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Mike Jackson

Commentary: Organized labor remains relevant

Mike Jackson

Each year Americans enjoy a long weekend to celebrate Labor Day, but do they realize the true meaning of the holiday?

Labor Day is a creation of the labor movement dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. It constitutes an annual tribute to the contributions workers have made to America's prosperity.

Since the 1880s, labor unions have established and fought to maintain certain worker rights so union members and other workers could benefit -- from the standard 40-hour workweek to allotted vacation time.

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Labor unions continue to strive for fair wages, benefits and job protection. These efforts have raised the standard of living for all American workers.

That's why the Michigan Legislature should pass the Teamsters' efforts for a workers misclassification bill that would take a stronger stand against unemployment and workers compensation fraud. It would create new fines and penalties, holding companies that abuse workers responsible for such illegal actions.

In addition, residents should oppose efforts to create a right-to-work law. Right-to-work is designed to hurt unions and would reduce wages and benefits, outsource jobs and threaten safety conditions. It would harm our already fragile economy, having the most devastating impact on the middle class.

Workers in right-to-work states like Mississippi and Alabama have a lower quality of life. Workers in right-to-work states earn 17 percent less than their counterparts in non-right-to-work states, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

If Michigan becomes a right-to-work state, businesses will have less incentive to offer fair wages and benefits -- to union and nonunion workers alike.

Also consider that construction unions protect American jobs by requiring proof of citizenship as a condition of employment. But right-to-work laws would make it easier for contractors and corporations to hire untrained and unskilled illegal immigrants, driving down wages and making work sites less safe.

These issues facing labor unions could have a devastating effect on every Michigan citizen. This Labor Day, take a moment to appreciate the working conditions enjoyed by Americans. Labor unions began establishing those standards over a century ago, and we continue to fight for the cause and to protect all workers in the years to come.

Mike Jackson is executive secretary/treasurer of the **Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters** and Millwrights. E-mail comments to letters@detnews.com



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