



# Labor Extension Bulletin

A Publication of the University of Massachusetts Labor Extension Program

UMASS AMHERST ■ UMASS BOSTON ■ UMASS DARTMOUTH ■ UMASS LOWELL

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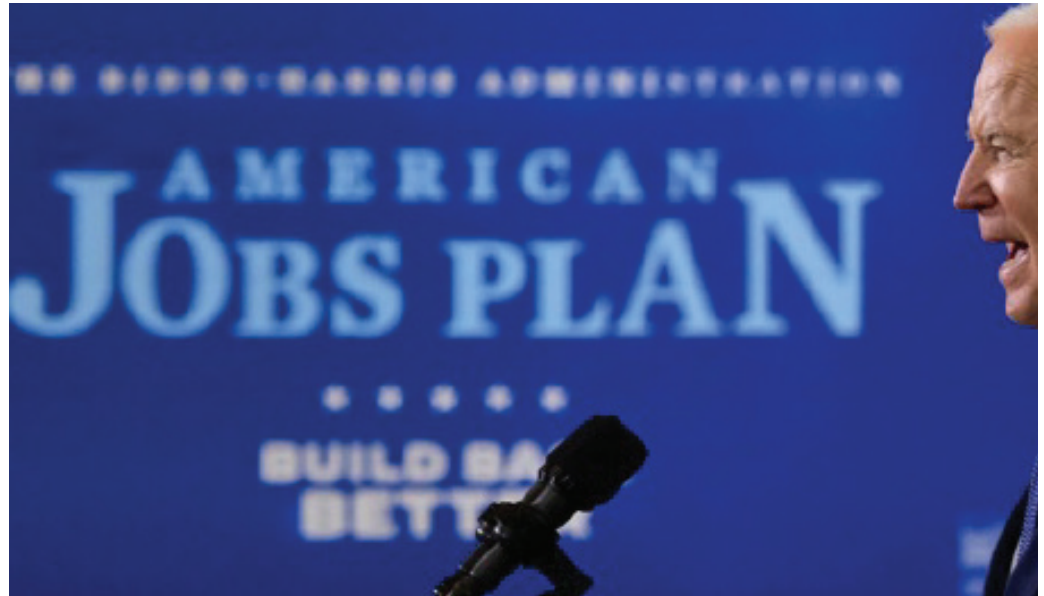
## Biden-Era Labor Policy: What's on the Table?

Unions around the country played a key role in the 2020 election, educating members and running massive get out the vote campaigns to secure the election of Joe Biden. While four more years of Trump would have certainly been a blow to worker rights, a Democrat in the White House is not, in and of itself, enough to reverse the decades long attacks on the working class. Instead, the labor movement must continue to put pressure on Biden to follow through on support he espoused during the campaign for a pro-worker agenda. There are several policy proposals currently being considered that have the potential to transform the Biden presidency into one of the most pro-worker administrations in recent memory.

The first of these proposals raises labor standards, including increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15 and expanding emergency paid family sick leave. Although an executive order in April 2021 raised the minimum wage for federal contractors to \$15 an hour, the federal minimum wage remains \$7.25, with lower rates for tipped workers and certain workers with disabilities. While Biden is likely to face significant Republican push back on these issues, they would go a long way toward providing some immediate relief to working class families.

Efforts to increase labor standards, however, can only go so far. They must be coupled with legislation that can support efforts to build worker power. One of the most significant pieces of legislation that could do that is the PRO Act. During his campaign, Biden repeatedly cited his support for the PRO Act. This legislation would make critical updates to the 1935 National Labor Relations Act. Among other things, it would institute stiffer financial penalties for companies who interfere with employees' rights to form unions, as well as holding company executives personally liable for interfering in unionization efforts. Importantly the legislation would also put in place a ban on permanent strike replacements and make it possible for unions to legally engage in secondary boycotts.

Beyond strengthening the basic labor law framework, the Biden administration must take steps to address the issue of worker misclassification that plagues the gig economy, leaving many workers categorized as independent contractors and thus outside the protec-



tions of labor law. Corporate tech giants like Uber, Lyft and Instacart have spent millions of dollars to ensure that labor protections are not extended to those workers and so turning the tide on this critical issue would require significant presidential will. While California's Proposition 22, which would classify most of these workers as independent contractors with reduced rights, was declared unconstitutional, it's not dead yet - and it's coming to the Massachusetts ballot in 2022.

Biden has already intimated that he plans to follow through on his promises to labor. One of his first acts as president was to fire NLRB general counsel, and notorious union buster, Peter Robb. Significantly, Biden has appointed Marty Walsh, former mayor of Boston, to Secretary of Labor Cabinet. This represents the first time that a labor leader has occupied this important cabinet position since President Eisenhower. Biden has also taken important steps to improve worker safety in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic leading to a set of improved OSHA safety measures, including a vaccination requirement for private sector workers - though critics have said that his standards do not go far enough.

