

Why Abortion Rights are Worker Rights Webinar Transcript

Victoria Guitierrez

Good evening and welcome everyone on this International Women's Day. Thanks for joining us and also thank you to our extraordinary panelists who are joining us tonight. Thank you, South Central Federation of Labor President Kevin Gundlach and especially Sharon Manor, executive assistant, for all you do to make things happen. Thank you to Sarah Trongone and Caitlin Benedetto, here at my side, doing the technical assistance during this panel, following an interspersed through this panel, there will be Q&A. Attendees please write your questions in the Q&A at the bottom of your screen. We are not using chats. If your question is to a specific panelist, please indicate that. Caitlin and Sarah will be monitoring these questions and we apologize in advance if we won't be able to get to all of your questions. This panel is being recorded and we hope to have it available and Sarah Nelson will be joining us momentarily unless delayed. And now Kevin Gundlach, President of the South Central Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO.

Kevin Gundlach

Thank you, Victoria. I'd also like to thank Sharon Manor because without the workers of SFCL, the work does not get done. Thank you, Sharon. So on behalf of the South Central Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, I'd like to welcome to you to this very important event. Our rights as workers and union members intersect with women's rights, with abortion rights, the right to privacy and reproductive justice. On a personal note, the local I came out of consists of 90% women and 70 to 80% people of color and recent arrivals from every continent outside of Antarctica. It was these workers who taught me what a union was and could become. It was here that our shared values could be expressed and fought for within the workplace, and within our communities and it was at that workplace where when I said as a working poor person that all I knew was fighting the system alone. It was the workers there who told me, now we fight together, and this is one of those fights. All of Labor must fight together. So with that said, I'd like to introduce again Victoria Gutierrez, who is a dedicated nurse at a local hospital here in Madison, has been active in the labor movement for decades, and is a delegate to SFCL and is currently on our Executive Board here at SFCL, the South Central Federation Labor. She's been fighting at a grassroots level for immigrant rights worker justice and abortion rights. Victoria.

Victoria Guitierrez

Pardon me, I'm on mute. Thank you, Kevin. We have an extraordinary panel tonight. Linda Gordon, professor of history at NYU; Amari Ozier, Madison, Abortion and Reproductive Rights Coalition for Healthcare member; Laura Boitel. AFSCME Local 720, Council 32 Member; and Sarah Nelson, President of the Association of Flight Attendants, CWA, AFL-CIO, to discuss this important intersection of the fight for bodily autonomy, abortion rights and worker rights. Wisconsin has been Ground Zero with the tax on workers since 2011. with Act 10, the destruction of the public sector unions, and right to work laws hitting private sector workers hard. Now we are Ground Zero fighting for bodily autonomy.

Since the Dobbs decision and the overturning of Roe V. Wade with the US Supreme Court, turned access to safe and legal abortions over to individual states. Wisconsin is a trigger loss state, taking us back to

1849 with an abortion ban, which makes providing an abortion a class H felony with up to six years in prison and or \$10,000 fine. Prior to June 2022, there were four abortion clinics operating in Wisconsin. Now there are zero. We know that abortion is healthcare and it is urgent we do all we can to protect healthcare access for all workers. The same US Supreme Court that heard the Dobbs decision has now heard a case on January 10th from Glacier Northwest, a company who sued the Teamsters Union and is seeking compensation for concrete that was wasted amid a drivers strike in 2017. The pending ruling could make it easier for employers to sue striking workers, which could eviscerate workers right to strike.

The same right-wing politicians that promote a pro-life anti-abortion agenda simultaneously have enacted anti-worker agendas. The attacks on workers and the lack of access to healthcare are felt most intensely by our low wage workers, who are disproportionately our black and Latin-x workers. Tonight, I'm very honored to have this lineup of panelists to talk about the urgency in the moment right now, what we can do, wherever you find yourself.

And our panel will start with Linda Gordon. Linda Gordon is professor of history at New York University. For the first part of her career, most of Professor Gordon's writings examined the historical roots of contemporary social policy debates in the US, particularly as they concern gender and family issues. Her first book, *Women's Body, Women's Right, The History of Birth Control in America*, published in 1976 and then reissued in 1990, remains the definitive history of birth control politics in the US. The book was completely revised and republished in 2002 as *The Moral Property of Women*. Professor Gordon's most recent book is *The 2nd Coming Of The KKK - The Ku Klux Klan in the American Political Tradition*, which investigates some of the historical roots of today's white nationalism. Forthcoming soon will be her study of 20th century US social movements, including socialist feminist organizations, bread and roses, and the Combahee River Collective. Thank you so much, Linda Gordon, for being here.

Linda Gordon

Well, thank you for having me and I want to thank you in advance for putting up with a little history. I kind of can't do anything unless I start with the historical background and I'll try to keep that brief because what's going on now is a crisis and it's very important.

OK, the first thing I want to say is that to the best of my knowledge, there's never been a human society in which people didn't try to control their fertility and birth. The motivations were partly economic - children are expensive. But they also partly have to do with Women's Health. You have to remember that maternal mortality in childbirth was very, very high in these early days. It's also true that for most of history. There was no clear distinction between contraception and abortion. Abortion was often the primary means, because oddly enough, it's actually simpler to do that than some of the kind of homemade contraceptives that people in ancient societies were trying to do, even as recently as the beginning of the 20th century in the United States, theoretically a very highly developed society.

Abortion was not only far and away the safest birth control method, but even more important, abortion was much safer than childbirth. The mortality of childbirth was much higher than that, and this held true even when abortions were being done by traditional healers, midwives, people who didn't have medical licenses. In the modern world, very few religions outlawed abortion totally. There's actually an informal compromise that was adhered to in many places, and that is that abortion was fine before what people used to call quickening. Quickening was the term for the moment when a woman could feel a fetus kicking, and I'm sure some of you remember that moment often in the middle of the second trimester.

Furthermore, one of the things about the quickening rule or informal rule is that there's only one person who knows whether the pregnancy is, as they say, quick, and that is the woman who is pregnant. There are no other experts who can step in about that.

OK now, stepping up to the 1900s, there were two different campaigns that affected birth control practices. One of them that I think probably very few people know about, was part of the women's rights movement, the feminist movement of that century and a half ago, who are insisting that women, even in marriage, had the right to say no to sex. Now this may seem basic to you, but I want you to understand that at this point, the law, the state laws of marriage in almost all states had the a premise that women's, shall they say, submission to male sexual demands was part of the definition of marriage. And a woman who refused, that could be divorce, and often this was used as a justification for domestic violence.

