



NEWS & VIEWS

LEHIGH VALLEY LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO
"UNIONS JOINING TOGETHER AS ONE"

www.lehighvalleyclc.org



December 2025



Local union members, including those from the Service Employees International Union (above), joined thousands of their Lehigh Valley neighbors in a nationwide "No Kings" protest against Donald Trump on October 18. See page three for more on the story.

Workers first initiative on AI

AFL-CIO launches program advancing concerns of American workers amid growth of artificial intelligence in the workplace

by the AFL-CIO
October 16, 2025 press release

The AFL-CIO launched today the “Workers First Initiative on AI,” the first comprehensive labor movement agenda establishing principles on artificial intelligence (AI) technology. The Initiative provides a blueprint for how employers and legislators should advance AI implementation in the workplace to the benefit of America’s working people and economy.

Developed with input from workers and unions across industries and public services, the “Workers First Initiative on AI” is designed to ensure that working people reap the benefits of AI technology and its use in the workforce. The Initiative includes first-of-its-kind guiding principles and resources for the responsible development of AI and its use in the workplace and a nationwide education and mobilization program. It also will be integrated with the AI task force the AFL-CIO launched this summer to fight for commonsense, strong AI safety policy at the state and local level.

“Instead of asking which future is coming, we should be asking which future we want: one in which humans are replaced or only augmented? . . . Any technology—from the stone ax onward—replaces some human work in the course of augmenting it. The key question is whether the tool enhances our abilities while still leaving us in control of how to use it. . . . The wholesale replacement of human work makes for good science fiction but a bad future.”

Tim Wu, special assistant to President Joseph Biden for competition and tech policy, in a June 29, 2025 *New York Times* editorial entitled “A.I. doesn’t have to mean the end of white-collar work.”

“No one understands how to build the future of work better than America’s labor movement, said Liz Shuler, president of the AFL-CIO. “We reject the false choice between American competitiveness on the world stage and respecting workers’ rights and dignity. We know that for AI—or any other technology—to truly boost our economy, it needs to benefit everyone, not just a select few at the top. That’s why I’m thrilled to launch the Workers First Initiative on AI, which will advance the labor movement’s vision for this technology and a path forward for equitable, human-centered innovation in our workplaces and communities.”

Across the country, there is consensus around the need for strong, worker-centered AI safety. Some eighty percent of Americans across both parties want the government to have strong rules in place for AI safety and data security. Red and blue states alike are prioritizing AI safety measures, with all 50 states having introduced regulations related to AI, with around forty passing legislation.

Our country has a choice to make: a future where we harness the power of AI to make work easier, safer and more productive. Or, a future where workers in every sector are subjected to brutal production quotas set by algorithms, where robots threaten their very careers, and where their data and their privacy are vio-

lated by digital overlords both at work and home. President Trump and Vice President Vance have already given billionaire tech executives the green light to bulldoze the rights and jobs of working-class families,” said Chrissy Lynch, president of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO and co-chair of the AFL-CIO State Federation Artificial Intelligence (AI) Task Force. “That’s why it is critical that states and workplaces draw the line between tech innovation and tech domination. These principles give lawmakers and employers a clear road map on how to ensure rapidly evolving technology like AI doesn’t leave the working class behind.”

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Lehigh Valley Labor Council

AFL-CIO

www.lehighvalleyclc.org

Phone 610-366-1358

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Our mailing address is: Lehigh Valley Labor Council
P.O. Box 20226
Lehigh Valley, PA 18002

Our office location is:
Operating Engineers #542
7609 Kuhns Drive
Trexlerstown, PA 18087

Editor

Ron Ennis	APWU #268
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Webmaster

John Weiss	SEIU #668
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Labor council prepares for the holidays

Allentown's Roosevelt Elementary school site of council's community service project

The Lehigh Valley Labor Council began the tradition of assisting the community via our holiday party nearly twenty years ago.

