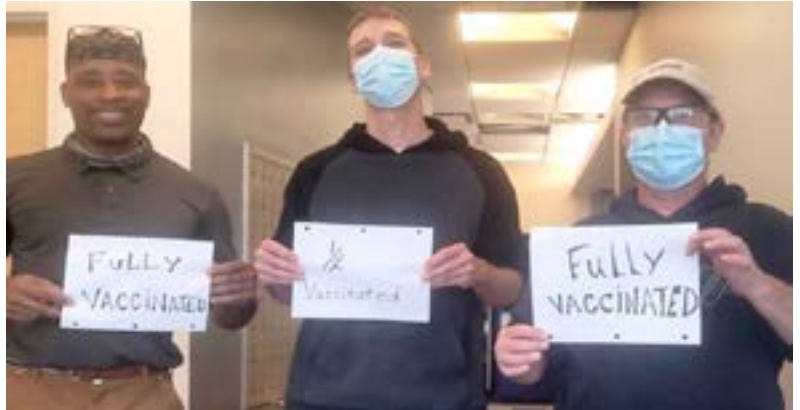


Construction unions battle vaccine reluctance among members



By M. Jaworski & J. Embrescia

Almost half, 46.4%, of U.S. construction/extraction workers—union and non-union combined—said they probably or definitely would not get vaccinated against the still-potent coronavirus, a new study shows. That's the highest refusal rate among all occupations, researchers at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh report.

The study, which has ranged over months since the start of the year, covered more than 732,000 workers in all occupations, ranging up to the age of 65. People over 65 were not included because the study covered active workers and because the oldest were in the highest-risk group and thus got the vaccines first, anyway.

The lack of trust points scored highest with the groups of workers who were most vaccine-resistant, led by construction, but including a few other groups, the researchers added. Construction union leaders have urged members repeatedly to be vaccinated since working conditions on construction sites are often not fit for other anti-viral measures, notably physical distancing.

At the same time, with the economy picking up and construction booming—at least in certain areas—discussions have begun about whether employers should, or if they could, mandate employees receive the vaccine in order to report to work.

With a large percentage of construction workers unvaccinated, job sites could be ripe for future outbreaks, which would cripple the ability of contractors to finish projects on schedule.

An outbreak on any job site has the potential to shut down the project for up to two weeks, leaving the remaining healthy workers without a paycheck as the worksite is disinfected and workers who are sick or were exposed are forced to quarantine.

With these combined shortages in many parts of

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the country, contractors face hard choices.

The Carnegie Mellon/University of Pittsburgh study showed results similar to a Morning Consult survey taken between October 2020 and January 2021 that found about 47% of construction workers indicated they would not get the vaccine.

Study: 46% of construction workers leery of anti-coronavirus vaccine.

Since the Ohio Health Department's earlier figures, the Biden administration has calculated that more than half of all U.S. adults have had at least one shot, though the president admitted the country missed his target of a 70% vaccination rate by July 4.

For the union construction industry, this is a complicated matter, fueled by a building boom in many regions of the country and established collective bargaining agreements.

According to multiple regional building trades council leaders, a vaccine mandate could only be enforced through either collective bargaining or at the request of the project owner. Only one leader whom the Labor Citizen contacted thought contractors could mandate the vaccine without amending an existing CBA.

However, many of the leaders are urging their members to get the vaccine, as they walk a fine line between pushing vaccination, respecting a worker's personal medical decision, and placing signatory contractors in a potentially perilous situation if an

outbreak would occur.

In Western Ohio, Dayton Building and Construction Trades Council Executive Secretary Grady Mullins said vaccination efforts are well underway. Mullins, who took that top job in December, said many local tradesmen and tradeswomen took it upon themselves to get the vaccine and he encourages others to do the same.

Unfortunately, at one local training center within his jurisdiction, COVID-19 turned deadly. An asymptomatic person unknowingly brought the virus into the building. A handful of apprentices and the Training Director became ill with the virus, as did the director's wife. Both were hospitalized—and, sadly, Mullins said, the wife died.

"Everyone thought everyone was doing everything right," Mullins said. "After that happened, the affiliated building trades unions and their members got serious about getting vaccinated." Across the state, Marty Loney, Council President, indicated many affiliated members are getting the vaccine.