This is important because I think today, we have to be talking not just about what's often called reproductive rights, but about an expanded notion which I think many people are familiar with reproductive justice. And this involves all kinds of aspects of reproduction. For one thing, it is a right to be able to have children and to have children who are going to be adequately cared for and taken care of? It also has very much to do with women's sexual autonomy.

The other thing that was happening in this period of time is the so-called Comstock Law of 1873. Very ironic that it was exactly 100 years before Roe V Wade. The Comstock law was a law about covering the post office and has to do with the fact that these issues were mostly up to the states, but the federal government, after the Comstock law, banned not only spreading contraceptive devices, not only abortions, but even articles that might defend the idea that we should have contraception and abortion. Its goal, however, was really different in today's anti-abortion politics. And that is you do not hear these people who were supporting Comstock and all those things. You do not hear them talking about the rights, the right to life, or about the rights of a fetus. They were actually much more direct about something that I think is very basic to this and is that the purpose of this law was to stop women from seeking out higher education or jobs, and to insist that their duty was to be domestic and to give birth and then take care of children. Now of course there's a big problem with that premise. And that is that it only really could apply to elite or even middle-class women who had the money to be able to not work. And it did not really affect that argument, the majority of American women. And here's a fact to keep in mind, there is never been a single moment in American history when the majority of families could live on one man's income. Women and extended families had to supplement incomes all the time. It is not as if working women only began in the recent past. Furthermore, in this period there essentially was no distinction between abortion and contraception in terms of the law, they were both illegal.

This changed when the modern birth control movement began, and I'm sure many of you heard the name Margaret Sanger. She was very important, but on the other hand, I also want to say that this movement was a national movement of a social movement in every state. And they were building a new strategy, and Sanger was very important in that strategy. And here was the strategy that if you could, so to speak, divorce, contraception from abortion, that maybe you could get the states to legalize contraception. While not touching the ban on abortion, this birth control movement took a very long time and began in something like 1914.

Contraception had to be done by state law, and it took until 1965. I'm not good at the math, but a very long time before the last state actually legalized contraception, and I'm talking about contraception among married couples, not with all the anxiety about how contraception was gonna make women

sexually loose and no one would be able to control them. Last legalization of contraception was 1965, and in 1973, eight years later, we got the Supreme Court decision in Roe V Wade. Now a lot of people try to imagine this as something that the Supreme Court decided out of the blue or on the basis of somebody's arguments. The fact is that before Roe, 18 states had already repealed the ban on abortion, and in 1973, when this happened, when Roe happened, I swear, just about everybody concerned with the issue felt OK - we are on a roll. Nothing is going to be able to stop this now. And that was even true of the groups of people who became part of the very early beginnings of an anti-abortion movement. This movement was a part of what people call the Capital N, Capital R, New right - a very new approach to conservatism and in order to move voters to the right, they had to win over working class, middle class, non-elite people who would not be attracted to traditional conservative politics, which were all about tax cuts for the rich. And I don't need to say more about that to this to this audience.

The new right developed a really new strategy, one that has had never been used in party politics before. And that was to focus on what they called the social issues, which were also the sexual issues, and these included gay rights. Because we are beginning to have a period in which more lesbians and gay men are beginning to have the courage to step out into public, it also included attacks on sex education in the schools. But very prominently, it included abortion.

And just to give you a sense of the importance of this political entry and this when I'm talking about the new right, I'm talking about secular people, not religious people. When Roe V Wade first happened, the leaders of. Evangelical Protestantism, the people we think of as the most conservative. Protestants today were fine with it. If anybody's interested, send me an e-mail I could give you the quotes. They had no problem with this. This intensely religious and moral antipathy to abortion was deliberately and carefully constructed. By a very powerful and very well-funded new right. Probably the most important and most effective of their propagandas was the notion of a quote right to life. This is not a concept that had ever had existed before, and that's why I wanted to point out that the original ban was not concerned with quote, the rights of a fetus or keeping a fetus. Well, they were concerned with women and the morality of keeping women in their place.

But, you know, by the time we're talking about 1973, that kind of, you know, was just not gonna fly. There's no traction behind that saying that women have to be sort of enslaved, so to speak, to their their role as mothers. The right to life slogan was really, I think, a burst of genius because it enabled building a real kind of hysteria in which, for the first time, abortion was being understood by lots of people as murder. Something that did not exist beforehand.

Secondly, I want to point out that today, many abortion opponents claim, and this is relatively new. In maybe last 15 years, that stop that abortions are dangerous for Women's Health and that they are protecting Women's Health by banning abortions. The recent most, one of the more recent Supreme Court cases, which was I think called Dobbs, took place in in Texas. Although I may be getting the names wrong, this was the argument that won - that these the procedures were dangerous to Women's Health.

The notion about that was also that part of the effort to keep women out of the labor force, although to be more specific, let me say out of the labor force that had better paying jobs because women always had access to the kind of jobs that didn't pay well. The idea was that these kind of jobs were not healthy for women and you get a lot of these weird arguments like that in some jobs, women are required to lift things that are just, they're not strong enough to do. Or one of the ones I found particularly funny is that women should not be allowed to work as waitresses or bartenders in places that serve liquor because they

would be vulnerable to assault and attack. Needless to say, it's didn't stop women from taking those jobs who needed that money?

I want to point out, you know, a way, something about today and that is that, you know certain way we are I think going to become full circle in which the distinction between contraception and abortion is getting fuzzier and fuzzier. This started with the use of hormones, the birth control pill, 1960, but it went on from there and what we have today and I'm sure you're all familiar with this, are medication abortions as opposed to so-called quote surgical, which are not really surgical. But in the media, medical jargon, their DNC's dilation **and cure cure tires**, once you get these continuing developments in the field of hormonal medicine, the question is at what point does contraception become an abortion?

