



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. James Comer (R-KY), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services Hearing:
“The Future of Work: Protecting Workers’ Civil Rights in the Digital Age”
February 5, 2020**

(As prepared for delivery)

“Today, we are here to discuss how technological advancements are impacting workers.

New technologies continue to increase efficiency, reduce costs for employers in recruiting and hiring, and lead to quicker job placements and enhanced job opportunities. In a statement to this Committee, the HR Policy Association noted: ‘In a recent survey, 71 percent of staffing firms believe artificial intelligence will eliminate human bias from the recruitment process.’ So, not only can employers utilize new technologies to eliminate employment bias, but they can also be used to decrease the time and cost of doing business.

Technology has also driven the sharing economy, which has created substantial opportunities for workers and job creators who are seeking flexible workforce arrangements so they can better compete in our ever-changing economy. Workers are seeking out the benefits and flexibility these arrangements provide as they recognize how significantly they can improve their quality of life, as well as their families. This is a growing trend among American workers and jobseekers that should be encouraged, not impeded. Many businesses who also value flexibility and productivity are turning to independent contractors. The use of independent contractors makes sense for job creators looking to obtain high-quality services, for workers who want to offer their skills on their own terms, and for consumers who benefit from a reduction in the cost of goods and services.

Simply put, online platforms and other emerging technologies have given American workers more control, flexibility, and opportunity in the workplace than they have previously had.

Regardless of technological advancements, every American should have the opportunity to achieve success in the workplace free from discrimination. That is why there are important protections built into federal law to prevent workplace discrimination. These protections are broadly written and continue to apply to new and emerging technologies.

These laws protect individuals from employment discrimination based on age, color, disability, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, or sex.

Workers in the sharing economy are also protected. For example, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) has strong remedies in place for employers who incorrectly classify workers and violate minimum wage and overtime requirements. All workers should be paid in full for their work. That is why Committee Republicans support enforcement of the FLSA. We shouldn't penalize Americans who work for themselves or the companies that do business with them. Instead, we should applaud these Americans for their entrepreneurial spirit.

Our nation's laws were written so that they can be, and are, applied to employers' use of technologies in ways that protect workers. Additionally, it should go without saying that the overwhelming majority of businesses follow the law and want to do what is expected of them. Bottom line, workers, job creators, and the U.S. economy are all benefiting from today's technological advancements.

Madame Chair, before we hear from our witnesses, I need to take a moment to point out the hypocrisy of today's hearing. My Democrat colleagues want to talk about protecting workers' rights while they simultaneously push radical legislation that will undermine the rights of workers.

H.R. 2474, the PRO Act, which we expect will be on the House floor for a vote tomorrow, is written to bail out the failing labor union business model that is being widely rejected by American workers. This radical legislation would penalize entrepreneurship by creating an expansive, one-size-fits-all definition of an employee, which will increase costs for business owners as well as consumers, while limiting work opportunities for individuals who desire flexibility.

Instead, we should champion reforms that expand opportunities for flexibility, innovation, and entrepreneurship to give workers and job seekers opportunities to compete successfully in the modern economy.

I thank the witnesses for being here and I look forward to their testimony.”

###