Beginning in 2016, Capital Blue Cross committed to the support of a community school with the stipulation that TeenWorks participate financially and the labor community would provide volunteers. Allentown is one of the poorest districts in the state and Roosevelt was one of the first community schools in the country. There is a high percentage of poor families and children with special needs. We could make similar arguments for many districts and schools. We can't help all the kids in the Lehigh Valley who need it, but we do an excellent job at Roosevelt and truly make a difference.

Following is the upcoming schedule for the Lehigh Valley Labor Council's holiday donation drive at Allentown's Roosevelt Elementary school on Monday, December 15.

Friday, December 12, 2025

Labor council holiday party at Shepherd Hills Golf Club, 1101 S. Krocks Rd. Allentown. Please bring an unwrapped, non-violent, American-made toy(s) to benefit the school children at Roosevelt and Sheridan Elementary.

This event is in lieu of our December labor council monthly meeting.

Food and beverages are included at no cost, and we thank Cohen, Feeley, Altemose & Rambo, and Capital Blue Cross for their sponsorships. Festivities are 5:30—9:30 p.m. with beer, wine, soft drinks and buffet.

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TeenWorks dinner slated for January 24, 2026

Is your union a partner?

*John Werkheiser, United Way Labor Liaison
Lehigh Valley Labor Council*



Support for the Greater Lehigh Valley United Way TeenWorks program has grown over the years, as it has successfully created a space that empowers teenagers to give back to their community and bring their service projects to life. This growth would not have occurred without the support of our local union partners.

We invite you to see the impact of your contributions in person at our celebration on January 24, 2026 and consider sponsoring this special event. If you wish to learn more, visit: www.unitedwayglv.org/teenworks/

Our January 24 dinner event will be held at the Northampton Memorial Community Center, 1601 Laubach Ave., Northampton. Seating is \$75 per person and we have various sponsorship levels that will align with your union's goals. We will also publish your local's ads—full-page, half-page or quarter-page—in the TeenWorks dinner booklet. For more about how you and your union can help create a brighter future for Lehigh Valley students, contact me at: johnw@unitedwayglv.org

With strong support from local labor unions and others, TeenWorks has invested in more than 500 community service projects driven by teens and local youth-based organizations. Make a pledge to these exceptional young leaders.



Local union members, including those from the Service Employees International Union (above), joined thousands of their Lehigh Valley neighbors on October 18 as part of nationwide "No Kings" protests against Donald Trump and his congressional allies, including Rep. Ryan Mackenzie and Sen. Dave McCormick. Dorothy Baran (left to right in the front row) Lori Hertzog, Jillian Hertzog and Christine Miller stood outside Mackenzie's office on Cedar Crest Blvd., Allentown. Also in the picture were Tammy McCoy, Ron Labar, Fawn Holdridge, and Jody Weinrich. Local rallies were held at Mackenzie's office on Emrick Blvd., Bethlehem Township. A third rally began at the Bethlehem Rose Gardens followed by a march to Payrow Plaza.

Holding signs that read "No Kings, No Billionaires," and "Hey, Rep. Mackenzie, We Can't Afford That," they protested Mackenzie's and McCormick's support for Trump's tax cuts for the wealthy while gutting Medicaid for the nation's most needy. Others held signs that read "Honk, if you are not in the Epstein Files," a reference to documents connecting sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein to Trump and other well-known people.

Many in attendance, unhappy with Trump and his congressional allies, waved American flags and wore costumes. Angered by the nationwide protests, Republican lawmakers and the MAGA media described the protestors as unpatriotic.



“I’m shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here” Trump puts workers’ savings and retirement accounts at risk.

by Ron Ennis, Editor
Lehigh Valley Labor Council

Petty crime and illegal gambling are everywhere in *Casablanca*, as vividly depicted in the 1942 Oscar-winning film of the same name. The police chief of Morocco’s largest city, Captain Louis Renault, is fully aware of the illicit activities at Rick’s Café Americain. In fact, he regularly benefits from the gambling proceeds at this stylish nightclub.

