

(Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extension of Remarks.)

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 4101, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1999

Mr. SOLOMON (during the special order of the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. BONIOR) from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 105-593) on the resolution (H. Res. 482) providing for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 4101) making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies programs for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1999, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

UNIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BONIOR) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, I am joined tonight by my colleagues, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) who just spoke, the chief deputy whip of our party, the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO), the gentlewoman from California (Ms. BARBARA LEE), and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LYNN WOOLSEY), as well.

We are here this evening, Mr. Speaker, to talk about unions. We say that word with pride. Earlier this year, many of us heard powerful, real life experience stories by Betty Dumas, Cathy Sharp, and Juan Mazymlian about the challenges they faced when they tried to organize their workplace; a basic right, to organize your workplace for wages, for benefits.

For Juan, he and his fellow asbestos removal workers in New York won union recognition and a shot at a better life. For Cathy Sharp, she struggled in a hospital system where she worked in San Diego and she won union recognition, and a contract that gives nurses more input into the care of their patients.

For Betty Dumas and her fellow workers at the Avondale shipyard in New Orleans, their fight goes on. It is a brave fight, but their resolve remains stronger than ever. They will win that fight, because they are standing up for folks who they work beside every day who are deprived of decent wages and decent benefits and the things that many of us take for granted today at the workplace.

These three individuals touched us in a very special, fundamental way when they spoke to us at our conference in Virginia. We understood their fights

were for basic human respect and for basic human dignity.

This week, and particularly on the 24th of June this week, many of us are lending our voices and our support to working men and women around the country. We will be speaking out about their efforts to improve their future. On the 24th, a day to make our voices heard, workers will be showcasing their ambitions and their visions and their successes, and yes, even their heartaches, in their effort to come together to form a union.

It is not easy to do. I will talk about that in a second. There are activities planned in over 70 communities to highlight workers' basic, fundamental rights to organize. From Seattle to Miami and from Burlington to San Diego there will be activities to celebrate past victories, and to remind us of the work that is yet to be done.

Some will say, how difficult is it to join a union? To give you some idea of how hard it is for workers to join together to form a union, let me try to offer an analogy. Imagine waking up the morning after the November election and reading the headlines: Challenger wins; challenger wins. Incumbent files objection to the way the election was conducted. The court will issue a decision within 2 to 5 years. Incumbent to hold office pending outcome of litigation. End of headline.

This sounds absurd and profoundly undemocratic, but that is what is happening. That is what is happening to workers in our country whenever they win an NLRB election. That is the National Labor Relations Board's election.

Just winning takes tremendous courage and resolve. Employers and their sophisticated anti-union consultants commonly launch campaigns of terror and fear against workers who try to form a union. Once a worker steps onto their employer's property, their basic human rights of free speech and freedom of assembly and free press, they get left at the curbside.

Workers face union-busting tactics such as threats of being fired or taking away their health insurance; or being forced to attend a compulsory anti-union meeting, either in large groups or in one-on-one shakedown sessions; or threats of moving the plant to Mexico or other countries.

There is in this country, and I am sad to report this, but there is in the country today a multi-million dollar industry that is established just to quash organizing drives in America. Against these odds, workers need all the help they can get.

That is why more and more organizing drives have become community campaigns. Religious and community leaders are speaking out more and more to improve the quality of life of their families and friends and neighbors. There is greater recognition that these drives are part of a larger cause, the fight for human rights and for basic justice.

Organizing not only improves the lives of individual workers, but also the entire community. When those wages go up because workers can come together and band together and bargain for a good contract and good wages, that money gets circulated throughout the community and everyone benefits. It does not stay in a few pockets.

Organized workers get contracts and salaries which set the standard for other workers in the community who may not be unionized, so they bring up everybody's wages, not just union workers.

There is a huge wage gap in this country today. I think everybody realizes that that gap is growing, and it is as wide as it has been in decades. It is wider than any other western democratic society, capitalist society, today. Today the struggle to reduce the ever-expanding wage gap between the top 20 percent and the rest of us is an important struggle, and it will be the struggle that will be waged over the next decade.

The only way to restore some semblance of economic justice to this country is if the labor movement grows. When the labor movement grew after the Second World War, the pie for America was shared by all. When productivity grew 90 percent, wages grew 90 percent during the 1950s. But during the 1960s and the 1970s and 80s and 90s, we saw that productivity continue to grow but the wage level for workers continued to decline. It declined significantly. That is why we have this huge wage gap.

One of the reasons it declined is because membership in unions across the country, which was at a high of about 40 percent in the 1950s, has slipped to about 15 percent today, and about 10 percent among the private sector.

The workers' struggle for union representation and free association is deeply interlinked with overall economic disparity and participation in our democracy. In order to win, we need to build an alliance between union members, churches, progressive organizations, and public officials who care about workers.

If we can do that, if we can shed some light on union-busting activities going on in the workplace, we can win this battle. Winning takes a good deal of teamwork. Members of Congress I believe have a responsibility to speak out.

That is why about a week ago, at my alma mater, the University of Iowa, I was saddened to see that the university's hospital system is fighting the right of 2,000 registered nurses and professionals to organize with the Service Employees International Union. Not only are they fighting it, the university has hired a known union-busting firm, Management Service Associates, MSA, to try to defeat the organizing drive.

So I called several officials at the university to ask them to terminate