
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, August 30, 2019

CONTACT: DWD Communications, 608-266-2722

On the Web: <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwd/news.htm>

On Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/WIWorkforce>

On Twitter: @WIWorkforce

125 Years of Labor Day: Workers Fight On

A column by Secretary-designee Caleb Frostman

Here in Wisconsin, many of us think of Labor Day as a glorious bookend to summer; a long weekend where we spend time with friends and family, enjoying all the amazing things Wisconsin has to offer.

But Labor Day represents and celebrates so much more than cookouts and one last swim at the lake; it acknowledges the sacrifice and struggle of the American worker to win rights by banding together for the economic advancement of the greater workforce.

The spirit of Labor Day is deeply rooted in the collective power of workers demanding fair pay, safe working conditions, and a seat at the negotiating table. Our state has long been a leader in the labor movement and generations of Wisconsinites have fought, sometimes to the death, to gain and protect the rights that we often take for granted.

The 40-hour work week? The right to a safe workplace? Paid leave? Thank the labor movement. How about having a job to come back to after being sick, having a baby, or serving in the military? You can thank the labor movement for that, too.

This year marks 125 years of Labor Day and more than a century later, we are reminded daily that the fight for fair, safe, and equitable treatment at work is never over. It becomes clearer every day that we must remain ever vigilant to maintain and advance Wisconsin's workers' quality of life.

As we prepare to celebrate Labor Day 2019, significant challenges remain for Wisconsin workers: Slow wage growth has not mirrored drastic increases in worker productivity, nor kept pace with the skyrocketing costs of housing, education, and health care. Our state's birth rate falls far short of replacing retiring workers. Inadequate public investment in our state's economic infrastructure (schools, roads, broadband, etc.) limits opportunity for widespread economic growth for all Wisconsinites, rural or urban, rich or poor, including workers, employers, and entrepreneurs. Thus, our collaborative work toward long-term, statewide economic advancement continues.

Many of the labor protections currently enforced by the Department of Workforce Development originated at the bargaining table. At DWD, we know that the best policies are advanced when labor and management negotiate mutually acceptable solutions. That's why we're proud of our history of incorporating this approach in our advisory councils for Unemployment Insurance, Worker's Compensation, and Apprenticeship, as well as the recently launched Misclassification Task Force.

There has always been, and will likely always be, an ongoing negotiation between those with capital and those providing labor. As that perpetual economic dialogue continues, this administration will ensure Wisconsin workers have a seat at the negotiating table to protect their hard-won rights and encourage the

economic advancement of our state's workers.

On this, the 125th Labor Day, we are committed to honoring the sacrifices of those who came before us, whose work aimed to ensure that a hard day's work is rewarded with fair pay, safe working conditions, and equal protection under the law.

###