

Maine Legislature

House Democratic Office

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Democratic Radio Address – House Democratic Leader Rep. Cain honors Maine workers

Good morning, I'm Emily Cain – State Representative from Orono and leader of the Maine State House Democrats.

Thank you for tuning in.

This week, despite ongoing budget hearings, exciting floor debates, and numerous committee work sessions, the State House was dominated by discussion of symbols, celebrations, and rhetoric around organized labor in Maine.

Tuesday was labor lobby day, and hundreds of workers from across Maine flanked the hallways to educate lawmakers about upcoming legislation impacting union structure, pension changes, and workplace safety.

Wednesday was overcome with news about a directive from the Governor to remove a mural at the department of Labor depicting scenes from Maine's history related to workers, and removing the names from conference rooms of men and women who were trailblazers in the fight for workers rights.

Thursday we had a moment of silence in the House to remember the 100th anniversary of the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory of New York City that killed 146, mostly teenage immigrant women. It was one of the worst industrial disasters in history and it resulted in safer working conditions for laborers.

All of these events and symbols remind us how far we've come as a nation and a state in improving workers' rights and strengthening the middle class. Our state

has a rich and strong labor history. A history that we can and should not forget even though it is easy to take these workplace rights for granted today.

Maine's history includes the iconic Rosie the Riveter, who worked at Bath Iron Works, and the French Canadian shoe workers in the Auburn Mills who risked their lives 74 years ago to secure higher wages, safer working conditions, and stand up to discrimination.

And we are especially proud of our own Frances Perkins, who served as the first female U.S. Secretary of Labor. Frances would have been famous simply for being the first woman cabinet member, but her true legacy is what she accomplished. She is responsible for the adoption of social security, unemployment insurance, federal laws regulating child labor, and adoption of the federal minimum wage.

With this rich history in mind, Democrats hope Governor LePage will change his mind about moving the mural, painted by a Maine artist, depicting these historic events, from the lobby of the Department of Labor, and the renaming of the conference rooms.

In Maine, our state is defined by those who built it. Flanking our state seal, we have a logger and sailor. Workers tell the story of who we are as Mainers.

In our State House and in State Houses across the country, we have seen these very workers demonized and scapegoated for the economic crisis and our budget deficits. This rhetoric flies in the face of reality, facts and of the strong history of labor in Maine and across the United States. We should not demonize and blame workers. They show up to do the work of our small and large businesses each and every day.

Divisive rhetoric and harmful policies rolling back workplace rights and safety won't create job or grow business.

If Maine wants to emerge stronger from this recession, lawmakers must respect that businesses need workers and workers need businesses. Both do better when they work together.

When workers have more money in their pockets they spend it at local businesses. When labor laws are fair and workplaces are safe, workers are more

productive and healthier. When businesses make more money, we see more jobs in our communities.

We must work together to strike a balance to find policies that support both our working Maine people and our businesses. Like Frances Perkins, let our legacy not just be our symbols and rhetoric, but what we accomplish that improves Maine's economy by supporting business and workers.

Thank you for listening and have a wonderful day.