

To: Re: Answer to Complaint to The Senate Ethics Committee

January 31, 2025

I. INTRODUCTION

I am writing this in response to the complaint against me by the PWG on January 10, 2024. I take any complaint by workers very seriously. My voting record shows I my commitment to workers, I have is 100 % with Union, Labor and working families. I have been a true and passionate champion of Worker's rights and workplace fairness and I have sponsored legislation to support workplace fairness.

The PWG complaint, however, is full of distortions and falsehoods and should never have been assigned to an Ethics Committee. The complaint focuses almost exclusively on internal office management. The only allegations that offer even an iota of “evidence” to support them are contained in an attachment detailing the complaints of two disgruntled young men who did not get the jobs and/or hours that they demanded.

The complaint was filed on behalf of the two men and three other persons. The three other persons fail to identify any complaints specific to them. In the formal complaint, the PWG refers, as evidence, primarily to one news outlet’s articles reporting that complaints had been made against me. Another article cited to an unnamed person who alleged that she was not paid in a timely manner. Further, the complaint references a letter sent to Senate Leadership on November 15th, 2024. Although I have asked repeatedly for that letter, I have not received it.

In total, this complaint is no more than a compilation of incidents unsupported by actual facts that are meant to focus attention on valid universal aide issues by scapegoating one Senator. Specifically, the truth is that this complaint is part of larger issues between aides and the General Assembly. As set out by one of the founders of the PWG:

PWG arose out of this refreshed labor movement, spurred to organize by the same subpar realities animating union drives around the country: low pay, lacking benefits, mistreatment, forced indignity, and zero job security. Our members are people determined to play a part in the functioning and maintenance of democracy, who for years were rewarded with low pay, long hours, frequent screaming, occasional groping, and the need to supplement the meager wages earned from their public service by delivering pizza and selling plasma.

and

We learned two of our most important lessons early: that power concedes nothing without a demand, and that power knows no partisanship. Despite Democratic candidates littering the state with pro-labor mailers, many are content to offer their own staff nothing but

long hours, low wages, and zero time-off. Despite Democratic majorities controlling the state legislature since PWG formed, every single concession PWG has extracted at the capitol in the past three years has been denied before ultimately being granted.

See Colorado Times Recorder, DAVIS: Lessons I Learned From Starting a Union, <https://coloradotimesrecorder.com/2024/01/davis-lessons-i-learned-from-starting-a-union/59029/>, January 16, 2024

In fact, the Guild is currently in a battle with Democratic leadership over the pay for aides:

The aides are seeking \$30 an hour, up from the current hourly wage of \$23. Their union, the Political Workers Guild of Colorado, says Democratic leaders have refused to engage with the group on its push for a living wage for staff, and that discussions have stalled. Democratic leaders dispute that assertion and say negotiations and conversations have been ongoing.

See CPR NEWS, Colorado legislative aides at odds with Capitol leadership over wage increase, <https://www.cpr.org/2024/03/12/colorado-legislative-aides-ask-for-wage-increase/>, Mar. 12, 2024.

It is clear that aides in general feel not appreciated and underpaid by members of the General Assembly. I agree that these issues should be raised and resolved. Unfortunately, however, I am being made the artificial focus of this larger conflict. I am being dragged through the mud for political ends. With false allegations, the PWG is using me to showcase its concerns. Other members are more than happy to put a focus on me so that they divert attention from their own issues and the larger issues of aide concerns.

Finally, the process by which this complaint is being investigated is unfair to me, to my constituents and to any sense of due process. I am being asked to answer a complaint that is largely bereft of specifics and, as noted above, refers to some material I have never seen, within ten (10) days. After I submit this answer, the Committee can and will collect a massive amount of information. Under the rules, I cannot respond to that information. I am given no opportunity to present my side of the story. This is anti-democratic and, again, a disservice to me and my constituents.

II. ABUSE OF POWER DYNAMIC-OFFICE MANAGEMENT ALLEGATIONS

A. Introduction

Legislative aides are hired to work during that legislative session, January through May of each year. *See Exhibit 1* (Senate Aide Job Description) Aides are not guaranteed specific hours. They are not guaranteed any hours during the off-session period. In fact, they are at-will employees who “serve at the pleasure of the hiring member or members and are appointed

without regard to the state personnel system.” Senate Rule 39(b)(emphasis added). An at-will employee can be hired or fired at any time without cause.

For the most part, the complaints of Mr. Doescher and Mr. Echeverry are internal workplace issues. In fact, they are contained in a document called “Workplace Expectations.” The timeline offered in that document describes events occurring almost exclusively the off-session time frame. In fact, Mr. Doescher says:

Throughout the 2024 legislative session, Luke developed a very friendly and productive relationship with Sen Jaquez Lewis. Despite what I had heard from other people Senator Jaquez Lewis treated me fairly and with kindness throughout the intense moments of the session.

Legislative aides work during the legislative session. They are not guaranteed a certain number of hours. Their schedule is worked out with the member. In the most current ad for Senate aides, it says:

Positions will start in January and run through the end of the legislative session, depending on the legislator’s schedule.....

\$24.57/hour, up to 40 hours/week. The actual work schedule will be developed in conjunction with your specific legislator.

Exhibit 1.

The issues raised in the “Workplace Expectations” document are internal office issues that should have been worked out informally, or at least through the Workplace Expectations Policy process. Instead, the aides went directly to Senator Fenberg and apparently then to the press. These are issues should not be the subject of an Ethics inquiry. If they are made so, every complaint of every aide for every Senator could become a subject of a formal ethics Committee.

B. Hiring and Firing

The major allegation in the PWG complaint (Workplace Expectations document) appears to be that Mr. Echeverry was “fired” and Mr. Doescher was “demoted.” Senate rules specify that aides are at-will employees, who serve at the pleasure of member.

Mr. Doescher and Mr. Echeverry accuse me of “Abuse of power dynamic.” Outside of the term being incomprehensible, they offer no evidence that “Senator Jaquez Lewis has continually demoted and promoted her staff without reason.” Under current policies, a Senator has complete discretion with regard to the hiring and firing of aides. In this case, I changed staff positions in order to accommodate Mr. Doescher, as he requested.

Again, in the complaint, Mr. Doescher, sometimes talking about himself in the third-person, states that:

Throughout the 2024 legislative session, Luke developed a very friendly and productive relationship with Sen Jaquez Lewis. Despite what I had heard from other people, Senator Jaquez Lewis treated me fairly and with kindness throughout the intense moments of the session.

An example of the kindness shown by me was my attempt to accommodate Mr. Doescher when he was applying for graduate school and had to reduce his hours. Instead of being grateful for my agreement to have Mr. Doescher work less hours as a junior aide (as opposed to a senior aide), he turns my kindness into something devious by saying that I demoted him without cause. This is **factually incorrect**.

Both Mr. Doescher and Mr. Echeverry allege that on November 13, without proper discussion or consent, Mr. Echeverry was fired from his position as Junior Aide and Mr. Doescher was demoted from his Senior Aide position. **This is clearly inaccurate.** Earlier in the fall, Mr. Doescher had asked me to write a letter of recommendation that would help him get into graduate school. I wrote a glowing letter for him. At that time, Mr. Doescher told me he would need to go part-time in January 2025, if he got into the Graduate program. As Mr. Doescher said:

“At this time I had submitted my application for graduate school but was waiting for my application to be complete with letters of reference and be reviewed. I discussed the possibility of stepping into a part-time role in the office to pursue more courses should I be admitted to the program. I understood that becoming a part-time aide would cause issues for Luis since there can only be 1 part-time aide.”