The real classic is the quote, unquote, morning after pill, which interrupts a pregnancy, presumably before it, has really become embedded in the uterus. And you know the issue about medication abortions is, of course, very, very frightening to the anti-abortion group because it's gonna be much, much harder for them to police this, believe me, they will try. They were talking about incredible violations of women's privacy, invading your emails invading, all sorts of things, but I don't think abortion is going to be stopped. And that's one of the reasons, in fact you know I would argue philosophically about this notion of right to life that you know, in a more scientific and also moral sense, life is a continuum. It doesn't have a particular moment when it begins. Some people would like to say, well, when an egg is fertilized, but then for a very long time, people would say, well, what happens if you naturally have a very early miscarriage and many women don't understand that they are pregnant, for quite a number of months, and many of them actually have spontaneous miscarriages without understanding that that is what they had because as women, I'm sure you all know that an early miscarriage is like a heavy menstrual period.

The most controversial hormone today, or something called mifepristone. No need for you to know these. And I want to quote you from one of the fake narratives coming from one of these conservative Christian so-called medical associations. And that is that medical abortion leaves emergencies, and I'm quoting emergency rooms teeming with women and girls bleeding from abortion drugs in such copious amounts that it is, get this, exacerbating the national blood shortage now. This is so absurd on the face, makes no sense at all. But on the other hand, when you get people into these kind of almost hysteria of concern about this, that kind of notion about checking that is this true, what are these facts that does not come into it.

The point I want to make about all of this that I think is most important is that the anti-abortion movement created hostility to abortion. It was much less that they took advantage of it, but that they began really building it. And let me point out also, especially when we talk about the new right, very, very large large amounts of money went into funding these anti-abortion movements and anti-abortion publications. Furthermore, today, as some of you may be aware of, these abortion opponents are increasingly attempting to make it difficult to access contraception. This is already a problem because of the costs and so on, and therefore there's huge fights going on about what health insurance will and will not pay - the new rights strategy. Furthermore, now I'm sort of winding up. To turn this over to you because you know more than I do about the current situation, especially in Wisconsin, although I am a Wisconsin resident, even though I'm in New York. This this whole business of using abortion, and some of these other sex and gender things like gay rights and sex education and so on, was a crucial milestone in building the right wing political alignment that we have seen growing in this country over the last few decades. It is something that connected the anti-abortion movement with anti-unions, anti-union

movement which struggles against feminism in in general, which struggles against anti-racist activity campaigns against voting rights. These were part of what is kind of a new hole of a certain kind of far right attitude. It's become particularly clear today. One thing I would point out again, that I'm sure some of you know better than me, but the state today, the states with the most restrictions on abortion rights, are also the states with the least Labor union presence, and they are also the states with the highest poverty.

This this is important because reproduction control is not only a matter of bodily rights, it is a social necessity. If we're gonna ever move toward greater equality, and of course, at the moment we seem to be moving in the other direction toward greater inequality. Furthermore, I just found something the other day that I was almost had to laugh. It was so complicated and opportunist, and that is that anti-labor union strategists are using abortion access for union busting. And they are making the threat that the current benefits that people may have from their unions will not be available to them if their unions are destroyed. I wouldn't be at all surprised if Starbucks is using this because they have that young kind of bunch of workers who are going to be very, very concerned with this.

There's also a lot of good news and. I won't go into that because you know more about it than me. There's a lot of bad news, too. There's a lot of successful attempts to restrict this. There's a very successful attempt just to make women fearful of what it would mean to insist on having an abortion. But I do want to say that it's, in a certain way, I think there's a silver lining to this new which we say coalition of various kinds of progressive movements by attacking all of them, attacking labor unions, attacking environmentalists, attacking you. You understand what I'm saying? They are also creating the opposite. And I wanna just close by giving you one example from the 1970s, something that I experienced personally. In the nineteen-seventies I lived in Boston, a very, very segregated city and the civil rights movement had created a move to have busing to integrate schools because the neighborhoods were so segregated that you couldn't desegregate without moving children to a different neighborhood. And they developed a very, very strong anti-busing movement, which incidentally had a lot of commonality with the anti-abortion movement because one of its major arguments was we are mothers and we need to protect our children from what is going to happen if they are put into buses with these children who are not their equals. But that way, but at the same time in Boston, an African American gynecologist by the name of Kenneth Edelin, this is in 1973, but before Roe V Wade, had done a perfectly legal form of late abortion on a teenager, who was really in, her health was in danger. What happened there was that the anti-busing people joined with anti-abortion people to create a joint movement and it was, it was actually violent and not, you know, some of the anti abortionists have really been violent. They were into killing abortionists and attacking clinics. But in the anti-busing movement, they were actually literally throwing stones into the buses that were carrying the children to other schools.

Anyway, what I what I wanna point out is that there's a conservative alliance of different causes and I it is giving birth, I hope, to a progressive alliance of various causes, and I think that it must be just absolutely central to what people are concerned with labor unions. We care about and think about anyway, so thanks hope that was clear. And happy to, you know, you can also e-mail me questions if you want. If you can't get them in here.

Victoria Guitierrez

We'll try to get your e-mail to people who are interested, and hopefully tonight, my intent is to provide. I mean, we're living in Wisconsin. It's been bleak for at least since 2011. If, you know, I'm sure it was bleak prior to that but definitely a line of demarcation for workers has been 2011. And now, with the

overturning of Roe, we're enduring this abortion ban from 1849. My goal tonight, is that we, with panelists, we'll have some positive things on what we can do. And thank you very much, Professor Gordon. Linda Gordon.

Next, we have Amadi Ozier. Amadi is a member of the Madison Abortion and Reproductive Rights Coalition for Healthcare here in Madison. Amadi is a cultural historian specializing in black diasporic literature with a particular interest in humor and psychoanalysis. Performing performance studies, capitalism, and cultural history. Their work has Amadi Ozier been published or is forthcoming in social text, modernism, modernity and Oxford bibliographies and African American studies. Their research has been generously supported by the Ford Foundation, the Andrew W Mellon Foundation, the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis, the Beinecke Library at Yale University, Sigma Tau delta, the International English Honors Fraternity, and the NYC Narrative Power Network for HealthEquity and Racial Justice Project Grant. I'm very honored to turn this over to Amadi Ozier.

Amadi Ozier

Thank you so much, Victoria, both for introducing me and for all of your organizing work. Hi everybody. It's nice to meet everyone on the panel virtually. And thanks to everyone who is involved in coordinating this event. I was slated to speak for a very small amount of time by my request, but I wanted to talk a little bit about the kind of abortion work, abortion activist work that I've been doing here in Wisconsin and why. And why? The answer is because I'm a good worker.