Statistics show new claims for jobless aid fewest in 15 months

By PAI

The number of workers filing new claims for jobless benefits, as an aftereffect of the coronavirus pandemic, hit its lowest level in 15 months, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported. But that still left more than 14 million people getting checks—and millions of those will get cut off by Independence Day. That's because 26 Republican governors have yanked their states out of special federal aid by July 3, the National Employment Law Project reports.

Those \$300 weekly checks go to workers who don't qualify for regular state-run jobless benefits—such as Uber and Lyft drivers, "independent contractors" and "gig economy" workers and those who exhausted their regular state benefits.

Nationally, the states and the federal government sent out a combined 14,659,761 jobless aid checks the week of June 12, the Bureau of Labor Statistics explained. That's equivalent to 10.5% of the entire U.S. workforce.

Meanwhile, 474,397 other workers filed claims for aid in the week ending June 26. That's down from 509,770 the week of June 19. Those two groups haven't gotten any checks, yet. Both weekly figures are the lowest since the pandemic was

officially declared March 13, 2020.

NELP reported the \$300 checks cover 74.7% of the jobless in the GOP-run states, including 218,434 who lost aid in Georgia alone. Right-wing GOP Gov. Brian Kemp cut off checks June 26.

Nationally, NELP calculated, the cutoffs will leave some 4.7 million jobless workers without any aid at all after July 3. And all the other jobless will lose those checks just after Labor Day unless Congress extends the program.

Senate Republicans, who perpetuate the myth that jobless workers are earning more from the feds and thus don't seek employment, may well filibuster an extension.

"Although states do not report demographic information on recipients of" the \$300 weekly checks, "over 46% of unemployment insurance recipients in the states ending the programs early are people of color. We can assume they make up a disproportionate share of those receiving pandemic unemployment benefits," the federal checks. In nine of the states, more than half of the jobless aid recipients who will lose all money are workers of color.

But National Employment Law Project warns millions now depending upon benefits will be cut off by July 4.

Filibuster or democracy: Can't have both



By Peter Certo

The American political system is complicated, but fixing it doesn't have to be.

Voters of all stripes broadly agree on the kinds of changes they'd like to see. We need less money in politics. It should be easier to vote—early, in person, or by mail. And voters should be able to pick their own representatives, not the other way around.

The For the People Act, which passed the House earlier this year, would do all of these things. It includes new ethics rules for members, protects and expands the right to vote, and would restrict the extreme partisan gerrymandering that's become commonplace. No wonder it's popular—around two-thirds of Americans tell pollsters they support it. It's also, for now, doomed. And with a wave of voter suppression laws, new gerrymandering schemes, and ongoing efforts to discredit the 2020 election results still underway, that's a very dangerous development for our democracy.

Explaining why reveals some truly absurd things about our system. For one thing, the law “failed” by a party-line Senate vote of 50-50, Democrats on the yes side, Republicans on the no. Ordinarily, 50 votes should be enough to pass something in the Senate when the vice president supports it, as Kamala Harris does. But thanks to an arcane Senate tactic called the filibuster, opponents of legislation can force supporters to come up with 60 votes, instead of a simple majority.

It gets even more absurd when you realize that those 50 Democrats represent over 40 million more Americans than those 50 Republicans. And with the filibuster, Republicans representing just 20% of us can easily stop legislation that overwhelming majorities support.

The filibuster is how Republicans are holding up everything from universal background checks on gun purchases to popular laws that would protect the environment, the right to form unions, and now voting rights.

Republicans are champions of the filibuster now, but it was only a few years ago that they weakened it so they could pack the Supreme Court with unpopular nominees like Brett Kavanaugh, who was credibly accused of sexual assault. Meanwhile, in states across the country, filibuster-free Republican legislatures are pushing hundreds of laws that will make it much harder to vote—or even, in some cases, let those same lawmakers overrule decisions made by voters.

Now that they're in power, the Democrats could get rid of the filibuster. Hundreds of historians and political scientists, alarmed by the state-level onslaught against democracy, have warned that they'll need to do just that. So too have hundreds of faith, labor, voting rights, and environmental groups.