After he notified me that he got into graduate school, I gave Mr. Doescher the part-time Junior Aide position that he requested (and that Mr. Echeverry had occupied) and he accepted the position. Mr. Echeverry was the interim part time aide and his term was ending. Instead of offering the position again to Mr. Echeverry, I offered it to Mr. Doescher at his request. In fact, I offered Mr. Echeverry a paid fellowship in the office with the offer to help him find another position if he wanted one. This is a clear case of a disgruntled young man, Mr. Echeverry, who did not get the job he wanted, and he decided he could take advantage to cause public embarrassment.

In short, Mr. Echeverry was moved out of the junior aide position to accommodate Mr. Doescher. Again, Mr. Doescher turned this action on his behalf into a bad act on my part. That is not surprising because Mr. Doescher had advocated for me hiring Mr. Echeverry and “Mr. Doescher told Mr. Echeverry that he was on his side.” In fact, Mr. Doescher created a situation in which it was “Mr. Doescher and Mr. Echeverry” against me, only after it was clear that I would not be hiring Mr. Echeverry into the Leg staff for 2025.

In short, I was not dishonest. I was simply trying to accommodate everyone’s needs.

C. Hours

It is important to note that there is no guarantee of hours for legislative aides between sessions. Mr. Doescher and Mr. Echeverry complain that they did not get the number of hours they wanted. The legislative session in Colorado is January through May of each year. Mr. Doescher and Mr. Echeverry apparently had no issues with their hours during the 2024 session. Mr. Echeverry appears to be complaining about his hours after the session ended. During the time between sessions, there is very little work for aides. I have no control over that. When a person is hired as an aide, there is no guarantee that a minimum amount of work would be available. Once the Session is done, most Legislators heavily reduce legislative duties. In 2024 in particular, I was running for Re-Election and was focused on my campaign and helping other Senate races. Even when Mr. Echeverry was offered work, he complained that it was not good enough for him. He consistently turned down campaign work offered to him and complained about other work I tried to give him to provide him some income during the summer.

D. Training

Again, there is no guarantee or requirement as to what or how much training is allowed for aides. While certain training is recommended, no training is required. I have wanted the Leg aides I work with to have more training. In the past, I have encouraged Staff to attend webinars and other events that they have expressed interest in. There is a vague accusation here, yet no specifics have been shared. If you would provide me with the specific complaints, I may be able to respond.

E. Communication

I have no idea as to what Mr. Doescher is referring when he alleges that I would not let aides communicate with each other. If you would provide me with the specific complaints, I may be able to respond.

F. Followed Senators

It is totally untrue that Mr. Doescher was ever told to follow any Senators. I would ask him to look in the Senate committee hallway and outer area for a particular Senator when we were having trouble catching up with that Senator about a bill that was being voted on in committee, for example Senator Winter and I were trying to vote count a bill and we needed to locate and speak with Senator Mullica. Legislators ask aides to look for folks in the Chamber, call over to an office in SSB or in the building all the time so that the Senator can talk to a colleague. That is not an uncommon practice.

G. Office Organization

Individual office organization is not a proper subject of an ethics complaint. For example, the complaint about having a large number of emails as proof of some type of

mismanagement is petty. My most recent aide, Liz Rosenbaum told me that Senator Snyder has 30,000 emails but he knows exactly how to find what he needs when he needs it.

H. Other specific allegations in Workplace Expectations Document

In addition, Mr. Doescher and Mr. Echeverry allege a “Lack of Accountability by Senator Jaquez Lewis and the continuation of repeated behaviors despite the acknowledgment of these actions by leadership.” They offer no evidence of this except that I have denied false allegations made against me. I have publicly apologized for any hurt feelings or misunderstandings. At the same time, denying false allegations cannot, under any circumstance, be considered an ethical lapse. Again, both Mr. Echeverry and Mr. Doescher knew that going to the press with any allegation without offering any evidence would cause public punishment and would immediately be covered by the media. Mr. Doescher even admitted to me, that “I was told not to speak with you” by President Fenberg. That is a clear violation of the usual protocol of talking workplace issues out with the Senator and Aide and a Senate staffer.

Mr. Doescher states that he believes there was an unstable aide situation. Yet, Denice Walker has worked in my office for the entire 6 years that I have been a legislator. She is willing to go on the record about my treatment of staff in the office as being respectful and generous of my time. (Exhibit 2) Other former staff have submitted letters of support. (**Exhibit 3-6**)

I. Other Workplace Complaints

The formal PWG indicates that it is being submitted on behalf of five persons -- Li Davis, Luke Doescher, Luis Echeverry, Lacey McGinty, and Molly Stawinoga. The only specific allegations made are outlined in the attached Workplace Expectations document submitted by Luke Doescher and Luis Echeverry. Those allegations are addressed above. I have no information regarding the complaints made by the other three individuals. I can only guess what their allegations are.

1. Molly Stawinoga

I have to guess what allegations Ms. Stawinoga is making because they are not specified in the PWG complaint. I do know that the 2023 Session was extremely stressful. I was asked to be on three different committees by Majority Leader Moreno and the work was certainly anxiety producing. Ms. Stawinoga was a good legislative aide, and I was fond of her. I found out later that she was sensitive regarding several subjects that I didn't know at the time. For example, Molly's desk was in my office, we shared the office space because that shared office space was a very loud one with music playing 24hours a day and many social events were taking place in the adjoining office. I wanted Molly to be able to hear me without me shouting through the removable wall. On certain occasions, I would have to ask Molly to go outside of the inner office when I was having confidential conversations. I heard later that she was upset about that.

In another instance, she was very upset that I agreed to take on a very large bill related to gender affirming care and reproductive services because she was afraid, it would add too much to my workload. When I realized that she was concerned about the bill, I told her, I would find other staff help so she did not have to work on the bill. After the bill passed and the Governor was getting ready to sign it, it was a very exciting moment. Even though Molly had not wanted to work on the bill and did not work on the bill, I got her a pass to attend the bill signing because it was so historic, and she seemed very excited to be included.

When Ms. Stawinoga seemed to be struggling, I did suggest we meet with Jessica Martinez, the political staffer assigned to work with aides, who is not a trained HR professional. That did not seem to help a great deal. I was unaware of the extent to which she was struggling until Ms. Stawinoga went to Senator Winters in the office adjacent to ours to hold private meetings about her unhappiness. I was only informed about these private meetings in December of 2024. I was also told in December, that Senator Winter's aide Hazel Gibson advised and helped Molly write a letter to President Fenberg.

I absolutely apologize for any of my actions that upset her and for being unaware of the extent of her stress and anxiety. This is a perfect example of why aides should be able to go to an experienced HR person who can help resolve these types of issues.

2. Li Davis

Aide work is extremely stressful during the Legislative session. For some folks, it can be bad for their health. Davis was an Intern in the spring and summer of 2022. Li was very talented in graphic design. When I first met Li, they were working in a Chinese fast-food place in the district. They wanted to go to law school and was also an artist. Li also told me they were LGBTQ and wanted to get more involved in LGBTQ issues. They applied for the fulltime Leg aide job, but their experience and qualifications were not enough for that position. Instead, I fund raised and created a special stipend paid intern position for Li. Li did indicate that they wanted to be a fulltime aide for 2023. However, in or about August of 2022, I received a call from Davis' mother telling me that Li would not be coming into the office for a month or so because of stress-related issues. (I will provide more specific information if necessary. At this point, I will characterize the situation in general terms). It was almost a month, before Li came back from their leave.

