

Publications

This Week From the Hill (July 20 – July 26, 2025)

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Each week while Congress is in session, our [Policy](#) team delivers a key update to highlight a topical benefits, health, or retirement news item from the Hill, such as a newly introduced bill, a summary of a committee hearing, or another hot-button matter.

On July 17, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (“HELP”) Committee held a wide-ranging hearing entitled, “Freedom to Work: Unlocking Benefits for Independent Workers.”

In advance of the hearing, Chairman Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and other HELP Committee members introduced a legislative package that includes four bills aimed at supporting benefits for gig workers. Those bills are:

- Sen. Cassidy’s *Unlocking Benefits for Independent Workers Act* ([S. 2210](#)) that would create a safe harbor for employers that wish to voluntarily provide benefits;
- Sen. Tim Scott’s (R-SC) *Modern Worker Empowerment Act* ([S. 2228](#)) to create a single employment test under federal law;
- Sen. Rand Paul’s (R-KY) *Association Health Plan Act* ([unnumbered](#)) to encourage association health plans, and;
- Sen. Cassidy’s *Independent Retirement Fairness Act* ([S. 2217](#)) to allow gig workers to participate in pooled employer plans.

In his opening remarks, Chairman Cassidy noted that most American labor laws are about 100 years old and called for their modernization to keep pace with the changing workforce. He also noted that both red and blue states are working on updated laws to address the independent workforce and urged bipartisan cooperation at the federal level.

Ranking Member Bernie Sanders (D-VT) took a different view in his opening remarks, stating, “These bills are not about giving workers the freedom to work, these bills are about giving corporations the freedom to deny workers the right to form a union. [...] The reality is that the safe harbor provisions included in this legislation would give large corporations a blank check to break our nation’s labor laws.” Ranking Member Sanders went on to introduce the *Pensions for All Act* ([S. 2335](#)) to require every employer to provide retirement benefits equivalent to those under the

Federal Employees Retirement System (“FERS”) or to make sufficient contributions into FERS for their employees to receive FERS benefits.

At the hearing, the witnesses were:

- Patrice Onwuka, Director, Center for Economic Opportunity, Independent Women’s Forum, who advocated for portable benefits as a way for female caregivers and others in need of nontraditional work hours to receive benefits;
- Kim Kavin, Editor, Imagine Media, who detailed her experiences in opposing state efforts to pass legislation similar to the PRO Act;
- Kev Coleman, Research Fellow, Paragon Health Institute, who spoke in favor of association health plans as a means for small businesses to provide health benefits to their employees;
- Timothy J. Driscoll, President, International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers, who argued that the *Unlocking Benefits for Independent Workers Act* would “accelerate [an] insidious race to the bottom” for “unscrupulous employers” who are eager to misclassify workers; and
- Karen Friedman, Executive Director, Pension Rights Center, who spoke broadly about the need for retirement security for American workers.

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