Café Americain, owned by Rick Blaine and portrayed by Humphrey Bogart, attracts nightly a diverse crowd of Vichy French, German officials, and refugees desperate to reach the still-neutral United States. Nazi commander Major Heinrich Strasser visits the nightclub shortly after his arrival in Casablanca and is incensed when the crowd spontaneously sings “La Marseillaise,” the French national anthem. He turns to Capt. Renault, played by Claude Rains, and insists the police chief shut down Rick’s. “But I have no excuse to close it,” Renault protests.

“Find one,” Major Strasser demands.

Renault must concoct a reason to close Rick’s and escape the wrath of Strasser. With deputies behind him, the police chief stands in front of the crowd and shouts, “This café is closed until further notice. Clear the room at once!”

Blaine, angry by the abrupt closure of his business, confronts Renault. “How can you close me up? On what grounds?” (Fig. #1)

“I’m shocked, shocked, to find that gambling is going on in here,” Renault answers with feigned indignation, moments before he politely accepts his gambling winnings from one of Rick’s staff. Rains’s delivery is impeccable, highlighting the hypocrisy and corruption that pervade the system, and it is one of the film’s great lines in a cinema classic filled with unforgettable passages. The scene reminds us that Renault always had the power to stop illegal gambling, but the financial benefits outweighed his scruples. (Fig. #2)



Fig. 1: “How can you close me up?” asks Rick Blaine (left), played by Humphrey Bogart in the 1942 film classic *Casablanca*. With feigned indignation, Capt. Louis Renault, portrayed by Claude Rains, replies, “I’m shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here.” (Credit: YouTube)



Fig. 2: As the crowd exits Rick’s nightclub, owned by Rick Blaine and portrayed by Humphrey Bogart (left), on the orders of Capt. Renault, played by Claude Rains (right), one of Rick’s casino croupiers approaches the police chief.

“Your winnings sir,” the croupier says to Capt. Renault, as he hands him a wad of cash. The police chief thanks him and promptly stuffs the money in his pocket. Renault always had the power to stop illegal gambling, but the financial benefits outweighed his scruples. (Credit: Pinterest)

No one should have been shocked on October 23 when *USA Today* reported “explosive news” of the FBI charging over thirty individuals linked to alleged illegal sports gambling. “As soon as the American sports industry threw open its locker room doors to the business of gambling,” columnist Jason Gay wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* on October 25, “this Captain Renault ‘*Casablanca*’ moment was sure to unfold.” In fact, “the gambling industry’s daily assault on our senses—ads, ads, and more ads”—makes one wonder why this scandal did not happen sooner.

Gambling has grown pervasive across America over the past fifty years with nearly every state legalizing some form of wagering. In 1978, New Jersey became the second state to legalize casinos, although it limited their establishment to Atlantic City. Pennsylvania legislators established a lottery in 1971 and legalized casinos in 2004. Currently, Pennsylvania is second only to Nevada in annual commercial casino revenues.

In 2018, the US Supreme Court further spread gambling by legalizing sports betting in *Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association*. The court’s ruling allowed U.S. sports leagues to pocket hundreds of millions of dollars a year from partnerships with companies like FanDuel and DraftKings. A year earlier, Harrisburg legislators made Pennsylvania the fourth state to legalize online gambling, joining Nevada, New Jersey, and Delaware. Today, thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia have legalized sports gambling, and Americans bet \$150 billion on sports last year. Gambling has deeply embedded itself in the fabric of America.

“The money is everywhere,” Gay concluded, who does not see any serious changes in the foreseeable future. “The gambling business is in the furniture, the walls, the wires, the pipes, everything.”

The speculative fever has grown worse since Donald Trump’s return to the White House this past January.