I had already decided to hire a different person for that position and truly believed that Li was not the right person for that job. Li was very upset, but they did accept a one-day a week paid intern position to continue their quest to get into law school.

3. Lacey McGinty

Lacey McGinty was a campaign manager for my first Senate campaign for a short period in early 2021. As detailed below, she did complain about an invoice not being paid when she left the campaign. As discussed below, the invoice in question was for work she had not done. I

value the contributions from my hard-working donors and constituents and will not use those funds to pay invoices for work not performed. In addition, I, like other campaigns, let Ms. McGinty go after specific issues arose.

4. Conclusion

If these types of internal office matters are allowed to become ethics inquiries, the business of the Senate will come to a halt. (Of course, I am not talking about discrimination or other unlawful actions taken by Senators.) The issues cited in the Complaint should be handled under the policies implementing the *Workplace Expectations of the General Assembly*:

The General Assembly seeks to be prompt and thorough in addressing all concerns. Concerns based on the Workplace Expectations Policy are addressed through an informal resolution process, which is intentionally flexible to allow for a wide variety of options. As every situation is unique, every reported concern is addressed individually, based on the circumstances.

See <https://leg.colorado.gov/workplace-expectations>. The issues should not be handled by formal Senate Ethics committees.

I also find it disconcerting that the complaint against me is being pursued when complaints about workplace expectations against members are rarely, if ever brought and/or investigated. For example, there are social media posts about a House Rep who said, he wanted to take his Legislative Aide out to the parking lot and beat him up. There are Senators who yelled repeatedly at their Legislative Aides in front of others and when that Aide decided to quit, it was handled as it should have been, confidentiality with thorough discussions with all parties. When a Senate staffer in the President's office quit in the Spring of 2024, because of the toxic and stressful environment, it was handled as workplace matter, not as an item on the front page of a newspaper.

I do not wish to provide specific names of other members at this point but I point this out to the Ethics committee because allegations against me were leaked to the media and I was treated differently by Senate leadership than other Senators.

III. NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

Mr. Doescher alleges that he was required to sign an agreement that included an "unlawful" non-disclosure provision but has "no clear recollection of what he actually signed." The prohibition of non-disclosure agreements under certain circumstances was enacted in 2023. See C.R.S. § 24-50.5-105.5 (2023). Specifically, the statute prohibits nondisclosure agreements that limit state employees from disclosing factual circumstances concerning their employment. **Exceptions to that prohibition include:**

(II) Data; information, including personal identifying information, as defined in section 24-74-102 (1); or matters that are required to be kept confidential by federal law

or regulations, the state constitution, state law, state regulations, or state rules, or a court of law or as attorney-client privileged communications, as privileged work product, as communications related to a threatened or pending legal or administrative action, or as materials related to personnel or regulatory investigations by the employer;

(XIII) Information and records not subject to disclosure under the "Colorado Open Records Act", part 2 of article 72 of this title 24;

C.R.S. § 24-50.5-105.5(1)(a)(II) and (XIII). The Colorado Open Records Act allows inspection of public records. The term "public records" does **not** include: "Work product prepared for elected officials." C.R.S. § 24-72-202(6)(b)(II). ¹

In addition, the Colorado Open Records Act exempts deliberative process documents from public review:

(XIII) Records protected under the common law governmental or "deliberative process" privilege, if the material is so candid or personal that public disclosure is likely to stifle

¹ See C.R.S. § 24-72-202(6.5) (a) "Work product" means and includes all intra- or inter-agency advisory or deliberative materials assembled for the benefit of elected officials, which materials express an opinion or are deliberative in nature and are communicated for the purpose of assisting such elected officials in reaching a decision within the scope of their authority. Such materials include, but are not limited to:

(I) Notes and memoranda that relate to or serve as background information for such decisions;
(II) Preliminary drafts and discussion copies of documents that express a decision by an elected official.

(b) "Work product" also includes:

(I) All documents relating to the drafting of bills or amendments, pursuant to section 2- 3-304 (1) or 2-3-505 (2)(b), C.R.S., but it does not include the final version of documents prepared or assembled pursuant to section 2-3-505 (2)(c), C.R.S.;

(II) All documents prepared or assembled by a member of the general assembly relating to the drafting of bills or amendments;

(III) All documents prepared by or submitted to any legislative staff in connection with assisting a member of the general assembly in responding to the correspondence from a constituent when such correspondence is not a public record of an elected official as provided for in subsection (6) of this section;

(IV) All documents and all research projects conducted by staff of legislative council pursuant to section 2-3-304 (1), C.R.S., if the research is requested by a member of the general assembly and identified by the member as being in connection with pending or proposed legislation or amendments thereto. However, the final product of any such research project shall become a public record unless the member specifically requests that it remain work product. In addition, if such a research project is requested by a member of the general assembly and the project is not identified as being in connection with pending or proposed legislation or amendments thereto, the final product shall become a public record.

honest

and frank discussion within the government, unless the privilege has been waived.

C.R.S. § 24-72-204(3)(a).

When I assumed office as a House Rep in 2019, nondisclosure agreements were not prohibited and in fact I received a template from another Rep. Political campaigns regularly use confidentiality agreements. When I was elected to the Senate, I received a Dem Senate Caucus one page confidentiality document that Dem staff recommended. **Exhibit 7**. Once I learned about the new legislation, I ceased using prohibited agreements.

The agreements I have used do not violate the nondisclosure laws. Those agreements prohibited the release of “confidential” information, including information made confidential by law, work product, proposed legislation, and private information about constituents and the Senator and her family. That information is allowed or required to be kept confidential by law. In addition, my agreements specifically allow any employee to disclose any information, including confidential information, pursuant to Workplace Expectations Policy, or the Workplace Harassment Policy or any disclosure allowed by law. That provision clearly meets the legal requirement that an employee be allowed to discuss “factual circumstances concerning their employment,” while still allowing certain appropriate information to be kept confidential.

Thus, there is no basis for a finding of an ethical violation here.

IV. WAGE THEFT ALLEGATION

Perhaps the most outrageous allegation in the Complaint is that I committed wage theft, which is untrue and constitutes actionable slander. The only “factual” support offered in support of that allegation is two news articles. The first is an article referring to the PWG complaint. In short, the basis for the allegation of wage theft is an article saying that the allegation of wage theft was made. (Proof of the complaint is reference to the complaint in a newspaper?).

The second referenced article describes a complaint made by an **unnamed** aide that she was not paid in a timely manner. To the best of my knowledge, the specific allegation is simply that I did not sign off on a timesheet when I was traveling. The allegation of wage theft is ridiculous, defamatory and clearly shows the lengths PWG will go to in order to achieve its goals.

Wage theft in Colorado law is defined as:

(2) In addition to any other penalty imposed by this article 4, any employer or agent of an employer who **willfully refuses to pay wages** or compensation as provided in this article 4, or falsely denies the amount of a wage claim, or the validity thereof, or that the same is due, with intent to secure for himself, herself, or another person any discount upon such indebtedness or any underpayment of such indebtedness or with intent to annoy, harass,

oppress, hinder, coerce, delay, or defraud the person to whom such indebtedness is due, commits theft as defined in section 18-4-401.