In the meantime, a number of ambitious initiatives - the American Jobs Plan, the American Infrastructure Plan, and the American Families Plan - fall under the umbrella of the "Build Back Better" agenda. One of the most ambitious and potentially most impactful measures would allot \$400 billion to "care infrastructure," allowing for expanded access to care services for low-income people and people with disabilities,

*(Continued on back cover)*

# ST. VINCENT NURSES STRIKE UPDATE

## Nurses Remain Resolved to Continue Strike Until a Settlement is Reached that Restores their Previous Positions and Ensures Safer Patient Care.

In Worcester at St. Vincent Hospital nurses continue their months-long strike, which began on March 8, 2021, for safer staffing to ensure safer patient care. Nurses who are members of the Mass Nurses Association are on strike to address the longstanding patient safety crisis at the hospital and demanding respect for nurses and the valuable role they have in protecting the community as we confront the spread of the Delta variant.

Nurses began the strike after Tenet had refused to negotiate with the nurses over improvements the nurses are seeking to improve unsafe patient care conditions in the hospital. The decision followed earnest and painstaking efforts over the last two years by the nurses to convince Tenet to improve the patient care conditions at the facility, poor conditions that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The nurses at St. Vincent have been widely lauded throughout the nursing community across the state and the nation, and the nurses have been held up as being heroes for the stand they are making in the wake of the worst public health crisis in the nation's history. Many of the dedicated nurses on the strike have worked at St Vincents for 10, 20 or even 40 years. Nurses have continued their efforts to reach an agreement that is focused on improving staffing levels at the hospital--staffing levels and working conditions that have forced more than 700 of them to conduct one of the longest strikes in the state's history, for over 200 days; conditions that before the strike, drove more than 100 nurses to leave the hospital for hospitals with safer working conditions.



In the last year alone, nurses have filed more than 600 official "unsafe staffing" reports (more than 110 such reports have been filed since January 1, 2021) in which nurses informed management in real time that patient care conditions jeopardized the safety of their patients. The nurses also report their patients in Worcester have experienced an increase in patient falls, an increase in patients suffering from preventable bed sores, potentially dangerous delays in patients receiving needed medications and other treatments – all due to lack of appropriate staffing, excessive patient assignments, and cuts to valuable support staff.

While most other issues have been resolved at the bargaining table, the final point of contention is whether striking nurses will be punished or retaliated against once they return to work. A back-to-work agreement would restore all striking nurses to their previous positions, but Tenet has refused to budge.

The nurses' strike has galvanized support from a variety labor unions, faith-based groups have held four vigils, community members have placed over 10,000 "I support the St. Vincent Nurses" lawn signs, and public officials, including the entire Worcester City Council, and also the Worcester state legislative delegation, have expressed their solidarity.



## Academic Offerings

### UMass Amherst

UMass Amherst offers a unique multi-disciplinary program leading toward an MS degree in labor studies. We offer a two-year residential master's program as well as a limited-residency format for trade union officers, staff, and activists. Scholarships are available. To learn more about our program, please visit our website at: <http://www.umass.edu/lrrc/>.

### UMass Boston

UMass Boston's Labor Studies undergraduate program is an interdisciplinary program offering a major, minor, and professional certificate that examines work, the workplace, workers and their organizations. Drawing on the field of economics, history, political science, sociology and other disciplines, courses in Labor Studies address questions about the roles unions play in affecting the well-being of workers, and how those roles have changed over the course of economic development in the US and globally. You can read more about the program and our courses at: [umb.edu/lrc/undergraduate\\_programs](http://umb.edu/lrc/undergraduate_programs). Please contact Wally.Soper@umb.edu with any questions.

### UMass Dartmouth

The UMass Dartmouth Labor Education Center continues to deepen our work with students through creating credit internships and offering service-learning projects connecting students to local community organizing efforts and the labor movement. We work with students to conduct research about working conditions in different sectors and on various issues. We launched an Artist in Residence program and continue to reach out to students across different fields of study. For more information visit [www.umassd.edu/labored/work-with-students](http://www.umassd.edu/labored/work-with-students) or to apply contact Camilo Viveiros, at [cveiros@umassd.edu](mailto:cveiros@umassd.edu)

### UMass Lowell

The program at UMass Lowell continues to attract students to our Labor Studies Minor. Students in our Introduction to Labor Studies course partner with unions and social justice organizations for a variety of service learning projects, from interviewing labor leaders for cable TV station to assisting with local workforce development. In addition to service learning, we provide undergraduate students with access to research opportunities, including conference presentations and the opportunity to submit to the statewide LEP undergraduate journal. For more information about our minor, visit [www.uml.edu/FAHSS/Labor-studies](http://www.uml.edu/FAHSS/Labor-studies).