Before last year's presidential election, the Biden administration kept watch on companies offering new ways to wager. In 2021, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FIRA) fined Robinhood, an electronic trading platform for prediction markets and cryptocurrency, a record \$70 million for issuing false or misleading information to users. The Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) had restricted prediction markets bets on election outcomes, describing them as gambling.

But Trump began dismantling protections after his inauguration, believing that his predecessor "stifled innovation and growth, drove an exciting new industry abroad and deprived ordinary

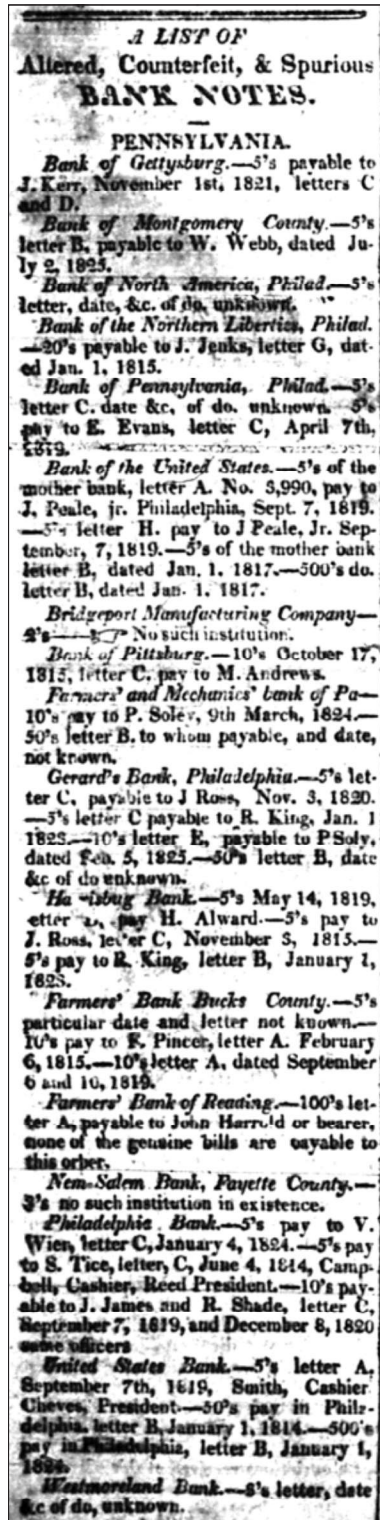
Fig. 3:
A list of Altered, Counterfeit, and Spurious Banknotes in Penna., 1829.

While the federal government minted coins prior to the Civil War, the states printed paper currency, known as banknotes. These notes lacked federal oversight, presenting hardships to workers and making it difficult for them to save or provide for their families.

First, the banknotes lacked uniformity, with many different banks issuing notes of varying values, leading to confusion and distrust. Thousands of different banknotes circulated in antebellum America. Second, notes often circulated at a discount, meaning they were worth less than their face value. If a worker tried to cash a Pennsylvania banknote in another state, he might not have received any payment at all. Finally, the frequency of financial panics caused banks to suspend redemption of banknotes for gold or silver.

Newspapers regularly published lists of discredited banknotes to the public.

The uncertainty and instability of our early Republic's economy provide a warning to politicians offering risky schemes to Americans hoping to grow their nest eggs. (Credit: Northampton County Journal, January 13, 1829)



Americans of new ways to build wealth," wrote Greg Ip, in his weekly *Wall Street Journal* column on October 17. Instead, the former casino operator gutted oversight conducted by the FIRA and the CFTC. Under his watch, the "CFTC has cut staff by fifteen percent and dropped a third of its open investigations," according to a *New York Times* editorial by Jonathan D. Cohen and Isaac Rose-Berman. He even allowed Kalshi, a prediction market based in New York City, to hire one of his sons. The company's platform allows users to gamble on event contracts, such as weather patterns, political elections, movie awards and legislative votes. (Fig. #3)

In March, Kalshi announced a partnership with Robinhood. The result of Trump's deregulation "will inevitably be financial pain," Cohen and Rose-Berman wrote on October 20. Here is why.