C.R.S. § 8-4-114(2).

I was traveling when the timesheet was submitted by an interim Aide. Instead of calling me, the Senate political staffer took the matter to President Fenberg, who then leaked it or allowed it to be leaked to the press, making it an intentional “hit piece” on me. (I would note that this occurred as Fenberg and I were disagreeing about oil and gas legislation). The timesheet was signed, and the temporary interim aide was paid in a timely manner. There is no basis at all to refer this for a formal ethics inquiry.

My understanding – although again I do not know the specifics of any allegations – is that Ms. McGinty is also alleging that I did not pay her wages earned. As noted above, Ms. McGinty was a campaign manager for me during my Senate campaign in 2021. She was dismissed for multiple reasons, and she was paid a final paycheck for the hours that she actually worked. I would note first that the Senate Ethics Committee has no jurisdiction over events that occurred in my campaigns. It is a dangerous precedent for the Senate to investigate private affairs of its members. Nevertheless, there was a situation in which Ms. McGinty asked to be paid for work she had not done. Specifically, she gave me an invoice for canvassing work done by another campaign aide. I refused to pay it. I am very careful with campaign funds. I will not use it to pay fraudulent invoices. In addition, Ms. McGinty was leaking campaign information to other campaigns, without permission. Like other campaigns before mine, I also had to let her go.

V. CAMPAIGN FINANCE ALLEGATIONS

A. Allegation that I paid for Personal Work with Campaign Funds

As to the allegation by Mr. Echeverry that I paid him to do personal work for me using campaign funds, it is completely false. On July 6, 2024, I hosted a fundraiser at my house for my campaign and other Democratic candidates for office. Majority Leader Rodriguez was at the fundraiser and several other Democratic candidates attended. When Mr. Echeverry asked me for work in July, I told him that there was nothing in the office (the Senate was in recess) but that he could earn some money by helping with a campaign event. (No good deed goes unpunished). As noted in the PWG complaint itself, I told him that the work would be hot and dirty because the duties included organizing the backyard by moving and setting up outside furniture, moving plants aside on the decks, and setting up food tables, beverage tables, and outside seating for attendees of the fundraiser. He voluntarily agreed (although he later said that the work was beneath him). Several other Campaign staffers helped with the event and all were asked to do similar work. In fact, other campaign staffers continued to do campaign work.

I paid Mr. Echeverry \$175 from my campaign committee account for his work to help set up the fundraiser event. The funds paid to Mr. Echeverry were directly related to supporting my re-election campaign in compliance with CRS §1-45-106(1)(a)(II), and existing case law. *See*

Williams v. Teck, 113 P.3d 1255, 1258-59 (Colo. App. 2005). The payment to Mr. Echeverry was reported in TRACER and Amended in the August 1, 2024, report.

Mr. Echeverry worked on a day when actual yard workers were there to mow and weed. The “migrant woman and child” to which that Mr. Echeverry referred are a family that we are helping to host, and the mother was doing inside work while her child was reading. When the child finished inside, she came out to assist until we could give them a ride home. The child saw her mother helping to collect compost and jumped in momentarily until we saw her and stopped that. As a Latina, whose family has endured discrimination and prejudice, I am astounded and insulted that Mr. Echeverry would use a Latina mother and child to support an outrageous allegation that he was singled out because he was Latino. In January 2024, when CLLARO referred Mr. Echeverry to my office for the CLLARO fellowship, he told me he picked my office to work in because of my legislative record and work on immigration policy.

In short, Mr. Echeverry was paid for his work, which is evidenced by the checks he included in his complaint. There is no basis for an ethics inquiry.

Further, campaign financing complaints come under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State, as noted on the Secretary of State’s website:

The campaign finance complaint process addresses potential violations of Colorado campaign and political finance (CPF) laws as outlined under section 1-45-111.7, C.R.S. and Rule 23 of the Secretary’s Rules Concerning Campaign Finance. Campaign finance complaints are handled by the Campaign Finance Enforcement Team in the Elections Division (Division) of the Secretary of State’s Office. The complaint process has several stages outlined in statute and can include initial review, opportunity to cure, investigation, and hearings.

See <https://www.coloradosos.gov/pubs/elections/CampaignFinance/complaintFAQs.html>.

A political operative has filed a complaint against me with the SOS based on the accusations of Mr. Doescher and Mr. Echeverry in the media. I am working through that complaint with the Secretary’s office and have already offered a cure and remedy. Any action from the Senate on alleged campaign finance is premature and is under the purview of the Secretary of State’s office.

B. Knocking on Doors

In addition, and in another effort to provide Mr. Echeverry with work, in June 2024, I referred him to Valerie Vigil for work on her campaign. Ms. Vigil was running in a primary campaign for Adams County Commissioner. Towards the end of June 2024, I paid Luis \$275 and reported an in-kind donation to Ms. Vigil’s campaign for his work. When I met up with Mr. Echeverry, I inadvertently grabbed the wrong checkbook and accidentally gave him a \$275 check from my candidate committee account, Sonya for Colorado, instead of from the leadership PAC,

Sonya for Dems. I corrected the mistake by amending the TRACER report and refunding my campaign account for this expenditure.

C. Payment not reported to Tracer

I paid Mr. Doescher extra money for working in my office. I did that because working in the Capitol is stressful, and I value my legislative staff. Those payments are not required, and I do so on my own volition. The payments were listed in Tracer.

VI. LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The PWG complaint accuses me of a “lack of accountability.” It is the case that I have disputed false or inaccurate claims and allegations. I assume any Member would do the same. It is not true, though, that I have ignored concerns of aides and other staff. I understand that aides in general are frustrated and want to convert the Guild into a union. I agree that we must do more to support aides, interns and fellows at the Capitol. The recent workplace policy requires that legislative aides must report everything to a political staffer, and not an HR trained professional. Legislative aides are treated differently than other Capitol staff in this regard. The policy should be reexamined, and I offer to take leadership in that process.

I have taken proactive steps in my office this Session to make life better for staff. For example, I worked with a HR trained professional to meet with my current Aide. We have already had two (2) meetings with Mr. FitzSimons. My current aide has access to confidential discussions and extra training if she wants it. We, the Senate, should allow aides to get professional HR support instead of being political pawns. That should be a goal we have.

I have fundraised to pay every intern in my office. As you know, most offices do not pay interns. I always have, for the 6 years I’ve been in office. I pay my office Legislative aides extra, above their salary, and give extra money for gas and parking because it is the right thing to do and I understand how hard the work is. I am trying to do something about the fact that we do not have adequate and trained staff assistance for new aides coming into their first professional job.

Finally, I take full responsibility for the running of my office and management of office staff. I always apologize to persons I cannot hire, including the individuals referenced in the PWG complaint. I apologized to the staffer who I helped to get into graduate school, but could not offer a fulltime job while he was there. I have apologized to the staffer who was so stressed that she asked me not to run any more bills in 2023. I do appreciate my staff and always want the best for them within the constraints of my work for my constituents.

VII. CONCLUSION

I understand that the Political Workers Guild (PWG) is upset. They want collective bargaining. I have learned that some have not known that I am trying to make the Capitol a better place to work by providing weekly team lunches and other things. I have learned that some Senators and Reps would prefer office managers instead of aides. They do not have the capacity

to mentor first-time workers and some of our colleagues would rather have administrative staff and/or executive assistant staff. That is why some Senators like Senator Sullivan and Catlin have family members as staff or, as Senator Ginal did almost every session, would go without an aide. Flexibility in staff models is the discussion that we should have. We legislators should strive to improve the working conditions at the Capitol.