Kill the filibuster and pass the For the People Act, they urge, or our democracy may not survive.

The warning from democracy advocates is clear: Kill the filibuster and pass the For the People Act, or our democracy won't survive.

LOCAL NEWS

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Portugal: Communists protest NATO summit

By Emile Schepers

The Portuguese Communist Party denounced the NATO summit the week of June 17th, which is being held in Brussels, claiming that the event's purpose is to "reinforce this politico-military bloc as an instrument of interference and aggression at the worldwide level, in order to impose the hegemonic domination of the United States and the other imperialist powers over the peoples of the world," encapsulated in Agenda NATO 2030, which is aimed against China and Russia.

The Portuguese communists recall that their own country was admitted to NATO during the fascist dictatorship of Salazar, as a founding member state. Subsequently NATO has been an instrument of intervention in many countries, including Ukraine, with its admiring supporters of Hitler and fascism. The communists expressed their strong disapproval of Portugal's continued membership in NATO and called for continued protests against it.

400 líderes religiosos instan a los senadores a aprobar PROAct

BY Mark Gruenberg

Decir que proteger y expandir el derecho de los trabajadores a organizarse es un imperativo moral y un impulso para los trabajadores que más lo necesitan, más de 400 líderes religiosos firmaron una carta abierta a los senadores, instándolos a aprobar el Protect the Right to Organize (PRO) Actuar.

En una conferencia de prensa telefónica de Zoom el 30 de junio en la que se dio a conocer la carta, los oradores de Interfaith Network for Worker Solidarity, con sede en Chicago, declararon que durante los últimos 40 años "la clase media ha sido exprimida y las familias han sido arrojadas a la pobreza", como dijo el Rev. CJ Hawking de Arise Chicago, un ministro metodista y director de la red, lo expresó.

"Al igual que el New Deal fue un poderoso reinicio económico" durante la Depresión de la década de 1930, "lo será la Ley PRO", declaró Hawking. Promulgarlo "protegerá a los trabajadores que quieren salir de la pobreza".

El New Deal de FDR incluyó la Ley Nacional de Relaciones Laborales original de 1935. Los congresos posteriores dirigidos por los republicanos, los fallos de los tribunales federales y la oposición virulenta, y a veces violenta, de los jefes a los trabajadores que se organizaron en su defensa y sus propios intereses lo debilitaron.

La Ley PRO está diseñada para revertir esas pérdidas, y las pérdidas que los trabajadores han sufrido como resultado, a través de una amplia gama de medidas a favor de los trabajadores. Las disposiciones favorables al trabajador van desde la

denegación de las leyes estatales de "derecho al trabajo" hasta la obligación del reconocimiento de cheques de tarjetas.

La ley también incluye, entre muchas otras secciones, el arbitraje de primer contrato si los trabajadores y los jefes no pueden llegar a un acuerdo, multas elevadas por violar la ley laboral y otorgar a la NLRB el poder de reintegrar inmediatamente a los trabajadores despedidos ilegalmente, por ejemplo.

En su carta conjunta, que el grupo quiere que otros líderes religiosos firmen, la coalición declara que las consecuencias del declive de los derechos de los trabajadores en Estados Unidos son "devastadoras".

"Basándonos en nuestras sagradas escrituras y tradiciones religiosas, creemos que los trabajadores deben tener la libertad de unirse en solidaridad para hacer oír su voz y mejorar sus vidas y las vidas de sus familias", declara su carta.

Pero fue el reverendo Hawking quien tuvo las últimas palabras. Primero, citó el Nuevo Testamento, diciendo "Si tienes dos abrigos y ves a alguien sin ellos, debes darle tu segundo abrigo. Tenemos un sistema económico con directores ejecutivos que tienen 300 abrigos y trabajadores", especialmente trabajadores esenciales, "sin ninguno".

Luego pasó al Antiguo Testamento, la Torá: "Desde la época de Moisés, los derechos de los trabajadores se han colocado en la cima de la agenda de Dios. Al sacar a los israelitas de la esclavitud, Dios dejó una marca y dijo: 'Estoy del lado de los trabajadores', dijo Hawking.

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