# Program Notes

## ■ UMASS AMHERST

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the UMass Amherst Labor Center took the opportunity to expand our online offerings. In our academic program we launched our news Masters' track, ULA for Educators. The program is specifically designed to meet the needs of K-12 teacher activists. Their courses meet online in the Spring semester allowing teachers to participate in evening classes. Topics include public sector labor law and education policy. The inaugural cohort of this program included six teacher activists from around the country. The Labor Center also expanded our online events organizing a series of online webinars in Spring 2021 on the future of work and organized labor. This included panels on workers in the media (including social media and increasingly digitized print media) and the future of unemployment insurance with UMass economics professor Arindrajit Dube and Labor Center alum, Michele Evermore, a top appointee in the Biden labor department. We also cosponsored a public forum on the proposed "Protecting the Right to Organize" (PRO) Act with Sara Nelson, president of the national flight attendants' union. Finally, on June 5, 2021, the Labor Center hosted a three-hour online training to coincide with the reboot of Professor Juravich's nationally recognized website on strategic corporate research. We plan to continue offering expanded online events in this upcoming year to the UMass and broader labor community.

## ■ UMASS BOSTON

We're very pleased that the Labor Studies program at UMB came through last year in excellent shape. Our courses continue to fully enroll, engaging over 500 students each semester. We have had a significant change in our teaching staff this year: Natalicia Tracy, one of our long-time faculty members, has accepted a position in the Biden administration, serving as the Senior Advisor to the Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) of the US Department of Labor. We are so very proud of the work that Natalicia has done at UMB and in the region, and we are excited that she now has a national scope to continue her work for all workers. *(Continued on next column)*

## UMass Boston *(Continued from previous column)*

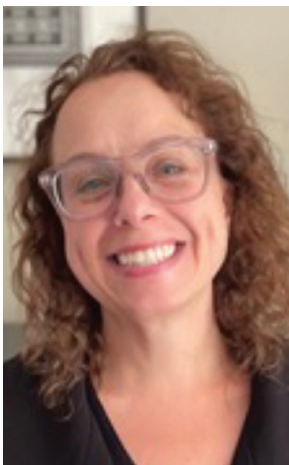
Over the past year we also launched the book that came out of our first annual Boston Labor Conference: *Organizing for Power: Building a 21st Century Labor Movement in Boston*. The book explores labor and popular mobilizing in Boston. We held this year's Boston Labor Conference on-line last March, focusing on labor and climate change. You can view the three forums, and find links to very interesting readings at the LRC webpage: [umb.edu/lrc/the\\_boston\\_labor\\_conference](http://umb.edu/lrc/the_boston_labor_conference). We're looking forward to our next Boston Labor Conference in March 2022!

## ■ UMASS DARTMOUTH

UMass Dartmouth continues to build multidisciplinary connections on campus. We work with a diverse group of interns on intersectional projects that connect issues such as immigrant rights, climate justice, LGBTQ rights and the labor movement. Over the summer, students and recent grads worked with unions, and local social and economic justice activists for a week. Our interns learn about the labor movement by contributing to timely research such as conducting oral history interviews and working on an upcoming podcast about local and national issues. We recently worked with UMass Dartmouth Chapter of the Legal Association of Women (LAW), we coordinate an online event with Susan T. Krumholz, JD, PhD. Professor Emerita, Crime and Justice Studies, Adjunct, UMass School of Law, about women in law. We are honored that Trixie Bernard, a Labor Ed Center intern who created a video testimony to workers lost during the pandemic and a video highlighting labor solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives was recognized during the Frederick Douglas Unity House.

## ■ UMASS LOWELL

After 8 months of furlough (August 2020-March 2021), the UMass Lowell Labor Education Program is fully restored and we have had a busy summer. In addition to her work in planning and facilitating the WILD Summer Institute and the UALE nationwide Women's Summer School, Director Elizabeth Pellerito has continued to serve on the Bread and Roses Heritage Committee. She presented a workshop to local high school students on building campaigns for social change, and collaborated with the UMass Boston Labor Center to provide a three-session virtual train-the-trainer on popular education for the Utility Workers Union of America Women's Committee and a three-session virtual series on Building Equity Lenses into Union Campaigns for SEIU 509 staff. She also continues her work as a founding member of the Healing Not Harming collective, a group that develops trauma-informed practices in organizing. This fall, Dr. Pellerito's co-authored chapter, "Pandemic shock absorbers: Domestic workers' activism at the intersection of immigrants' and workers' rights," is forthcoming in *Migration and Pandemics: Spaces of Solidarity and Spaces of Exception* (IMISCOE Research Series, Springer. <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783030812096>).