I do not believe, however, that I should be the focus of the discussion, or the platform on which PWG's bid for unionization should be built. For those reasons, I believe that this Complaint should be dismissed. Rather, internal office issues should be worked through according to the Workplace Expectations procedures. Campaign finance issues should be worked through with the Secretary of State. Finally, allegations unsupported by any facts should be set aside and not subject to ethics inquiries.

This constitutes my initial response to the complaint brought against me by PWG. Out of fairness and in accordance with due process, I ask that I be allowed to respond to the information collected by the Committee to the extent that it is used in the Committee's consideration and recommendations. I want to be informed of allegations against me as any person would.

Respectfully,

Senator Sonya Jaquez Lewis

Colorado SD17

Cc: Senator Julie Gonzales, Chair, Senator Dylan Roberts, Senator Mike Weissman,

Senator Cleave Simpson, Senator John Chase

Ed DeCecco



Senate Democratic Caucus Legislative Aide

The Colorado Senate Democratic Caucus is looking for talented aides to assist our State Senators during the 2025 legislative session. Being a legislative aide is an exciting position that puts you in the middle of Colorado's political action.

Aides help in the implementation of the Senate Democrats' policy goals by providing administrative, written, and logistical support to individual senators. Roles, responsibilities, and scope of work for each legislative aide is determined by their respective Senator as each Senator's needs for their offices vary. Duties may include organizing the lawmaker's day-to-day work and calendar, scheduling meetings and events, maintaining contact lists and files, conducting issue research, supporting their Senator's work on legislation, overseeing office outreach and social media, interacting with constituents, website back-end management, and if appropriate, supervising interns.

Skills and Experience:

- Excellent writing and verbal communication skills and "people skills"
- Interest in Colorado politics and statewide issues
- Excellent attention to detail and organizational skills (scheduling and event planning)
- Basic knowledge of Colorado government
- Ability to work independently and take initiative
- Computer skills (Microsoft Word/excel, VAN, social media, web skills preferred, but not required)
- Good judgment and flexibility
- Ability to manage stress in a fast-paced environment

Positions will start in January and run through the end of the legislative session, depending on the legislator's schedule.

Compensation

\$24.57/hour, up to 40 hours/week. The actual work schedule will be developed in conjunction with your specific legislator. Each Senator's designated full-time senior aide will also be eligible to enroll in health, life, and dental insurance benefits under the Colorado State Employee Benefits Plan. Free Eco Passes are provided on a year-to-year basis, and future benefits are subject to available funding.

How to Apply

To apply for this position, please send a resume and cover letter to jessica.v.martinez@coleg.gov with the subject line 'Senate Dem Aide Position'. The deadline to apply for this position is Friday, January 15th at 5:00 PM, however applications will be considered on a rolling basis, so applicants are encouraged to submit their materials as soon as possible.

Equal Opportunity: We welcome applicants from all walks of life, and strongly encourage individuals of color, women, LGBTQ, immigrant, refugee, people with disabilities, and other communities to apply.

Denice Walker
2500 S. Public Rd
Lafayette, CO 80026

To Whom It May Concern,

I have known Senator Sonya Jaquez Lewis since 2008. I have worked with the Senator now 7 years that she has been in public office in a variety of roles, including as her Chief of Staff, Leg Aide, Intern, Volunteer and campaign staff. I have worked with almost everyone who has been hired in the Senator's office since she was elected.

I know and have worked with the 5 people who are raising allegations against the Senator. I am astounded and do not see anything factual in what they are claiming against Senator Jaquez Lewis.

A little background, the Senator and I met working on a political campaign. She was the field organizer for a large campaign (over 75 volunteers) and I was impressed immediately with how well she worked with everyone.

When Sonya decided to run for the Colorado State House in 2018, I immediately offered to volunteer for her. She would be the first Latina and the first LGBTQ elected to the General Assembly from Boulder County. I worked with her and her campaign manager and large volunteer group. Sonya and our team did such a great job and at County Assembly, she won by 72% of the vote and went on to win in November. When Rep Jaquez Lewis offered me a part time job at the Capitol (I am retired and can only work part-time), I wholeheartedly said yes.

Rep Jaquez Lewis was an adjunct Professor at the School of Pharmacy and a Board approved preceptor for Pharmacy students. Sonya works very well with young people and has for decades. Because I am a retired Educator, she asked me to recruit and help train interns and volunteers for the Leg office.

Anyone who meets Sen. Jaquez Lewis knows that she is a very nice person. Over the last 7 years, we have seen Aides and Interns come and go and I can wholeheartedly say, she tried to work with and help each and every one of them. She is respectful and generous with her time to staff. We had group meetings, she paid intern stipends and she provides lunches for the office during the Session. She has always cared deeply about what happens to our Staff, during COVID, she encouraged us to stay at home and work remote until it was safe to come back to work.

The Senator bent over backwards to give chances to some of the 5 accusers when their qualifications were not on par. The Senator always tried to help Aides and Interns grow and develop their opportunities and career dreams. The Senator wrote letters of recommendation for several of them and encouraged them to stretch their skill sets and talents and let them pick the projects that they could work on.

This past 2024 session, I never heard one complaint from Luke or Luis about the Senator. It is very apparent, that when Luis did not get the Leg Aide job because Luke wanted it when he got into Graduate school, that something changed with both of them. Luke was in school during the 2024 session and the Senator encouraged him to do so and allowed for flexible scheduling so he could be off to take tests and go to classes. Luke made it clear to everyone that he wanted to finish graduate school and that he would need to quit or go part time in 2025.

Luis is another story. He turned down projects and other job opportunities and did not seem that interested in a fulltime Leg Aide position. He was not a go getter and seemed lost because he has not been accepted into graduate school for 2024 or 2025. I am shocked at his campaign allegations. They make no sense from what I know of the Senator.

I worked very closely with Li and Molly in 2023. The Senator was Chair of an important Senate committee and one of only 3 Senators who was also serving on 3 committees. That is a huge stretch for any Senator. We needed all hands on deck. Molly did a great job but she seemed to be anxious and by the time mid Session came along, very stressed out. I was shocked when I heard her say she did not want the Senator to take on other bills that were being brought to her. One time I heard Molly say she did not feel well and I distinctly heard the Senator tell her to go home and take the rest of the day off so that she could rest. The Senator noticed that Molly seemed to be tired and maybe losing weight and the Senator frequently brought in lunches for all of us including veggie lunches for Molly. Another time, Molly was crying because she was asked to leave the Senator's office for a private meeting and she seemed bothered by that. I told her, it is okay, nothing personal, some conversations have to be down in private and the Senator had set up an extra desk for Molly to work at. I was astounded that Molly has alleged that she was mistreated. I did hear Molly say that she hated politics and was not sure this was the job for her. She was very frustrated with her own Senator in another District where she lived because of how he voted and could not understand why Senators treated each other so disrespectfully.

Li Davis was a tough challenge for us. They really wanted to go to law school but had been turned down several times. The Senator could not offer Li the Leg aide position, they were not qualified. The Senator instead created a position to give them a chance. I watched the Senator give projects to Li and they would struggle at the best way to tackle them. Li is an artist and did well at design projects but policy projects seemed tough. I watched Li work with a Senate staffer on a complex health care bill and their hands would shake so badly that the meeting had to stop to make sure that Li was ok. In the interim of 2022, I was contacted by the Senator to see if I could assist in correspondence because Li had to take a leave. Later that fall, when I saw Li next in person, they told me they had been in-patient and outpatient treatment for anxiety and depression. I was relieved the Senator did not pick Li to be the next fulltime Leg aide. It would have been too much for them.

