



# Continued Labor Reform Dialogue in the 119th Congress

Center Forward Basics

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## Overview

For the better part of a century, dating back to the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA) and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA), the ideological battle lines of labor policy have been clearly defined. Progressive Democrats have largely supported stronger labor protections and more favorable union policies, while conservative Republicans have largely supported business interests. In recent election cycles, and especially in the 2024 election, political realignment has blurred these lines.

Entering the 119th Congress, President Trump and Senate Republicans have adopted new approaches to labor policy and broken through the traditional dichotomy that has long dominated this conversation. In early 2025, Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO) stepped in front of the Republican leadership to voice some new positions on labor and union legislation. In the fall, Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Chairman Bill Cassidy (R-LA) introduced his own legislation, further reframing this long-standing debate. Now, progressive labor advocates and the business community are responding to the new movement in the GOP and bracing for potential major shifts in 2026. This Basic will examine the evolution of the labor policy debate in the 119th Congress to date and the path ahead.

## New Allies for Labor in the 119th Congress

As some GOP leaders have shifted on labor issues to reflect the changing electoral coalitions in recent election cycles, so has the dialogue on these issues in Congress evolved. Sen. Josh Hawley has been one of the most prominent figures associated with this shift since arriving in the Senate in 2019, emphasizing worker power, union accountability, and skepticism of large corporations. In January 2025, Sen. Hawley released “A Pro-Worker Framework for the 119th Congress,” a document circulated on the Hill outlining his vision for labor reform. The framework included loose proposals to expedite union election timelines and processes, restrictions on productivity quotas, and harsher penalties for violations of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).

Hawley’s agenda came into clearer focus in March, when he introduced [S. 844](#), the Faster Labor Contracts Act, alongside Sen. Bernie Moreno (R-OH) and nine Democrats. The bill aims to accelerate the **collective bargaining** process following a union election by imposing stricter timelines on contract negotiations and expanding remedies when employers are found to have engaged in unfair labor practices. Supporters argue the bill addresses prolonged delays that can undermine workers’ ability to secure a first

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Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for-profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

For more information, please visit [www.center-forward.org](http://www.center-forward.org)

## Key Terms:

- **Unfair Labor Practices (ULPs):** actions by employers or unions that violate the National Labor Relations Act, such as retaliation against organizing or refusal to bargain. Current legislation would increase penalties for ULPs to deter employer misconduct.
- **Collective Bargaining:** the process by which workers, through a union, negotiate with employers over wages, benefits, and working conditions. It is a right protected under federal labor law.
- **Contract Bar Window:** A limited period of time near the expiration of a collective bargaining agreement during which employees may file a petition to decertify a union or

contract. In September 2025, Rep. Donald Norcross (D-NJ) introduced a House companion bill, [H.R. 5408](#), with strong bipartisan support, including 14 Democrats and 13 Republicans.

Bipartisan developments on labor policy continued later in the year when Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) introduced [S. 2613](#), the Warehouse Worker Protection Act, in July. The legislation had originally been introduced in the 118th Congress, and after negotiations and revisions, Sen. Hawley signed on as its lone Republican cosponsor in September 2024. In the 119th Congress, the bill incorporated several concessions Hawley had sought, including clearer statutory guidance for enforcement and limits on regulatory discretion. Sen. Roger Marshall (R-KS) joined Hawley and nine Democrats as cosponsors in the 119th Congress. Rep. Norcross again introduced a companion bill in the House, [H.R. 4896](#), though with narrower bipartisan backing, including eighteen Democrats and Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY).

The two bills have drawn strong opposition from the business community, with business associations warning that the reforms would impose heavy compliance burdens, particularly on small businesses, potentially leading to supply chain disruptions, job losses, and higher consumer prices. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, and others have labeled Sen. Hawley's framework the "PRO Act Lite," arguing that the union election reforms would limit workers' ability to make fully informed decisions.

Unions and labor advocates, by contrast, have welcomed Hawley's proposals as a meaningful bipartisan step towards strengthening collective bargaining. At the same time, the Trump administration has sent mixed signals on labor policy, pairing blue-collar focused messaging and tax relief in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act with actions to limit federal employee bargaining rights and constrain the National Labor Relations Board, highlighting the unsettled direction of labor policy in the 119th Congress. (Read more about Sen. Hawley's labor agenda and its reception [here](#)).

## Developing a New Dialogue

In October 2025, Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Bill Cassidy (R-LA) convened two hearings to examine labor policy issues and foster discussion of potential solutions.

The first hearing, titled "Labor Law Reform Part 1: Diagnosing the Issues, Exploring Current Proposals," featured testimony from union leaders, labor economists, and former NLRB appointees under the Trump and Biden Administrations. Chairman Cassidy set the tone for a bipartisan conversation, emphasizing the importance of dialogue across partisan lines and building a broader consensus to move forward. Acknowledging proposals from both Republican and Democratic members of the committee, he agreed that all ideas should be considered, and that common-sense "pro-worker" reforms do not necessarily translate into "pro-union" or "pro-employer" reforms.

The second hearing, a few weeks later, was titled "Labor Law Reform Part 2: New Solutions for Finding a Pro-Worker Way Forward." The witness testimony included perspectives from academic experts, laborers, and advocacy groups. In his remarks, Cassidy made a point of not fully rejecting pro-worker protections, but of reframing them within more traditional GOP priorities: individual choice, private-sector flexibility, bureaucratic efficiency, and freedom from compulsory practices by both employers and unions.

