

CONOR LAMB

17TH DISTRICT, PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE
& TECHNOLOGY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
& INFRASTRUCTURE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT



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April 2, 2021

The Honorable Janet Yellen, Secretary
U.S. Department of Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave NW Room 3134
Washington, DC 20220

The Honorable Martin Walsh, Secretary
U.S. Department of the Labor
200 Constitution Ave NW
Washington DC 20210

Dear Secretary Yellen and Secretary Walsh,

Congratulations on your recent appointments and confirmations. I look forward to working with you and the entire Biden Administration in the months and years ahead.

You both bring to the cabinet a long history of prioritizing jobs and protecting working people. In your new positions, you will have the opportunity to honor and enforce the legal rights of workers to organize and bargain for fair contracts. For many workers in today's America, a union contract is the only realistic path to better wages, better working conditions and critically, better healthcare.

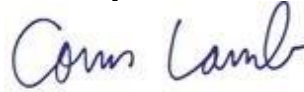
Right now in my district, members of the United Steelworkers are striking rather than agree to a contract which they feel would eliminate some of their jobs. Unfortunately, the loss of work means that the steelworkers are now in the impossible position of having to choose between fully exercising their legal right to strike and guaranteeing health coverage for their family members. I met one steelworker whose wife was already in the middle of chemotherapy treatment when the strike began. I believe that this steelworker is as critical to our national defense and our economy as the metal he produces, and I believe that our laws simply cannot force him to choose between his wife and his union.

Thankfully, the American Rescue Plan made it possible for these workers and their families to be protected by creating a full subsidy for Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) continuation of health coverage through September 30, 2021. As you know, an individual who was covered by a group health plan on the day before the occurrence of a qualifying event such as a termination of employment or a reduction in hours that causes loss of coverage under the plan are able to elect COBRA continuation coverage upon that qualifying event, and the Rescue Plan would pay for that coverage.

Before the steelworkers in my district can take advantage of the Rescue Plan, however, the Department of Treasury and Department of Labor must promptly issue guidance and regulations under the American Rescue Plan affirming that striking employees are eligible for the full COBRA subsidy. Many union contracts contain provisions that limit the timeline for how long member benefits last in a strike, and as the experience in my district shows, workers have responsibilities that can outlast those timelines. Therefore, we must take steps to ensure that the American Rescue Plan COBRA provisions protect these workers like millions of other Americans.

As corporations become more global and inequality worsens in our society, workers may have to resort to strikes simply to achieve basic dignity and respect in the workplace. Negotiating these contracts is not easy for either side, but I do not believe workers should be placed at a disadvantage because they rely on the employer to cover the health of their families. These workers are essential, and our goal in passing the Rescue Plan was to help them. I urge you to interpret the Rescue Plan legislation in line with our intent and ensure that DOL and IRS issue clear rules and guidance that protects the health care benefits of workers in a contract dispute or strike. I stand ready to work with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Conor Lamb". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Conor Lamb
Member of Congress