You know, one thing that I've been thinking about while I was preparing for this conversation is about the fact that I had an abortion. Now, like a couple of years ago at this point and thinking about how like beyond being a community builder with **March**, which is an abortion rights organization here in town, also professor at the university, that and I just started this job this year. So I think about how, like if I'd had that baby I like would not, I would not have this job in general. And I remember some of the. Internal conversation and conversation with the person who sired the fetus at the time about, like economics, like long term economics, my apartment was extremely expensive. I lived in Brooklyn. I could barely afford food for myself, could not imagine affording food for another child, etc. So those, the constellation of related issues including like health care, housing, food, education, long term, meant that it did not make logical sense for me to have a baby.

I wanted to start my remarks for the evening there in part because of the provocation that Victoria shared as moderator, which is about one of our goals. Today is talking about what can we do to defend abortion rights, like actively as organizers and as workers. And the number one or first thing that you do is talk openly about abortion, right? So, like the phrase can shout your abortion. Where one thing that Linda was getting at in her remarks is all of the one of the strategies. That anti-health activists use to thwart people's rights or to control people's bodies is by getting us to think of medicine as evil or revolting, right? So, to make abortion into an ugly word is part of how you stigmatize abortion. So the first thing that we can do to actively defend our abortion rights is to talk comfortably about abortion, both our own abortions and other people's abortions. And all of the strategies and reasons and methods and comforts and discomforts. So one of the things that my organization does, so this is Madison Abortion Rights Coalition for Health Care here in Wisconsin, is we organized speak outs, which is a tried and true method for drawing public attention to reproductive rights and reproductive health and abortion rights. And the way that strategy works is by building a collective comfort with talking about things that we have been told to be ashamed of instead.

For me it seems like, bans on abortion, say the quiet part loud, especially because of my own experience where I knew that having a child was a way to like would have, like artificially limited my career and was honestly. Might then partner or what have you, former partner X or whatever was the reason why they wanted me to have the child was to limit my career, right? So these bans on abortion, as like Professor Linda or Linda, we've been having difficulties about what to call Linda. But what windows been getting at? Is that? Sir, I'm trying to move past the emotion. Is that the bans on abortion are communicating that women's role and responsibility, sole role and responsibility is? And giving birth to children. And that everything else, every other aspect or sector of the woman's life is subordinated to that. So being able to actively defend abortion rights is one way for us to move past that dynamic.

Let me see. I have some speaking notes and I don't want to talk too long. OK, so I talked about one main way that we work together to defend abortion rights, which is speaking actively about abortion and comfortably about abortion. And for me another way that we like work together to protect abortion rights is by being comfortable. Admitting that, like, abortion care exists in a continuum of all the different kinds of things that we as workers have to fight for, including like childcare, help all different kinds of healthcare, collective child rearing, and being an ally to mothers and expectant mothers. You know so we work together to create the conditions for people to abort a fetus. So, hopefully and also, you know, create the conditions for people to be able to like, raise a child safely on a variety of different kinds of environments and communities. The last thing that I wanted to share or last strategy would be again thinking towards comfort. And also, with comfort, with the edges of the law, right? So, like as both Victoria or as Victoria was talking about in her remarks as well, abortion is illegal in Wisconsin. So, part of what it means to defend our health is being comfortable with that gray area of being criminal, of aiding and abetting other people in asserting their rights to health care, uh, in a variety of circumstances. OK, I didn't talk too long, right, Victoria?

Victoria Guitierrez

You're fine. You're absolutely fine. And thank you. Thank you for sharing and certainly the, you know, putting forward the concrete strategies that we need.

So with that, going in with concrete strategies is Laura Beutel. Laura has been with, been in the Dane County municipal workforce in various positions for 35 years. In that time, she's also been a union member, rank and file Union member of Dane County AFSCME Local 720, Council 32. Laura has held various Union leadership positions, but most currently Laura is the secretary of AFSCME Council 32. In Madison, WI, Laura has lived, worked through and fought for the Employee Benefit Handbook when act ten was pushed through. Laura is a longtime member and current chair of Dane County employee. Management advisory committee. Which makes recommendations to the Dane County. Board of Supervisors. And when Roe V Wade, The Dobbs decision overturns safe and legal abortions and we are in 1849 under an 1849 abortion ban, Laura fought and won to get travel, lodging and healthcare benefit language for municipal workers. An amazing victory and Laura is here to tell about it.

Laura Beutel

Thank you, Victoria, and I'm gonna. I'm glad that the people who went before me went before me because I'm going to tie into some of the things that they said, and I also want to say I'm the voice for a whole

bunch of people in Dane County and throughout Wisconsin who helped me get to where we are. For those of you not in Wisconsin, Municipal employees, so County, School Board or school, municipal city workers - we don't have the right to collective bargain anymore. And some of us in the Madison area, we're lucky enough. Our governing boards, our city councils, our school boards, and our county boards kind of worked around it and we now have employee benefit handbooks and there are still many things we can't do. But at least we have a little bit of a voice.

My journey through this started with, right, as soon as Roe V Wade was overturned, all these companies, national companies, Starbucks, Target, Walt Disney, Amazon, Dick's Sporting Goods, there are tons of them. They all jumped on the, I'm going to call it the bandwagon, and said we're gonna, we're gonna pay for our employees to go where they need to go and we're going to make sure that they still have access to abortion care. Which is really a nice thing to do and I think what somebody was going to ask the question. I wanted to make it solid so that as quickly as they gave it to employees, they can also take it away if it's not formal. One of our Council staff who works for the Council and provides support to all the employee groups, which is another name for a union in our area. She came up with some language and our council approved travel expenses for anybody who was employed by our Council or who qualified for, for once, or who was going to be a support person for someone who needed to travel outside of Wisconsin? And I'm, I'm really proud to be on the board. Help to prove that so that the workers who help us, help ourselves got the benefit that we were going to ask for and then?

Being on the insurance committee and I also work in the District Attorney's Office. So I see victims of rape and incest, and I see what it does to them and. It made me sad and it made me mad. This was one more thing that was going to be up against them. And Governor Evers said he's going to do what he can to try and. Repeal it. But we have. Republican majority in the capital. But our Dane County sheriff said he was not going to arrest anybody and our District Attorney in Dane County said he was not going to prosecute anybody who helped women get access? And so I thought, if not now, it's never gonna happen. And if not in Dane County -it's not going to happen anywhere else in Wisconsin and so I want to share something with you.

