

Committee Statements



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Walberg Statement: Hearing on "Protecting America's Workers: An Enforcement Update from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration"

WASHINGTON, D.C. | October 7, 2015 I'd like to extend a special welcome to you, Dr. Michaels, and thank you for being with us to discuss an issue that is incredibly important to every one of us: ensuring the health and safety of American workers.

We all agree that men and women working hard to make a living deserve workplaces that are safe and working conditions that protect their health and wellbeing. In the 21st century workplace, employees should be able to put in a day's work without having to fear being injured on the job or having to worry whether they'll be able to return home to their families at the end of a shift. That's why we continue to demand every American have strong and effective health and safety protections.

We're here today to take a closer look at these rules and the enforcement process to make sure they're working well for both employees *and* employers. Providing for the health and safety of American workers is an important responsibility, but it's important to be responsible in carrying it out. Otherwise, we will end up with inadequate protections and unnecessary regulatory burdens that stifle productivity and job creation while doing little to keep workers safe.

That's why this committee has long urged Dr. Michaels, his colleagues at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and others to engage in responsible safety enforcement. By identifying gaps in safety and working with employers and other key stakeholders to develop positive solutions, we can ensure that federal policies are effective and workers are safe. And these are both goals that I believe stretch across party lines.

President Obama promised an "unprecedented level of openness in government" and vowed to establish a system of "transparency, public participation, and collaboration." Unfortunately, that has not always been the case, and changing enforcement policies is one area in which we've seen a *lack* of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. In fact, on several occasions, the administration has used what it calls "enforcement guidance" to alter significant rules *without* public input. This one-sided approach is not the kind of responsible rulemaking and enforcement American workers deserve.

When actions of the administration or other policymakers are in conflict with the best interests of the American people, it's our responsibility to speak out. So that's what we did with OSHA. We spoke out when they altered long-standing policies outside the public rulemaking process. We spoke out when they failed to conduct proper oversight of their own enforcement activities. We spoke out when they spent significant time and resources pursuing unsound and unnecessary regulatory schemes.

OSHA, on several occasions, has listened to some of our concerns. Not all of our concerns, but enough to say that we've made progress in a number of areas.

As a result of our oversight, OSHA is pursuing a responsible approach to protecting the men and women employed on family farms, more small businesses are able to participate in an important safety and health program, and employees in the telecommunications industry have more clarity and certainty. Workers are safer because we spoke up, the agency listened, and steps were taken to promote smart, responsible regulatory policies. However, while we have made gains, there is still work to be done. Which brings us back to the reason we're here today.

Standing up for workers and ensuring safe workplaces remain leading priorities for this committee. We've seen what we can accomplish when we work together to improve the health and safety of American workers. This hearing is an important part of those efforts.

I look forward to hearing from Dr. Michaels on his agency's regulatory and enforcement actions, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss ways in which we can better protect hardworking men and women and provide greater clarity to job creators.

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