

Why Unions Matter

With the full-scale attack on collective bargaining launched by Wisconsin's Governor Scott Walker, maybe you're wondering how to convince your colleagues, friends or family that unions deserve support. Or perhaps, frankly, you need to hear those arguments yourself. The case is clear: **a vibrant, powerful labor movement makes for a better America.** Here's the evidence, with links providing more information.

Why Unions Matter *if you're in one:*

- **Your paycheck will be bigger.** [In nearly every occupation, union members earn more than non-union workers.](#) Overall, union members earn nearly 30% more than non-union workers. [If you're a woman, or a person of color, unions make an even bigger difference:](#) Latino union members, for instance, earn over 50% more than their non-union counterparts. [For low-wage workers, a union card can lift you out of poverty:](#) non-union cashiers, for instance, earn wages that keep them below the poverty line, while union cashiers make more than \$2400 above poverty guidelines.
- **Your health and pension benefits will be better.** [Nearly 85% of union members receive health insurance through their employers,](#) compared to 55% of non-union workers. [If you are a union member you are far more likely to have employer-sponsored retirement plans.](#)
- **You'll get more time off.** [Union workers average 28% more vacation time than non-union workers.](#)
- **You'll be safer, better informed, and more empowered.** Unions actively communicate with their members about beneficial laws and ensure that protective regulations are enforced. Unionized workers are [more likely to take advantage of workers' compensation, get their benefits faster, and return to work more quickly.](#) Union members are [more likely to receive unemployment insurance.](#) Union workplaces [are far more likely to receive OSHA inspections.](#) Union workers [are much more likely to know about, and benefit from, the provisions of the Family Medical Leave Act.](#) Union members who are fired or disciplined because they missed work for family-care emergencies can turn to their unions for protection, [and in many cases will overturn their punishment.](#) Union members are [more likely to receive overtime pay they've earned.](#)

Why unions matter *if you're not in one:*

- **You earn more because unions exist.** ["Unions have set norms and established practices that become more generalized throughout the economy, thereby improving pay and working conditions for the entire workforce."](#) This is especially true for those lacking college degrees (75% of the workforce), as high school graduates in unionized industries (even if they're in non-union shops) earn more than those in less-unionized segments of the economy. All workers benefit as well from [labor's campaign to raise federal and state minimum wage provisions.](#)
- **Your working conditions and benefits are better because unions have improved them.** [Unions have been the driving force propelling advances for all workers,](#) like unemployment benefits, workers' compensation, improved treatment of immigrant workers, family leave, and safety regulations. Labor's victories are not for their members only: [thanks to a 2008 union lawsuit,](#) for instance, all workers who are required to wear safety gear on the job now must be provided that equipment by their employers, rather than paying for it themselves.
- **Unions strengthen the economy generally.** ["Analyses of the union effect on firms and the economy have generally found unions to be a positive force, improving the performance of firms and contributing to economic growth."](#)

More on Why Unions Matter

The Democratic Party of Evanston

We Engage • We Elect • We Empower

Why unions matter *if you're a progressive:*

- **America is a more just and a more equal society because of the labor movement.** Unions have provided the organizational savvy, the financial backing, and the foot soldiers to bring about crucial social reforms throughout our country's history. We can thank unions for Social Security, the 40-hour week, child labor prohibitions, farm worker protections and mine safety provisions, minimum wage laws, safer workplaces, and much more. Unions [were integral to the civil rights movement](#) and made possible the Equal Pay Act and the Voting Rights Act in the 1960s.
- **Unions are still essential to progressive change.** Enacting health care reform, codifying family leave time, protecting immigrant workers, safeguarding Social Security, combating discrimination -- labor remains on the front lines of these and many other ongoing battles. Unions constitute an indispensable advocate for the disadvantaged and the powerless; a stronger labor movement translates to more progressive legislation.
- **Unions constitute the principal bulwark against corporate political power.** In the aftermath of the Citizens United decision, unions are all we've got offsetting the floodtide of campaign cash coming from [the Chamber of Commerce and its ilk](#). Even now, [unions are far outspent by corporate PACs](#), and if labor declines even further, we will see fewer progressive candidates (or Democrats of any variety) elected to office.
- **Income inequality -- [perhaps the most important issue of our time](#) -- can be addressed only by strengthening the labor movement.** Unions [lift workers into the middle class](#) and help counterbalance Wall Street's pervasive influence in Washington.

Why unions matter *if you're a consumer of goods and services:*

- **Unions make workers' lives easier, which leads to better products, better care, and better service.** [Union workplaces see less turnover and provide more training](#), meaning a more experienced workforce. By negotiating for and enforcing limitations on workloads, unions allow teachers to maintain smaller classrooms, keep case loads for social workers manageable, make it possible for hotel maids to clean rooms more thoroughly, and ensure enough workers are on the job to clear our streets after snowfalls. Union workers, who can communicate more effectively with management about problems they encounter in the production process, [produce higher quality goods](#).
- **Enforcement of union regulations makes things safer for workers, and for you.** Firefighters and police officers' unions [ensure public safety](#) by fighting for proper staffing levels. Unions work [to keep nurse-patient ratios manageable and to prohibit mandatory overtime for healthcare professionals](#), which makes a measurable difference: if you suffer a heart attack, [you're less likely to die if the nurses who care for you are in a union](#). Airline pilot unions [keep our skies and runways safer](#). Food and farm workers' unions lead the struggle [to protect our food supply](#) and [keep pesticide use down](#).

Why unions matter *if you believe in democracy, dignity, and self-respect:*

- **Through the electoral process, we express our collective voice and shape our political destiny. Unions allow workers a collective voice with which they can affect their economic destiny.** Collective bargaining allows workers some say over their wages, benefits, and working conditions -- in other words, those things central to the quality of life. Unions provide workers with an avenue for redress when they've been sexually harassed; when they've been passed over because of their race, gender, or ethnicity; when they've been disciplined for complaints about unsafe conditions. **Unions empower people to speak out against unfair treatment and to speak up for their rights.** Unions make America work. Spread the word.

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