I took our language that our Council used and I approached one of our Labor friendly Board of Supervisors County supervisors. And gave him the language and he was more than willing to take a look at it, see what he could do. I was in a meeting and this this e-mail popped up and he said it's going to the committee tonight and I started crying in a in a work meeting. Because I felt like it wasn't just, it wasn't just me, other people felt the same way. And so what they did in Dane County is we made it a budget amendment to provide so that if people in that were employed by Dane County, or if they were going to be a support person with for a dependent or a spouse, we would cover the travel expense and part of how this is, we implemented our Flex Plan Company administers it so it ensures complete privacy. Your coworkers don't know, your supervisor doesn't know. I don't think anybody in the county will know people's names. That was just as important to me as providing the service is they're going through a horrible, very emotional thing and it's something that's only theirs to share, if they want to. I'm so I'm really glad that the budget got passed and our county supervisors were even, they were willing to give more, even. But we couldn't find a way to do it like they were wondering if it's an employee's significant other and unfortunately, that's not something that's covered by our insurance, so it's not somebody who would be covered by this.

I want to see where I am. The other thing about making it a county budget amendment is in following years, anything that's approved in the budget is a base of where we start again, so it's going to be there next year and it's going to be there the year after. And it's going to be there in years to come, unless somebody specifically introduces something to take it away and remove it. And to me, that provides a little bit of stability, so that on the whim of an administrator or if a County Executive changes who is not so friendly to us, can't take it away from us like I think some of those big national companies can.

Do you know they can dangle it over your head if you things don't go the way we want it to. If you bring in a Union, we're going to take this away from you. Seeing how other places can use. It can kind of use it as a pawn. I'm really glad how we did it for our county.

I want to see what else. I have the other thing I found interesting in looking at places that nationally have this Alaska Air already has something in their, in their wording and stuff where they cover healthcare, travel expenses, for services that are not available where they are immediately and abortion just falls under that and so reading that my job is not done. I would like to take it that one step further and see if we can get travel covered. Like if you have to travel to somewhere else for a cancer treatment, I just see it as one more thing and it kind of makes it more, more the norm instead of the exception. So that's all I have and I would be willing to share our language and other stuff if anybody wants it.

Victoria Guitierrez

Thank you so much, Laura. You know the victory, that you have is something that we need to start to do with talking, you know, talking about this issue in our unions with our coworkers. You know, in the private sector, we have collective bargaining agreements here in Wisconsin that we have right to work that, but we have our collective bargaining agreements that we need to try to get this language as our Healthcare is provided by our employers trying to protect and ensure this access to healthcare. There she is, I see President Nelson, Sarah Nelson has joined us.

In the meantime. Sarah Nelson is international president of the Association of Flight Attendants, CWA, AFL-CIO and Sarah Nelson has served as the International President of the Association of Flight Attendants CWA since 2014, representing 50,000 of aviation's first responders at 19. She has been a United a Union flight attendant since 1996, when she started flying at United Airlines Sarah designed. This successful payroll support program that was a historic workers first relief program that kept aviation workers connected to their paychecks, healthcare and other benefits for 16 months during the COVID pandemic while banning stock buybacks and dividends across the industry and capping executive compensation. For two years after the relief period ends, Sarah believes Labour should set the agenda every time. The New York Times called her American's most powerful flight attendant for her role, helping to end the 35-day government shutdown in Style magazine, placed her on their top 50 women list and fast Company put her on the cover of their summer 2021 magazine with the headline workers strike. Back Sarah often says corporations have money and control, but workers have power and the labor movement is for all working people. She encourages women everywhere to join. Unions and run unions. She believes flight attendants can play a pivotal role in building worker power, with more public contact than almost any other job in connectivity around.

Victoria Guitierrez

Don't know what happened to Sarah. I think there was a little. Bit of a technological glitch. But we'll be getting her. Sounds like there she is. So just in time, Sarah.

Sarah Nelson

Well, well, that's great. Thank you so much for inviting me. I am running from another International Women's Day event. I'm very grateful to be here with all of you. I think it's really important that we recognize that the issue of healthcare and abortion rights is directly central to workers' rights and we can't let up on that issue whatsoever at all. Our union was formed in 1945 and it was formed by some really brave women who wanted to beat back discrimination that made us quit when we turned age 30, or weighed too much, or got married, or pregnant, or didn't meet the standards of the boss. We didn't have access to the job if we weren't a single white woman. And we've fought through all of that discrimination and the reality is that as our Union, through all this time, recognize that we're workers, we're workers like anyone else. We're workers like anyone who goes into a mine or an auto plant, or that works in a hospital, or sweeps floors, or anything that makes this world go round. And the reality is that today, women make less than men in these professions, not just in the jobs the Union contract makes us equal.

Certainly, flight attendants make all make the same thing, and in fact we fought very hard for men to have the same rights on the job as women. That union contract is important, but the valuation of the job long ago, it was determined that flight attendants, teachers, nurses, telephone operators - this was the work that women could do, and this was the work that was assigned to women caregivers. And that work was devalued because of our gender status. Women often became the predominant force in textile mills, but that wasn't the case in the beginning of that work and what the boss did was pit the women against the men. The men were angry at the women for undercutting, doing their jobs and being willing to take that work at a lower level. But women were usually doing that because they had lost their husbands as they were trying to come to this country for a new life and lost them along the way to disease or some other tragedy or a tragedy at work as well. And they still had to provide for their children.

And so, today I am thinking very much about the fact that I am turning 50 years old on Saturday. And I was born in 1973 and thanks to the brilliant and determined efforts of women, I have been able to live my life knowing that I could make choices for myself. In my own life, knowing that the women who fought so hard for that seniority list at United Airlines in 1946, so that management couldn't force women to trade sex for schedules so that everything was transparent and so that. Men couldn't control women by ***** them and making them be controlled for the rest of their lives because they literally took ownership of their bodies. And that's what this is about.