## Dr. Pamela Whitefield joins the UMass Lowell LEP team.

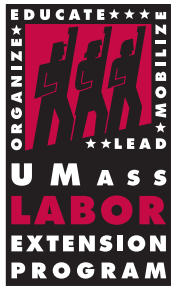
Pamela Whitefield is a long-time university-based labor educator and researcher who has extensive experience teaching and developing curricula focused on worker rights, organizing, social movements, economics, labor history, leadership development.

Prior to joining the Labor Education Program at UMASS Lowell, Pamela served as the Manager of Labor Programs at the Murphy Institute for Labor Studies and Worker Education at the City University of New York (CUNY). At CUNY, Pamela oversaw the labor education programs including the Master's Degree in Labor Studies, the New York Union Semester program and the CUNY/Cornell ILR Certificate in Labor Relations.

Preceding her role at CUNY, Pamela served as the Director of Labor Studies at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations Extension Division in New York City. At Cornell, Pamela led the evening and weekend Labor Studies program providing courses and workshops to local union members, activists, leaders, and staff in the areas of worker rights, organizing, labor history, collective bargaining, and leadership development.

Pamela holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the CUNY Graduate Center; her research work focuses on labor and social movements.

**Read the latest issue of the *Undergraduate Journal on Work, Labor, and Social Movements* (Spring 2021) to get a sampling of the work of undergraduate students from all four campuses.**



UMass Amherst

Labor Extension Program

Labor Center, Thompson Hall

200 Hicks Way

Amherst, MA 01003-9277

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## In the Past 6 months...

The UMass Labor Extension Program has provided trainings on these topics...

- **Stewards as Organizer Training** (UMD)
- **Community Impact Workshop** (Lowell High School)
- **Training of Trainers: Welcome to the Union** (Utility Workers Union of America Women's Committee)
- **Healing Not Harming: Trauma-Informed Organizing**
- **Introduction to the Labor Movement and Organizing for Students**
- **Building an Equity Lens in Union Campaigns** (SEIU 509 staff)
- **Leadership Development, Women's Institute for Leadership Development** (WILD)
- **Using Popular Education in Your Unions and Organizations** (UALE Women's Summer School)
- **Fighting Back Against Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence, Women's Institute for Leadership Development** (WILD)

## To Contact the UMass Labor Extension Program:

### ■ UMass Amherst Labor Extension Program

Labor Center, Thompson Hall, 200 Hicks Way

Amherst, MA 01003-9277

[www.umass.edu/lrrc](http://www.umass.edu/lrrc)

**Clare Hammonds: 413-545-6166 Fax: 413-545-0110**

**email: [chammonds@soc.umass.edu](mailto:chammonds@soc.umass.edu)**

### ■ UMass Boston Labor Extension Program

Labor Resource Center, 100 Morrissey Blvd.

Boston, MA 02125-3393

[www.umb.edu/lrc](http://www.umb.edu/lrc)

**Annetta Argyres: 617-287-7229**

**email: [anneta.argyres@umb.edu](mailto:anneta.argyres@umb.edu)**

### ■ UMass Dartmouth Labor Extension Program

Arnold M. Dubin Labor Education Center, 257 Union Street

New Bedford, MA 02740

[www.umassd.edu/labored](http://www.umassd.edu/labored)

**Camilo Viveiros: 508-910-7108 Fax: 508-910-7120**

**email: [cviveiros@umassd.edu](mailto:cviveiros@umassd.edu)**

### ■ UMass Lowell Labor Extension Program

Department of Sociology, Dugan Hall 205Q, 883 Broadway

Lowell, MA 01854

[www.uml.edu/LaborEducation](http://www.uml.edu/LaborEducation)

**Elizabeth Pellerito: 978-934-3137 Fax: 978-934-4033**

**email: [Elizabeth\\_Pellerito@uml.edu](mailto:Elizabeth_Pellerito@uml.edu)**

Contact the UMass Labor Extension Program at <http://umasslep.org>

- **Workshops for youth on worker's rights, unions and collective bargaining** (Boston Public Library)
- **Addressing racism in the public sector** (SEIU 509)
- **Basic Unionism** (MTA)
- **Building Member Engagement** (UE)
- **Strategic Planning** (CT Roundtable on Climate & Jobs)
- **Labor History and Collective Action** (MassCOSH Youth)
- **Introduction to the Labor Movement and Organizing for Students**

## **Biden** (Continued from front page)

while improving pay and working conditions for domestic workers. Where things go from here will largely depend on the ability of the labor movement to maintain critical pressure on a President and Congress who will continue to pull in opposite directions by powerful corporate interests.

Labor education has a critical role to play in supporting these legislative efforts. Many workers are not aware of their existing rights, let alone what is at stake in a labyrinthine \$3.5 trillion budget bill stalled in Congressional negotiations. Just as contract language is only effective if it is enforced through organizing, education, and filing grievances, new laws and regulations are useless if workers are not empowered to understand and fight for their rights.