Smartphone owners can now download the Robinhood app and "buy stocks on one tab, 'bet' on Oscars outcomes on another and trade crypto on a third," Cohen and Rose-Berman explained in their article entitled "Gambling. Investing. Gaming. There's No Difference Anymore." "Risking your money is as easy and attractive as playing Candy Crush." Last March, Kalshi announced its partnership with Robinhood will allow users to place bets via the same app they use to manage their investment accounts and retirement savings.

What makes this arrangement dangerous is that it eliminates what is known in economics as friction, obstacles that make it more difficult or expensive to conduct a financial activity. Just like physical friction reduces the movement of an object, economic friction slows the exchange of goods, services, and capital.

Trump's weak regulation and enforcement policy has meant that workers can pull out their smartphones, and with the touch of their fingertip use the Kalshi-Robinhood app to transfer money from their bank accounts to bet on Taylor Swift album sales. Or they can spend their hard-earned savings on crypto-currency, like bitcoins and meme coins. With just a click on a smartphone, risking your retirement savings on so many gambling options has never been easier. Trump has greased away the friction of driving to a bank, withdrawing money, traveling to a casino and finding a table to play.

"People are adults," said Josh Sterling, a lawyer for Kalshi and one of Trump's picks to lead the CFTC, at a conference in July. "They're allowed to spend their money however they want it, and if they lose their shirt, that's on them."

But wealth is not won in a bet. Alexander Hamilton, one of America's founders and its first treasury secretary, would have agreed. "There should be a line of separation," he wrote to Philip Livingston during the 1792 financial panic, "between respectable stockholders . . . and mere unprincipled Gamblers." (Fig. #4)

Has Trump offered American workers a new way to build wealth? Or has the former casino operator invited them to a party that is about to end badly? Helping ordinary retirement savers with new ways to grow their nest egg should not leave them "shocked, shocked" to learn that it's all been a gamble and the house never loses.

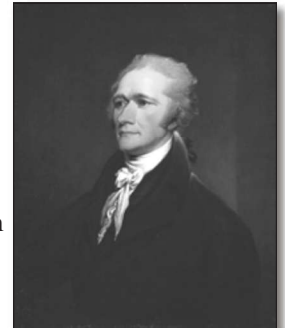


Fig. 4: US Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton wrote to Philip Livingston describing the unscrupulous men who had profited during the 1792 financial panic. "Contempt and neglect must attend those who manifest that they have no principle but to get money," he wrote on April 2. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)



Outlook for 2026

Will Pennsylvania workers carry momentum into next year?

by Ron Ennis, Editor
Lehigh Valley Labor Council



Pennsylvania's richest man poured millions of dollars into campaigns up and down this year's state ballot, but it was working-class voters who emerged victorious on November 4. Will they sustain this momentum through to Election

Day 2026?

Workers have reasons for optimism as they approach next year's mid-term elections. "We don't need to wait for lengthy post-mortems on this election to understand what happened," the AFL-CIO declared following the November 4 results. Working people "will continue to take back our country from the billionaire CEOs who control our economy and our lives."

One such billionaire is Jeffrey Yass, a major investor in TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, with an estimated worth exceeding \$50 billion. As Pennsylvania's richest man and one of the nation's wealthiest billionaires, he has spent over \$75 million on state elections since 2017. He ranks as the largest donor to Pennsylvania's right-wing, using his wealth to support local politicians such as state Sen. Jarrett Coleman, and state Reps. Joe Emrick and Ryan Mackenzie. However, his financial influence failed to unseat the three incumbents – Justices Christine Donohue, Kevin Dougherty and David Wecht – in the 2025 state Supreme Court retention race.

Yass also channels his millions to fund a network of PACs and lobbying groups, particularly focused on defunding public education and redirecting taxpayer dollars to private schools. The *Wall Street Journal* frequently publishes his opinions criticizing public schools and the unionized educators who teach our children.