They have money and they have control. But the reality is, just like the Atlanta washer women over 100 years ago who worked individually in individual houses, cleaning the rich families of Atlanta's laundry, and they had no single employer to negotiate with. But in nearly three weeks' time, they signed up 3000. Women in a pledge that they were not going to work for the wages that they were working for and they had a demand that they were going to make a dollar more a week for the work that they were doing in these rich families home. And they told their stories. And even though they were not going to the same job site and they were not negotiating with the same bosses, they knew what it was like to cry with each other when they lost a child, or to celebrate the birth of a child and a marriage. or a new job for someone in their family that was going to allow them to move forward and in status in that society. And they sang together in church on Sundays, steal away, and they could hear the harmony of their voices singing together. And when all the odds seemed to be against them, they came together. And they put the rich

families of Atlanta on notice. They would no longer do their laundry for the meager wage that they were. And so those rich families had to determine whether or not they were going to succumb to the demands of these women who were standing together. Having each other's backs. And in the meantime, they didn't know who was going to do the laundry and they, they gave in. They gave in to the women. And they agreed to this standard of a dollar wage increase in the wages during the week and that made the standard for those women better, the ability to take care of their families better. And they understood the power that they had by standing together. They had not formed a union, though, so it was not lasting. And so, it is important that through our unions we are helping. Our Union siblings understand everywhere that women's rights are workers' rights. If any one of us can be discriminated against. Can be controlled by the decisions that we make in our own lives. Then it is not just our labor that we can withhold to hold our power.

There are other forces of power that can be held against us. And that's what we have to understand. When the me-too movement broke, I said to a fairly young staff of communication department, I said get ready, the phone is going to ring and they said what do you mean? And I said, well, people are going to be looking for stories about who has been sexually harassed at work and they're going to wonder who could they call? Who could they? Well, ah, maybe we'll call the flight attendants - the flight attendants who had been marketed by airlines as sex symbols and a reason to buy airplane tickets. The flight attendants who had been put in ads with short skirts and a suggestive voice, saying I'm Cheryl, fly me, and go go boots and hot pants. And even when I started in 1996, still required to go through a day of makeup training when the men in the class got the day off. And two-inch heels that we had to wear through the airport still in 1996.

These were the issues that that we had to fight through at work just to have a right to get to the bargaining table, just to have a right to say that we had an equal right to a career like anyone else doing work? And so when that Me-Too movement broke, I think it's really important, first of all that we take in why that broke. Finally, women were not allowed, we're not allowing men to have them be pitted against each other for jobs to have them climb over the top of each other to find that rare space where women could have work in the entertainment industry and that spread out to other industries as well. Women at each other's backs. So when these calls came in, I knew we had to get busy and I got out into the crew rooms because I certainly knew what I had experienced at work. I knew that when I got on the job, that in my first year of flying it was a real lesson. I had a passenger come up behind me as I was setting up the galley and he actually put his hand on my hip and ran his hand from my waist down to my rear end and he said what no girdle, how could you possibly look so good and that without a girdle? Did I report that to anyone? No, because didn't think anyone would care. I knew it was something that I had that I had to take myself. and keep going and keep the peace and keep moving. And there were countless stories like that. So I knew what I had experienced on the job, but I got out into the crew rooms to check with other women. And I said tell me, do you ever experience sexual harassment, sexual abuse on the job? Without skipping a beat. Every single one of them, from six months on the job to 30 years on the job, said yes. Yes, of course. We experienced this all the time and I said what do you do when you experience that? And the first response was, oh, we tell them, you know, stop. That's not appropriate behavior. Don't do that. And I said every time.

And that's when the real conversation started. And they said they said no. They said our job is to deescalate. Our job is to keep people calm. Our job is to get people who are and really really to do what we want, and we did that by helping them feel like if we were the punching bag, maybe they wouldn't

punch someone else. And as we were being punched, we didn't think that anyone else would take it seriously. So, did we report these things? No, and we didn't have time because the boss cut our staffing to a point where we had so much to do that we had to keep going just to get the job.

So, we heard all these stories from women that was much like the experience that I had had, but I had never really had the opportunity to talk with my flying partners about this really express the way that that can cut away at who you are and how you can stand up for yourself and how you can demand more of an employer who thinks less of you because of the gender that you have or the way that you express yourself. And so, I had also seen men because our job had been injected, defiled and sexualized and marketed in that way. I had seen them be subjected to incredible sexual harassment, just like women. And I asked them in that moment because we weren't just asking women, we were asking flight attendants, on the whole, what's your experience? And we were not hearing from the men. And I asked them why are you not telling your stories? I've seen it. I've seen it myself. I've seen some of the worst sexual harassment against men, oftentimes from businessmen who are away from their wives, who had been hiding from their families, and their businesses, and their wives, and their families, who they really were and felt that they could suddenly control someone and let all their impulses as gay men come out on those planes against the men that I worked with. And they said, Sarah, this is not a moment for gay rights, this is not a moment for men, this is a moment for women to tell their stories, and we work in a profession of 80% women. And if we don't take this moment to lift up women's rights and to use this moment to try to fight for equality for women, we are never going to have the kind of bargaining power that we want to improve our own careers on the job.

So, this is, this is central to the work of the labor movement. And it is the labor movement that we want to build. Women, and people of color, and people who have been cast aside and discriminated against, and de-valued because of the way that they look. The fight for women's equality is a fight for all workers. Because since the beginning, the premier tactic of the boss has been to use racism and sexism to divide working people, and to keep us in check, and to keep us thinking that we are in competition with each other. So, in Wisconsin, as you fight for a Supreme Court that may give you a chance to have equal rights in the state, to control what happens with our own bodies, that is not just for our families. It's not just for our communities. It's not just for our children. That's for taking on the corporate class who has for too long controlled us for too long. Pitted workers against each other to take more and more and more to build a billionaire class that doesn't even have to talk with real people because they fly on private jets. They're not even on our planes where we can get at them. And this inequality. Has grown more and more and more so that workers everywhere can understand that we have a common cause together to take back our time.

The 8 hour day - who has that today? There's forced overtime. There's forced efforts to work voluntary overtime just to make ends meet, and try to provide for your families, because as our productivity has been stolen, our wages have remained flat. And as women – we have not had the opportunity to get to the table as much. We have not been able to negotiate on the issues that are important to us. I will never forget a union meeting where women who built up our Union and had already been through menopause, were looking at me and asking me to take the lead on the issue of bargaining for women's health, bargaining for breast screening to take place, and uncovered under our health insurance, where the company had already decided that Viagra should be free.