I worked with Lacey McGinty on the Sonya's first campaign for Senator. She was hired as the campaign manager. She went to the County party meetings for the Rep Jaquez Lewis during session and was in charge of campaign material design. In March we were doing canvass lit

drops and Lacey called me to work on a Saturday and Sunday because her child was sick. I said yes and did it. Then, I happened to mention it to Sonya and she told me that Lacey had billed her for those hours. Then, later that week, the Rep called to tell me that she had to let Lacey go. Not only for billing for hours that she did not work but also for sharing some campaign issues and other information to another campaign manager that Lacey had become attached to.

In my opinion, Senator Jaquez Lewis is being singled out by disgruntled young people who did not get the job they wanted or were let go or just disliked the toxic and high school atmosphere of the political place of the Legislature. The Senator wants things done correctly and is a very careful person. She is trained as a Pharmacist and errors can mean life or death in her former workplace. She loves working with young people and has many success stories of our former aides and interns who have excelled in other policy and legislative jobs. I believe many of those former staffers have excelled because of the excellent example that Senator Jaquez Lewis set for them. We get letters, thank you cards and phone calls all the time from her constituents and advocates who have worked with the Senator, who love her and so grateful for all that she has accomplished in 7 years. There is nothing in any of these "stories" that would rise to an Ethics violation. The Senator has the right to hire who she believes will do the best job for the people of Colorado.

Sincerely,

Denice Walker

January 31, 2025

Tara Mastracchio
1704 E 97TH DR
Thornton 80229

My name is Tara Mastracchio. I am writing to support my former boss and current Senator Sonya Jaquez Lewis.

I worked on Senator Sonya's recent re-election campaign and helped with legislative work briefly and left to travel and do other work and came back to help on several campaigns this past summer and fall. I would work with the Senator again without question. I have full faith in her and she has always paid me very generously.

I know the allegations by Luis Echeverry and Luke Doescher to be FALSE. I was working at the fundraiser at Sonya's house for her campaign that was in question. There were other Senate campaign staffers there because there was a lot of work to do to set up the stage and beverage area and other areas outside. No one was doing personal work. That is a crazy story. We were paid very fairly to help set up and run a major campaign event. A lot of people were there because people trust the Senator and want to be supportive of all the good work she does.

To be perfectly honest, Luis was a terrible worker and complained the whole time. I think the Senator could tell he did not want to be there and told him he could head out early if he wanted to. He told me that he wanted to take Luke's place and he was waiting to hear if he got into school. I told him the vast majority of Aides worked in campaigns before they worked at the Capitol and that he should get to know SD17. He had to be told what to do and how to do the most basic of tasks. He seems to have no initiative. He kept complaining about not getting into graduate school.

To the other allegations, I also helped with the Valerie Vigil campaign and I was never paid out of Senator Sonya's campaign funds. I know Valerie needed funds

by the end of her primary race and I know she was calling folks to donate more and that the Senator mentioned that she was going to do more to help her cousin because the campaign limits are very different than the Senate races. I worked very closely with Sonya and she would never intentionally violate any campaign rules. She is very careful and thoughtful because I worked on both sides at different times, for campaigns and then legislative work.

I also met Luke Doescher at the end of this past Session when the Senator invited the bid committee that is trying to bring the International Gay Games to Colorado to the Capitol. The Senator was named an international ambassador to the Bid Committee and the Governor and Mayor are helping with the efforts also. Luke told me that he was probably going to leave to go to Graduate school and Luis wanted the job. Much later in the fall, I mentioned this to the Senator and I said that I hope she would not hire Luis because he would not be the kind of worker that she needed in her busy office.

These personnel conflicts should have never been elevated to the media. I have worked in law enforcement and for other public entities and this situation would have never been handled this way. It has been completely mishandled by someone trying to do something to Senator Jaquez Lewis. It is painfully obvious. My guess is that Luis and then, Luke pressured by Luis, knew or were told by someone that they should go directly to the Press to hurt the Senator.

Sonya is kind, very nice, compassionate and tries to help others, probably to a fault because she has tried to give many young adults a chance to be a part of helping others. The way she has her entire life. The Senator has not violated any ethics rules and this should have been thrown out ages ago and she should be restored to her well earned standing so she can keep doing the work that the voters elected her to do. Do the right thing, Throw these ridiculous charges out, they don't belong in a Senate committee. Thank you.

Letter to Senate Commission

Anna McLean
Aurora, CO 80015

To the Senate Commission,

I worked with Sonya Jaquez Lewis in the Senate as a Leg Aide after we were coming back to work after the COVID.

She was a terrific boss. I had small children at the time but really needed a job and wanted to work with someone who was working on healthcare issues and reproductive rights work. She had just fought hard to pass a bill to give healthcare to immigrant women and families and I was so excited to work with her. I really loved the work we did.

I needed a flexible schedule and she worked with me all along the way. If I did not have so many home commitments at the time, I would have loved to have worked for her fulltime.

We have kept in touch on and off. She has written job recommendations for me and helped give me advice. I never witnessed any mistreatment in our office. She bought us lunches, gave us little treats and let us pick the projects that we wanted to work on.

I would tell anyone to work with Senator Jaquez Lewis anytime and anywhere.

Kelsey Oliver
Formerly lived in Erie at
1384 Carlson Ave Erie, CO

To Whom it Matters:

I am a former intern of Rep Jaquez Lewis and was a volunteer when she was running for office.

I was a newbie to Colorado politics when I met Sonya Jaquez Lewis. Her infectious energy and passion for issues and the values that I hold dear was instantly apparent.

Sonya is a great communicator and she inspired me to get more involved in making a difference at the local level. I met so many folks while working on her campaign. I know that some of the folks I volunteered with, have gone onto to become Lobbyists in the Capitol. One campaign worker is now a Legislative fiscal staffer. Another one of her aides now works for the Mayor of Denver. They all have nothing but praise for now Senator Sonya. One of them told me that it breaks their heart to read these things in the press but they can not come forward without feeling like they will become political pawns to what that PWG is doing and what Senate leadership is allowing to happen to her when they know full well Aides have quit or been fired many many times with other Senators and even the past President's staff.

I was always paid very fairly by Sonya and she even gave extra money for gas and other expenses.

I have been following this news and I think this is disgusting that her good name is being slandered. None of these stories started happening until the last Senate President took over. Senator Sonya was in leadership and suddenly when she started taking on the Oil and Gas and big Chemical companies did these stories start leaking out in the press. Common sense says something stinks here. She served for 6 years with no issues. She has worked with dozens and dozens of volunteers and other staff. And at least one of the people I worked with is one of the people listed who is complaining and they were let go because they were not working on the campaign like they were supposed to. That manager was not easy to work with and she told me that she had been fired before by a another campaign.

Senator Sonya has given so much to her community. The more I think about this the more outraged I become. These kind of stories should have been handled as workplace issues by an HR person. I watched 2 other campaigns fire campaign managers and nothing made the press there. It was an honor to work for and with Sonya Jaquez Lewis. She has mentored me to become a contributing and caring member of society. Please treat her with the respect she deserves and has earned. She has been elected by overwhelming margins and the voters have spoken and need to be listened to.