It is unsurprising, then, that a November 1 *Journal* editorial supported Yass's cause to defeat the retention of Donohue, Dougherty and Wecht. Entitled "The Pennsylvania Court on the Ballot," the editors highlighted the "millions of dollars flowing into the state" to defeat the three incumbents, describing it as "a message from the voting public." But it wasn't average voters pouring money into the defeat of Donohue, Dougherty and Wecht, as the *Journal* claimed. It was billionaire Jeffrey Yass. For more on how he and other billionaires undermine democracy in Pennsylvania, visit: www.alleyesonyass.com

The past year's "No Kings" protests provide another hopeful sign heading into 2026 as they raised the enthusiasm of those who attended them and influenced those who observed them. Trump supporters seem to believe that protestors threaten the community, or worse, hate the country. Lehigh Valley congressman Ryan Mackenzie claimed that protestors outside his office have disrupted nearby businesses and traffic. "To be respectful to other people in the community, that's not happening," he alleged without offering any proof at a televised September 24 Town hall meeting.

Other Trump allies have gone further. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy described the marches as "part of antifa." House Speaker Mike Johnson called the events "the Hate America Rally." Clearly, the protests have rattled Trump's MAGA base, but there is no substitute for the perseverance and patience needed by the protestors to translate their sentiments into election victories next year.



A violent mob storms the nation's capitol on January 6, 2021.
(Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Not everyone, however, is upbeat after the 2025 Election. The election of Zohran Mamdani as mayor of New York City means that "anarchy is in the air," wrote Andy Kessler, a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, on November 10. He and many other right-wing columnists and cable television pundits quake at the thought of a socialist taking the mayoral reigns of the city and fear social unrest will soon follow. Kessler began his column, entitled "The Politics of Anarchy," describing the 1920 bombing at J.P. Morgan & Co.'s headquarters that killed thirty-eight and wounded many others. But using a one-hundred-year-old case as a link to recent disorder and suggesting socialism and the newly-elected mayor may create more unrest is a stretch. Perhaps, Kessler and some of his colleagues at the *Journal* should be reminded of the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing, the 2014 Bundy standoff in southeastern Nevada, the 2016 Occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon and the 2021 Insurrection. Right-wing extremists, not socialists, have picked up the anarchy flag in recent years.

There's reasons for workers to stand together for next year's election, even if opponents scream "socialist" at every candidate that stands to the left of Donald Trump.

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The election of Zohran Mamdani "was a battle cry that absolutely needed to be sounded. In the last few years, we have been so bullied by the superrich. There's a sense that the rich are the ones who have the voice in every debate, whether it's about academia or the way the nation is run or how we live our lives with the tech revolution. And people have felt, I think, more and more hopeless about the enormity of the wealth and the impossibility of fighting it. Mamdani has shown how to get your fight back. It's very inspiring. Money doesn't buy everything. All that money went into stopping him and he still won. And you don't have to like his ideas to be glad of that. I'm very glad of it."

Tina Brown, in an interview with Lulu Barcia-Navarro of the *New York Times*, on November 15, 2025. Beginning in the 1980s, Brown was the editor in chief of *Vanity Fair*, followed by taking the helm of *The New Yorker*. She launched the political website *The Daily Beast* in 2008 and currently can be read on the Substack website with her newsletter *Fresh Hell*.



Buy American, Buy Union Shopping for the holiday season

by Gregg Potter, International Union of Operating Engineers #542
Executive Vice-President, Lehigh Valley Labor Council

The holiday season is fast approaching, but there is still plenty of time to start thinking about buying gifts for friends and family. Check out the websites below for union-made and American-made products



Remember, companies often relocate their manufacturing facilities. If you should buy anything from the online retailers, check to be sure their products or services are domestically manufactured.

www.madeinusaforever.com

www.howtobuyamerican.com

www.unionplus.org

www.unionlabel.com

www.usstuff.com

www.americansworking.com

www.madeinamerica.com

www.buyamerican.com

www.labor411.org

www.unionprouduisa.com

Computers and computer-related gear are high on the list of holiday gifts. Check out TDS Technologies, 1728 West Allen Street, Allentown. They also specialize in alarm and surveillance systems and can be reached at 610-351-4994. Best of all, the shop is represented by members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers #375.

