be in a position to authorize or ignore such a decision. Workers should be allowed to form unions regardless of whether management agrees.

RIGHT-TO-WORK IS WRONG

Right-to-Work laws true purpose is to hurt the ability of unions to advocate for all workers and serve as a check on corporate greed. These laws are wrong for workers, wrong for business, and wrong for the economy. Right-to-Work laws drive down wages for all workers, including workers that aren't part of a union. Workers in Right-to-Work states are less likely to have health insurance and more likely to die or be hurt on the job.

Right-to-Work laws are not a deciding factor in where businesses locate, despite what proponents say. In fact, high-tech companies that provide good-paying jobs favor states where unions are strong.

Right-to-Work drives down wages and communities lose jobs. In fact, Right-to-Work laws actually lead to a decrease in employment.

Simply put, Right-to-Work is wrong for Montana and wrong for the country.

MAJORITY SIGN-UP

Workers should always have the right to organize a union in a fair process, free of intimidation. That is why the Montana AFL-CIO supports majority sign-up (also referred to as "card check"). Studies show that workers who use majority sign-up experience less coercion when they use majority sign-up to speak together and to form their union. Majority sign-up is tried and true. It has been around since the National Labor Relation Act became law in 1935.

Employers should not have the right to decide whether or not workers use majority sign-up. It should be the worker's choice.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Collective bargaining ensures a group of employees are able to negotiate as a unit with their employer over safety, pay and benefits. As a collective unit, employees can be unified, stand together, and speak with one voice. Collective bargaining is also important in terms of whistleblower protections, job flexibility including family leave and advancement opportunities. Collective bargaining for employees in the public sector serves as an important safeguard against cronyism.

Collective bargaining is essential to middle class mobility in Montana and must be protected for both private and public sector employees.

NDO

The Union Movement has always been at the forefront of defending and expanding civil rights in this country. We have and will continue to be on the right side of history. Today, many of our brothers and sisters are discriminated against in the workplace and in the housing market due to their sexual and gender identities. As trade unionists, we cannot allow this to stand. An injury to one is an injury to all. The LGBTQ community and labor community stand together and support the passage of Non-Discrimination Ordinances (NDOs) that guarantee liberty and dignity to every citizen regardless of orientation.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The failure to invest in our state's infrastructure has impeded transportation safety and Montana's economy. The Montana State AFL-CIO supports public investment in infrastructure that creates good paying jobs, maintains public safety, improves our schools, and supports economic growth in our state.

TRADITIONAL ENERGY

Coal is a necessary part of our energy portfolio and will be for many decades. Montana has more recoverable coal reserves than any other state in the country. At our current rate of production, it would take more than 1,600 years to exhaust Montana's coal reserves. Coal still provides about half of Montana's energy. Furthermore, the responsible mining, transporting, and production of energy from coal provide labor intensive, highly-skilled jobs that sustain over ten thousand Montana families. Many of these jobs are union jobs.

The Montana AFL-CIO supports maximizing existing technologies to increase efficiencies and reduce carbon emissions from existing power plants.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

The Montana AFL-CIO supports the development of renewable energy. We support protecting the democratic, transparent, and accountable regulatory framework that secures our future by protecting consumers and encouraging energy conservation. We support the training of our workforce to operate and maintain the utilities of the future. Renewable energy expands the energy industry and increases the potential for high-paying, family sustaining jobs.

EDUCATION

The Montana AFL-CIO supports early childhood programs that prepare young children for future learning. Educators must have the support and resources needed. School facilities must have proper equipment and building maintenance.

Private school vouchers, K-12 education savings accounts and other schemes, such as education tax credits for K-12 private school expenses, undermine public education by taking scarce public funds away from public schools, which are open to all students, and shifting them to private schools.

Post-secondary education creates economic development and advances the quality of life for Montanans. All Montanans must have affordable access to quality post-secondary education that addresses their needs and goals. Student tuition must be affordable.

DAVIS-BACON ACT

The Montana AFL-CIO supports the Davis-Bacon Act and the Little Davis-Bacon Act, which requires the payment of prevailing community wages on federally financed construction projects. The law ensures local contractors that uphold prevailing rates of pay and local labor standards in a geographic area a fair chance to compete for government projects without being undercut by outside firms using subpar labor. The act also protects the government from unreliable operators seeking to win federal contracts by bidding too low to attract competent craftsmen.

VOTER ACCESS

The Montana AFL-CIO believes that every Montanan should be able to vote regardless of class, income, age, and race. However, voter access **is** under attack. The opponents of voter access push "Voter ID" laws and advocate for the elimination of same day registration. Their goals are clear: diminish voter turnout and exclude the young, the poor, workers, and people of color from the voting process. The Montana AFL-CIO supports making voting easier, not more difficult. The Montana AFL-CIO supports same day voter registration.

PAY EQUITY

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 made it illegal for employers to pay unequal wages to male and female employees who perform work requiring equal effort, skill and responsibility. Yet today, wage disparities between women and men are evident in the private and public sectors. In Montana, working women make about 75% of what their male colleagues make in wages, regardless of experience and education. It's time to ensure equal pay for equal work through wage transparency.

It's important to note that the gender wage gap is smaller for union women than their non-union sisters.

TIP CREDIT

Montana law states that tips are the property of the worker. By definition, employers owe wages to their workers for hours worked. Tips are not provided by the employer and should not be considered a credit toward the employer's responsibility to pay wages as this legislation would propose. The Montana AFL-CIO believes a Tip Credit that would allow employers to count the gratuities of tipped employees and apply them as "credit" toward the employee's wages. In effect, this takes away the gratuities given to workers and transfers the income illegally to the benefit of the employer. In Montana, too many workers are illegally required to submit their tips to the employer. In many such cases the employer redistributes the tips in the form of a check, a week or more after their collection. The check often reflects less than the originally collected tips.

PROTECTED LABOR AGREEMENTS

Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) have been used in the construction industry since the 1930's. A PLA is a single-site craft labor agreement that is used to provide reliable, cost-effective project staffing for public and private capital construction projects. PLAs have the power to ensure a Montana preference in hiring so the work Montana taxes fund are employing Montana workers, who will further stimulate our economy by spending their paychecks in our communities and paying their income tax to our state's general fund. The Montana AFL-CIO supports PLAs.

PERS AND TRS

The Montana Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) and the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) are critical to retired public servants. The integrity of these plans must be protected. We oppose all plans to convert defined benefit plans into any form of hybrid or defined contribution plan.

MEDICAID EXPANSION

Healthcare is a basic human right and Medicaid is one of the cornerstones of America's healthcare system. It was created to provide essential services to Americans who had no other means of affording the healthcare they needed, including older Americans, people with disabilities, and low-income children. The Montana AFL-CIO supported the expansion of Medicaid in Montana (the HELP Act), which provided healthcare to an additional 70,000 Montanans.