So, as we come together in our unions as we come together for as women, as we fight for a government that understands that until women are declared as equal, none of us are free until all of us is free. So, the fight that you have in Wisconsin is a part of not only lifting up women to understand that we have power to be a part of this fight in the working class. And in fact, we should be leading it, because who better than people who have been marginalized, who have had to fight with creativity to get to our place at the table. Who have had to fight through incredible obstacles just to be heard to get into rooms where the decisions are being made.

The fight that you have in Wisconsin is a fight that we have everywhere and it is atrocious. That in 2023, we still have not recognized women as full and equal citizens in this country. And that's what we have to understand we have to fight forward. That's real in our hearts, but the clear determination and ability to take the emotion that we feel, that we do not have to feel ashamed of. Tell women everywhere. Emotion is not your weakness. Emotion is your superpower. But you use it to train your sights on making a better day for the women who are our sisters and our children who come behind us. So that is the fight that you have to take up here in Wisconsin.

And I cannot tell you how grateful I am to be here with you tonight. It is extraordinary the group that is on this call right here and by having each other's backs and saying, in fact, actually, if people could just, if you're able to take yourself off mute and just say with me right now to all of the women and the allies that we have on this called as well to say I've got your back. And think about that and take that into our hearts and understand that when we're fighting for that Supreme Court in Wisconsin, where we're fighting for our unions to take on the issues that seem to be women's issues, but they are central to men's issues, we don't need women's committees to be on the side and to be put in a side room. We are the workers in this country. We are the leaders in this country. And if we're not fighting for women's rights and control of our own bodies, then we are not ready to take on the billionaire class. That's what we have to understand and know and take into our hearts and we are not ready to make good on the promise of what was written, maybe not understood by those who wrote it, but I think of the Pledge of Allegiance, I said as a five-year-old every day in Miss Malden's classroom in kindergarten. And that pledge, even though that doesn't happen anymore in our classrooms, that pledge, I remember looking around at the other five-year-old kids as I had my hand over my heart, and I thought we were making a solemn promise to each other. At the end of that pledge with liberty, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all, indivisible with liberty and justice for all. We are full and equal citizens. We have to do the work to claim it and make it real under the law. That's what we're going to do together. That's what we commit to on this International Women's Day and that's what we're going to achieve in Wisconsin and across this country and carry that message and lift up women around the world. That is how we are going to solve the great existential threats of this time. Climate change and everything else because we are going to make sure that as we make these changes that women are central to the decision making, central to the leadership. Because we are going to make sure that the policies that we create are inclusive and actually create a better world for all of us. It is connected to everything that we have to take on in this generation for the generations behind us and taking to our hearts the people who fought before us.

Mother Jones, the great labor organizer, said "The capitalist class says there is no need of Labor organizing, except that they themselves are continually organizing and show us their real beliefs. She also said don't be ladylike when you fight. Rockefeller and the Gang of Thieves made the ladies, but God Almighty made women. And so, we can't be ladylike either. We have to demand our way forward. And I promise to do that with you. I promise to do that. I promise to have your back, and I know you promise

to do the same. And together we're going to lift up women everywhere. We're going to change this world and we are going to lead our world forward to the solutions that we need for our children and our grandchildren and all those who want to dream higher than we can imagine today. Thank you so much for joining me, having me join you tonight and for your commitment to this fight. Solidarity forever.

Victoria Guitierrez

We've got your back, Sarah, and everybody here. Clearly this is, we are in this together. You know the slogan is an injury to one is an injury to all, and your words reminded me of, you know, you know, March 25th, 1911 is the shirt Coast, Triangle, Shirt, Coast fire. And here we are in 2023, still fighting for workplace. You know, that is what? Caught the attention of the billionaire class back then, and it's we're still fighting for it. So, thank you so much.

Sara Nelson

That's right. And think about think about Frances Perkins standing out out there on the street and seeing the woman who had jumped from that building and making it her mission in life To fight forward. She said to the president when he asked her to be the Secretary of Labor, that she had certain things that she wanted to accomplish. And she made demands on the president, and when he didn't follow her instructions, she would come to his office and say, Mr. President, what is our position on Social Security and she would make him repeat it. She would make him repeat it twice and then she would make him write it down. And then she would say, you know it works with 10-year-old boys too. So, women have been the ones who have made the great changes in our world. And thank you so much. We're going to lead forward and I didn't mean to jump back in again, but you mentioned the Triangle Shirtwaist fire and that was a jumping off point for many women. To lead our movement and to be inspired to lead forward with the standards that we expect today, all of this is on the chopping block if women don't fight forward and don't demand exactly what Francis Perkins demanded of the president and finish the job. Of the economic freedoms that she hoped to achieve for all so sorry, I had to add that.

Victoria Guitierrez

Thank you. I at this point want to just circle back and see if there is any panelists that would like to have some comments. I'm still muted. And I I I don't know if the people here, if there's any panelists that at this point want to circle back – Linda, Amadi?

Linda Buettel

Hi some people asked about our operating budget and I put it in the chat to everybody.

Victoria Guitierrez

OK, I also want to say that people have been asking for some of the language for Laura and we are going to be getting an OK to be able to circulate the \ language. So that's forthcoming. I do want to. Give the floor for. A minute to Lily Johnson, Lily Johnson is. Not an advertised panelist, however. She has a very important. Role as Vice President of the Rockford Family Planning Foundation and I'd like to give the floor to Lily.

Lily Johnson

And I can keep my comments very brief. Thank you so much, Sarah, for your wonderful remarks. There's no place I'd rather be on International Women's Day than with amazing type of Labor leaders. I'm just wanted to, at the end of tonight, give a little bit of hope, which is the group that I work for is Rockford Family Planning Foundation. I'm on their board. I don't work for them. We're a nonprofit organization and our goal is to open a new abortion facility that will serve the women of our community, women and pregnant people of our community, and all the way up to Wausau, WI. So just to kind of bring it home, before the Dobbs decision, there were about 600 abortions happening in Wisconsin every month. There are about 5500 less abortions a month, since Dobbs, in our country. Of course, this is a workers' issue of we have nowhere to go. In Wisconsin, people, even in extremely dangerous pregnancies where their safety is at stake have nowhere to go in Wisconsin.