I hope that none of you ever experience significant damage to your home, whether it be water, fire or other acts of nature. If you do, I sincerely recommend that you contact the Butz Co. You won't find a better company employing union construction tradesmen anywhere. My family chose to employ them for a recent home restoration project and the results speak for themselves. For more information, visit: <https://butz.com/restoration/>



Labor council holiday preparations

(continued from page three)

Monday, December 15, 2025

The toy delivery/parade is set to begin at the United Auto Workers (UAW) #677 hall at 2101 Mack Blvd., Allentown. We will meet at 9:00 a.m. and load vehicles for the parade to Roosevelt Elementary school.

At approximately 10:15 a.m., we leave the UAW hall for our parade on Emmaus Ave. to Roosevelt. We will unload vehicles and stage the items in the Roosevelt gymnasium for the parents to "shop with dignity" the following week.

After the delivery, we will head to Jack's Slice for pizza and solidarity at 3400 Tilghman St., Allentown.

In lieu of a toy, you may make a monetary donation. All monetary donations should be sent to, Lehigh Valley Labor Council, Attn: Dennis Andrews, 1705 Northampton Street, Easton PA 18042.

You may also volunteer for the event. Please RSVP to Executive Vice-President Gregg Potter at potterfb@msn.com.

As always, thank you for your support!



Workers first initiative on AI

(continued from page two)

"Unregulated AI poses an existential threat to workers, the public and humanity. That is why our labor movement has endorsed this AI agenda to supercharge our task force's efforts in the states to protect working people," said Lorena Gonzalez, president of the California Federation of Labor Unions and co-chair of the AFL-CIO State Federation AI Task Force. "We will stand up to the Big Tech corporations pushing a dangerous deregulatory agenda and building AI systems that harm workers without accountability."

The largest technology companies have responded by launching a multimillion dollar lobbying blitz, urging policy-makers to act against the public interest and let them unleash unregulated and untested AI on workers without guardrails in place to protect them from its harms. So far, many politicians have been eager to oblige Big Tech—with some members of Congress and the White House pushing to shield the AI industry from liability and government oversight under the guise of being "pro-innovation." The Workers First Initiative on AI will serve as a bulwark against corporate greed and set the agenda for technological advancement and the future of work.

"Technological progress and human dignity can and should advance together. Centering workers' voices in an AI policy agenda ensures a future where America both innovates and creates good jobs and opportunities for everyone," said Ed Wytkind, interim executive director of the AFL-CIO Technology Institute. "The AFL-CIO Workers First Initiative on AI advances a positive vision for new AI-enabled technologies—one rooted in good union jobs, high-quality public services, safety, racial justice and strong workers' rights."

The Workers First initiative on AI is the latest project by the AFL-CIO, the nation's largest labor federation representing sixty-three unions and nearly 15 million workers, to put working people at the center of the AI revolution. Since AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler created the AFL-CIO Technology Institute in 2021, it has worked with unions, government, civil society, universities and employers to ensure that the benefits of technology are broadly shared, creating good union jobs in communities, strengthening democracy and equity, and advancing worker protections that meet the needs of working people in a modern economy.



Credit: Boilermakers Union on X, formerly known as Twitter.



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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2026
Executive Board @ 7:00 PM – Delegate meeting @ 7:30 PM
Teamsters #773 3614 Lehigh Street, Whitehall PA 18052

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Lehigh Valley Print Center, 1701 Union Blvd., Suite 114, Allentown Pa. 18109
610-435-0313 / mail@LVprintcenter.com



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