I am a former Aide of Senator Jaquez Lewis and helped her at various campaign events. I can only speak from my personal experience, but I enjoyed my work with the Senator. We shared open communication and built a healthy working relationship. I was always treated with professionalism and respect. My contributions were valued, and I was always fairly compensated for my work, even paying me over the regular Aide wage. She was always willing to teach me and devoted time to my personal growth. She is a dedicated public servant and it was a joy to work with her. I think many of these issues stream from organizational challenges rather than deliberate actions. I have great respect for her and believe she cares deeply about her team and her mission.

I wish to remain anonymous because of continued employment in the Legislature.

AIDE CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I understand that as an aide to Senator _____, I may have access to sensitive and/or confidential information, including, but not limited to: Information designated as confidential by law, such as work product, proposed legislation or amendments to proposed legislation, and information about the private lives of constituents; private information about Senator _____ and members of his/her immediate family, such as home addresses, telephone numbers, and personal health information; and internal legislative strategies and internal operations of the office of Senator _____ and/or the Colorado Senate Democratic Caucus. I understand the disclosure of such sensitive and/or confidential information outside of my work could breach my duties as an employee of Senator _____. Accordingly, I represent and warrant that during and following my employment with Senator _____, I will not disclose such sensitive and/or confidential information outside of my work environment unless I am required by Senator _____ or as otherwise allowed by this agreement. Further, I represent and warrant that I will not take or use such sensitive and/or confidential information for personal gain or advantage or take any action that would create a conflict of interest either during or following my employment.

I further understand that any violation of this agreement can result in disciplinary action being taken against me, termination of my employment, and/or legal action being taken against me to enforce any rights and remedies available, including, but limited to, injunctive relief. I also understand that nothing in this agreement prevents me from disclosing such sensitive and/or confidential information: Relevant to filing a complaint alleging a violation of the Colorado General Assembly's Workplace Expectation Policy or the General Assembly's Workplace Harassment Policy; relevant to filing a criminal complaint; or to the extent required by law or by the request or requirement of any judicial, legislative, administrative, or other governmental body.

Aide Signature: _____

Print Aide Name: _____

Date: _____

The following articles were linked in the answer.

- NEWS
- OPINIONS

DAVIS: Lessons I Learned From Starting a Union

by
[Logan M. Davis](#)
posted on
January 16, 2024

On an unseasonably warm Sunday afternoon in January 2021, my friends and I gathered around a shoddy table in a borrowed conference room for the specific purpose of causing trouble. Some were legislative aides, historically underpaid and mistreated at the state Capitol. Some were campaign workers, historically underpaid and mistreated on the campaign trail. All of us knew we deserved better, and all of us had come to the realization that asking nicely wasn't going to do the trick. We had gathered to put a collective foot down.

By the time we departed that afternoon, we had assembled the document which would become the first official bylaws of the Political Workers Guild of Colorado. While that document – a copy-pasted nightmare of a rush job, stitched together from scraps of other union bylaws, tailored clumsily to our nascent cause – has been edited and amended in successive years, the group it animated has remained. Today, three years later, PWG is the largest unit in the Denver local for the Communications Workers of America/The News Guild, representing 100-plus workers in the state capitol and on the state's campaign trails – more than three times as many members as we had at the start.

In the past three years, PWG has made real gains for real workers. We have meaningfully improved pay and conditions for legislative aides at the state capitol, and have established best practices for pay, time off, and treatment for campaign workers.

I thought I knew a thing or two when we launched this experiment. Now, looking back on three years in union leadership, three years of challenging power and winning, I

could fill volumes with what I didn't know at the beginning. The lessons I've learned in three years of stepping outside the established boundaries have taught me more about politics – and more about power – than coloring inside the lines ever did.

These are my biggest takeaways.

1. A Union is its People, Not its Contract

To get the jargon out of the way early: the [Political Workers Guild of Colorado](#) is what's known as an open-model union, organized under CWA/NewsGuild. Unlike traditional unions where the members of a unit share a workplace and work according to a contract negotiated between management and the union, our membership, and our approach, has always been more diffuse.



This was in part a matter of necessity: when PWG formed, Colorado legislative aides were explicitly forbidden from collective bargaining, and campaign workers – who are primarily independent contractors and likewise deprived of the right to bargain – have no central entity with which to bargain, even if they had the right to do so.

In the strictest sense, we did not have a right to form a union. We did it anyway, and became the first group of our kind in the country.

What we lacked in rights, we made up for in knowledge: knowledge of the key political players in the state, and knowledge of the value of our labor. “They need us,” we reasoned. “If they fire aides, we’ll refuse to work for their campaigns,” those of us on the political side promised, hoping it wouldn’t come to that; hoping we would hold to the

promise if it did. “They can’t fire all of us,” we repeated to each other, mantra-like, in the early months.

With this rationale, and no evidence that it was true, [we made our public debut](#) – and it turned out we were right. Within a month of our launch, we had secured recognition from the Speaker of the House and the Senate President. Within three months of our launch, we had secured something much more important: healthcare for legislative aides, for the first time ever.

Now, in 2024, PWG represents a supermajority of Colorado legislative aides. We represent dozens of campaign workers, many of whom manage races for the same elected officials employing the legislative aides in the capitol. At first, we grouped these two kinds of workers together to ensure our survival: to create a larger body of members to look out for one another, to exert pressure for one another. What started as a matter of survival ultimately gives us our greatest strength — our shared identity as laborers in the machinery of democracy, deeply wedded to hoped-for outcomes, sick of being grist for the mill. Our shared identity as political workers.

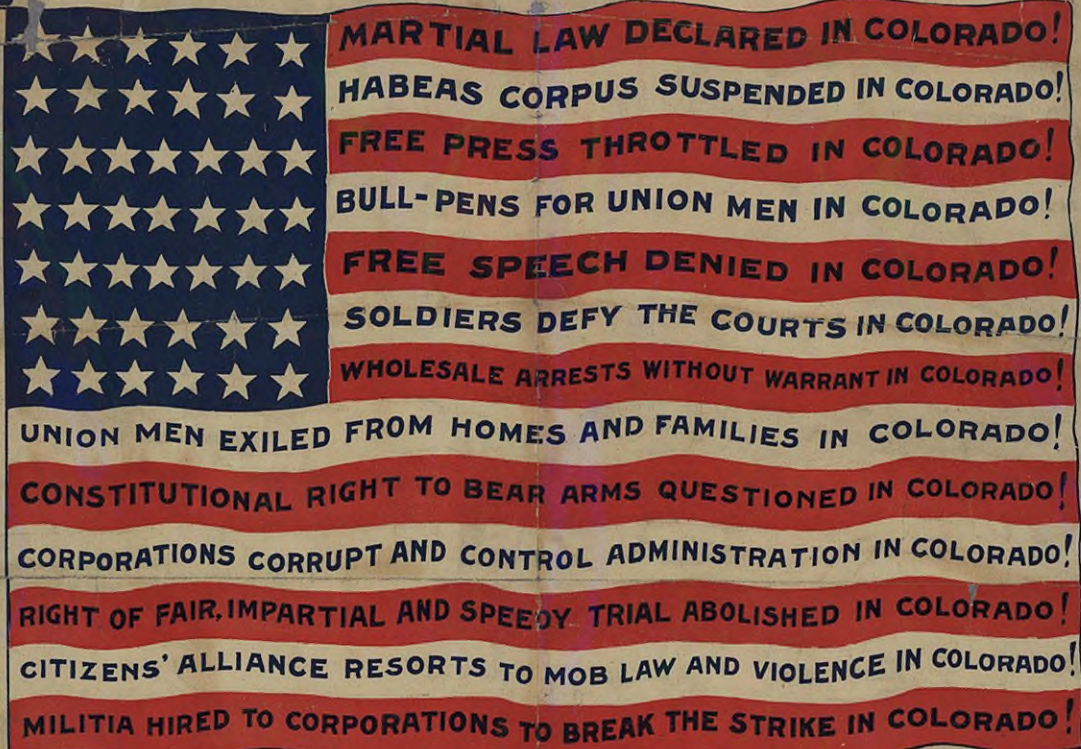
As an open-model union, we have never had the luxury of a contract. We have had to operate in the way unions operated before the Clayton Act, or the National Labor Relations Act of 1935: with no guardrails, no real institutional or legal protection, and no one to fight for us but us. Together, without a contract or an official right to bargain collectively, we have helped establish the first-ever best practices for campaign workers’ rights, and have increased annual take-home pay for Colorado legislative aides by more than 50% – a series of gains our higher-ups in CWA said rival anything they have seen in their careers.