In subsequent statements, Chairman Cassidy linked the two hearings to a broader objective of crafting a pro-worker,

seek representation by a different union. Outside this window, the existing contract generally bars changes to union representation.

- **"Card Check" Elections:** A union recognition process in which a union is certified if a majority of employees sign authorization cards, rather than through a secret-ballot election conducted by the NLRB. Supporters argue card check streamlines organizing, while critics raise concerns about employee privacy and coercion.
- **Non-Bargaining Activities:** Activities undertaken by unions that fall outside direct contract negotiations, such as political advocacy, public campaigns, strikes, or organizing efforts. These activities are regulated differently and can raise legal and policy questions about union authority and employer obligations.

pro-business, and pro-family agenda, as well as the need to bring stability to labor relations and avoid policy reversals between administrations.

## New Proposals

In November 2025, Chairman Cassidy introduced a package of six new bills to address worker protections, unionization election processes, NLRB administration, and other issues raised in the October hearings.

- [S. 3117](#), **The Worker Reforming Elections for Speedy and Unimpeded Labor Talks Act, or Worker RESULTS Act**, amends the NLRA regarding labor organizing elections. The bill expands the **contract bar window** and places restrictions on some union election tactics. It also requires all union elections to be conducted by secret ballot and mandates that at least two-thirds of the electorate participate for the results to be valid for union certification. The current NLRB rules do not require any participation threshold to certify election results. The NLRB does not currently require secret ballots in union elections. Still, many union elections operate on voluntary “**card check**” rules, in which workers can sign “union authorization cards,” and pressure employers to recognize a union without a formal election. This is the most significant of Cassidy’s proposed reforms, and analysts have styled this as an alternative to the Faster Labor Contracts Act.
- [S. 3114](#), **The Union Members' Right to Know Act**, amends the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959, requiring unions to proactively inform members of their rights, including the option to opt out of dues used for political spending. Under this bill, unions will be required to obtain annual written consent before using member dues for non-bargaining activity.
- [S. 3115](#), **The NLRB Stability Act**, amends the NLRA, requiring the NLRB to abide by precedent from the U.S. Court of Appeals in the circuit where the case arose. The bill aims to improve legal consistency and streamline bureaucratic operations, though critics warn it could create further chaos by requiring the agency to apply different standards in different regions.
- [S. 3116](#), **The Fairness in Filing Act**, amends the NLRA, tightening the required documentation to file an **unfair labor practice** (ULP) charge with the NLRB. The NLRB has long struggled with a backlog of cases, which has only grown due to the lack of a quorum since President Trump fired Democratic board member Gwynne Wilcox in January 2025. The bill aims to cut frivolous cases from the board’s docket.
- [S. 3124](#), **The Protection on the Picket Line Act**, amends the NLRA to clarify rules of when an employer can discipline an employee during protected labor activity or protests. This protects workers from retaliation and abuse while also allowing employers to continue operations, provided the discipline does not display anti-union bias.
- [S. 3128](#), **The Worker Privacy Act**, amends the NLRA to allow workers to choose which form of contact information they share during union elections. This aims to protect workers from union organizers using that data for political or non-organizing purposes after an election period.

As of January 2026, none of the six Republican bills have Democratic cosponsors. Business groups have expressed much greater openness to the November legislation than to the earlier Democratic- and Hawley-backed legislation. Citing state-level lawsuits, business advocates have stressed the need for legal certainty and national standards to reform existing policies.

The AFL-CIO has vocally opposed Sen. Cassidy’s new legislation, arguing that the bills will make it harder for workers to organize, undermine the NLRB’s enforcement authority, and weaken employees’ rights under the NLRA. They stated the bills offered one-sided benefits to employers at the expense of employees, and some bills aimed to address nonexistent problems

while imposing unfair administrative burdens on union organizing and activities. The dissent took particular issue with S.3115, the NLRB Stability Act, warning that the NLRB's national authority is important for regulatory certainty. The warning noted that appellate court rulings could lead to different interpretations of the NLRA between jurisdictions, thus complicating administrative compliance for employers operating in multiple states.

Cassidy's hearings and the new bills following Sen. Hawley's recent releases mark a significant evolution in the ongoing dialogue on labor law reform. Given a packed legislative calendar in 2026, Senate Republicans could face challenges building momentum for a vote on any of these bills without bipartisan support or significant buy-in from the White House.

## Links to Other Resources

- AFL-CIO - [Letter Opposing Sen. Cassidy's Proposed Labor Legislation](#)
- Institute for the American Worker - [The Pro-Worker Agenda](#)
- OurLawHub - [Senate HELP Panel Reopens Labor Reform Debate with Second Pro-Worker Hearing](#)
- Politico Shift - [Republicans take a big swing on labor reform](#)
- Punchbowl News - [Sen. Josh Hawley's "Pro-Worker Framework for the 119th Congress"](#)
- Senate HELP Committee - [Full Committee Hearing: Labor Law Reform Part 1: Diagnosing the Issues, Exploring Current Proposals](#)
- Senate HELP Committee - [Full Committee Hearing: Labor Law Reform Part 2: New Solutions for Finding a Pro-Worker Way Forward](#)