So, there's this wonderful group called Rockford Family Planning Foundation. You can look us up. Some colleagues are currently offering medication abortion in Rockford, currently, and our organization is opening a comprehensive medical clinic late this spring, probably at the end of, middle of May, is our goal. And it's a very important time and it's very important for us to let our comrades, workers across the area know of where they can send their friends and family, and colleagues, how they can get more involved. We believe wholeheartedly that more reproductive health access is the only solution until we can obviously flip our Supreme Court to do the work we need to do policy wise. But that there are people in our community here that are really fighting to make sure that more access is provided. We know, thanks to some wonderful, wonderful researcher, brothers and sisters at the University of Wisconsin, that if you have to travel more than two hours for this care, it becomes very hard for working people to make that trip. And currently there is no place to go less than two hours away from Madison, WI. And let alone all the way up to Wausau, which is where we used to care for people here in Madison. So, I'm available for questions. You can get my contact information. I want to thank the wonderful panel for tonight and let you know that there's a lot of people in this space that are working to make sure workers have access to this crucial healthcare in the months ahead. So, thanks and I know there's a lot of questions, so I'll let you open it up, Vic. Thanks for having me.

Victoria Guitierrez

Caitlin or Sarah, we're going to do questions. I keep muting. All right. I think we have a very brief time for questions. I'm going to try to combine two that have been asked and this will be addressed to all.

Caitlin

Unions played in California's decision to stop doing business at Walgreens. And I kind of want to tack on to that, just a general question for all panelists. How can the labor movement be more effective in restoring reproductive justice and abortion rights? So anyone who wants to answer, please do.

Victoria Guitierrez

Anybody want to tackle that?

Sarah Nelson

I'll just jump in and say that when the Dobbs decision came down, I did contact all of the airlines and ask them to speak out and make it clear about what they were going to do in their power to make sure that women could get the healthcare that they need. We have negotiated that the airlines will pay for any travel that's necessary for a flight attendant and I interviewed a flight attendant who had been working since the 1940s. She had a lot of stories to tell. She had actually started our very first safety committee and traveled around the world and got airlines and manufacturers and governing bodies to make standard certain evacuation equipment on the plane. So she had she had an incredible story to tell about how she had been an advocate and actually changed all of aviation safety. But what she wanted to talk with me about was the calls that she got as a union representative. The women who knew that if they were pregnant, they were going to go back to a home where their family was going to try to find a husband for them and they were not going to be able to have control over their own lives or that they were going to be stuck in an abusive relationship. They were going to lose the job they loved, and she herself did was not she was made it very clear that she herself did not believe in abortion, but she helped women get illegal abortions so that they could keep their jobs. So, this is central to the job. And I asked airlines to speak out and and talk about just what they were doing to make sure that they were providing access for their members and also speaking out as in support of their consumers. They talk about all the time about wanting women in aviation, wanting women to be consumers on their planes. And so certainly these corporations would speak out in support of women's health care. And only two of them spoke, actually spoke publicly about just the policy that they had with their employees for providing travel to another state if they needed it. Never mind the fact that they have workers who land in different states all day long during the course of their jobs, and every time that they land, they have different rights depending upon where they are.

So, we do have to do more to hold the corporations accountable. I think that there's a lot more that a lot of people go straight to what we can negotiate and contract to preserve these rights. But I, and that's fine. And we should be doing that. But I want to be thinking about is how we can use our power to make corporations speak out against this right wing fanatical effort to try to control them in bodies and I think that we have to hold these corporations accountable to do that and we're going to continue to do that. And I expressed with all of them that it was. And I was incredibly disappointed in their total lack of leadership on this issue. If they want women on their planes, if they want women buying their tickets, then they sure as hell better speak up for women's rights. They cannot say that. They want women in aviation and they want women to be trained as pilots and mechanics and air traffic controllers. And all these jobs that are incredibly needed and need a larger pool of people who are willing to go, go into them without actually respecting the people that they're asking to come to do these jobs. So, I think that the labor movement could do a lot more to call upon corporations to speak out, because this should be an

issue. This should be a consumer issue. This should be a worker issue. And these corporations are controlling politics. Don't try to tell me that they're not, so we should be holding them accountable in that way and not just thinking of how we can carve it out for the people that we represent because oftentimes, then that will be used to divide workers as well union workers to get this. But non-union workers don't. We've seen all of it. No, they need to speak out for everyone. Anyone who buys their products, and anyone who is working in their shops.

Caitlin

Sarah, do you feel comfortable sharing with us who those two companies were so that?

Sarah Nelson

I mean, I mean, you know, they it wasn't perfect, but at least they at least they put out public statements about this. It was Alaska Airlines and Hawaiian Airlines and the rest of them were totally chicken shit. Pardon me.

Victoria Guitierrez

Safe space here. We're kind of running into 7:30. I know that we have many questions we're going to record these questions. I'm told there will be a transcript of it and we'll try. To answer back. I'd like to ask are there any closing comments that any of the panelists have? Linda.

Linda Gordon

No, I I just was really grooving on what Sarah Nelson was saying. You just also get there's a spirit of possibility there. But you know, I do think that more and more there are going to be people who are acting to help women. And when you add to help them, you are actually making a statement about what is justice and what is right. So I I'm not totally.

Victoria Guitierrez

Thank you, Laura, Amati?

Amadia Osiah

My only words are thanks everybody. I feel invigorated and happy Women's Day.

Laura Buetel

I guess I would just like. To add if anybody. Is going to do this and need people to show up at meetings because there's power in numbers. Send the word and and we'll be there.

Victoria Guitierrez

There's been lots of. I'm really inspired by all of the I haven't been able to read all of the Q. And A, but I **think this is the kind of thing that we need. We need this sort of. We need this coming together in this moment, especially, no matter wherever we are, everything that everybody said. And to continue on, I wish we had the whole evening now that we've got everybody here. So hopefully this is a start. And I. UM. I'm very thankful for everybody who's tuned in tonight. It's my hope and intent we all walk away with some concrete ways that we can engage in this struggle.** Thank you to all of the panelists that we

have tonight, Linda, Amadi Ozier, Laura Buetel, Sarah Nelson, thank you to the South Central Federation of Labor, and the SCFL Education Committee, to Sharon Manor, again, for making this happen, to Sarah and Caitlin here. Thank you to Anne Mcneary of the United Way of Dane County for the space that we are actually in right here. There's a long list of people that have helped in small and big ways David Newby, Ellen La Luzerne, Kim Gasper Raybuck. Thank you so much. Onward and solidarity to everybody. Happy International Women's Day. Solidarity.