2. The Struggle for Workers’ Rights Has Changed – But it’s Far From Over

Unions aren’t what they used to be, it’s true. Gone are the days of [Blair Mountain](#), [Homestead](#), and the [Colorado Labor Wars](#), when workers took up arms and gave their lives for the rights we now have. That’s a good thing. Today’s struggle is for

rights and dignity in a different economy, in a different century. It's being waged by a combination of traditional labor unions and a new wave of unions organizing in non-traditional workplaces. The struggle for workers' rights has changed in the 21st century, like the economy within which it struggles, but it's far from over.

IS COLORADO IN AMERICA?



MARTIAL LAW DECLARED IN COLORADO!
HABEAS CORPUS SUSPENDED IN COLORADO!
FREE PRESS THROTTLED IN COLORADO!
BULL-PENS FOR UNION MEN IN COLORADO!
FREE SPEECH DENIED IN COLORADO!
SOLDIERS DEFY THE COURTS IN COLORADO!
WHOLESALE ARRESTS WITHOUT WARRANT IN COLORADO!
UNION MEN EXILED FROM HOMES AND FAMILIES IN COLORADO!
CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS QUESTIONED IN COLORADO!
CORPORATIONS CORRUPT AND CONTROL ADMINISTRATION IN COLORADO!
RIGHT OF FAIR, IMPARTIAL AND SPEEDY TRIAL ABOLISHED IN COLORADO!
CITIZENS' ALLIANCE RESORTS TO MOB LAW AND VIOLENCE IN COLORADO!
MILITIA HIRED TO CORPORATIONS TO BREAK THE STRIKE IN COLORADO!

THESE are absolute facts and are not the only outrages that have been perpetrated in Colorado in the name of law and order. It has been charged and never successfully denied that the corporations contributed \$15,000.00 towards the election of the present Republican administration, but Governor Peabody has been unable to "DELIVER THE GOODS."

THE unions have not been nor can they be abolished, and before the strikes in Colorado are settled, we will have demonstrated the right to organize for mutual benefit. The eight-hour day as decreed by over forty thousand majority of the voters will be established.

IF you desire to assist the striking Miners, Mill and Smeltermen of the Western Federation of Miners of Colorado in this battle for industrial and political freedom, send donations to Wm. D. Haywood, Sec'y-Treas., 625 Mining Exchange, Denver, Colorado.

Charles Moyer
PRESIDENT.

Wm D Haywood
SECY-TREAS.

A poster produced by the Western Federation of Miners in 1903 after striking miners were arrested in Telluride

Today, the United States [ranks last](#) amongst industrialized nations in worker benefits including healthcare, retirement benefits, unemployment, sick days, and time off. That's not coincidental: it's the intentional result of years of public policy designed to rollback the gains made by last century's struggle for workers' rights, lobbied for in broad daylight by major corporate concerns. Though the Reagan era takes most of the blame, the decline started as early as 1960, as the nation's postwar profit-making machine revved into gear and real wages [began to stagnate](#).

Though the average American worker's likelihood of being gunned down by Pinkertons outside the workplace is at an all-time low, the future envisioned by forebears like [Mary Harris "Mother" Jones](#), where workers received a greater share of the profit from their labor, never materialized. In 1960, the United States' GDP was [\\$543.3 billion](#). In 2022, it was 5,000 times that size – but the workers who fueled that astronomic growth had roughly the same purchasing power as their grandparents. Despite decades of economic growth, the poverty rate in the United States has not meaningfully [declined in more than half a century](#). The rising tide did not lift all boats.

A few years ago, a new wave of the American labor movement swelled into existence, driven primarily by young people determined to confront the indignities and injustices native to the 21st century economy. Staff at modern fixtures like Starbucks, Amazon, and Google have taken up the fight for safe conditions and fair compensation. In doing so, they have reminded a generation of something the vast majority of Americans have in common, but have learned to forget: that we are workers.

PWG arose out of this refreshed labor movement, spurred to organize by the same subpar realities animating union drives around the country: low pay, lacking benefits, mistreatment, forced indignity, and zero job security. Our members are people determined to play a part in the functioning and maintenance of democracy, who for years were rewarded with low pay, long hours, frequent screaming, occasional groping, and the need to supplement the meager wages earned from their public service by delivering pizza and selling plasma. Capitol aides were paid \$15 per hour when PWG started; campaign workers had learned never to calculate their own hourly. It was mistreatment driven less by malice than by institutionalized neglect and the

institutionalized neglect and mistreatment at the hands of those who were never taught to value their own labor. It wasn't going to stop unless we took a stand – so we did, together.

3. Power Concedes Nothing Without a Demand

We learned two of our most important lessons early: that power concedes nothing without a demand, and that power knows no partisanship. Despite Democratic candidates littering the state with pro-labor mailers, many are content to offer their own staff nothing but long hours, low wages, and zero time-off. Despite Democratic majorities controlling the state legislature since PWG formed, every single concession PWG has extracted at the capitol in the past three years has been denied before ultimately being granted. These experiences taught us not to confuse preaching for practice. They also taught us not to take 'no' for an answer.

When we asked for healthcare for legislative aides, we were told it was simply not doable – *it's a matter of law, you see. It's how the insurance pool is set up. We would love to give aides health insurance, we really would, but we can't. And even if we could, the members wouldn't vote for it, it probably wouldn't pass. Surely you understand.* It was the first request we had made, and it was denied out of hand.

That was the first time we didn't take 'no' for an answer.

What happened next is a long story, but the highlights are simple: we secured the support of key committee chairs, we did our own whip count, we did the policy research showing why the initial denial didn't hold water. Ultimately, leadership relented. When the bill to grant legislative aides access to the health insurance pool came to the floor, nearly every Democratic member of the legislature voted for it.

The problem was never that legislative Democrats didn't support us, it was that our demands were an unplanned complication for leadership. The problem was not that the former Speaker was opposed on principle to giving aides healthcare, it was that he already had a plan for the year, and our demand was not part of it. That legislative aides

would put their hands out, asking for more than they had been given, was a violation of the capitol's guiding ethos: that there is *a way things are done*. When confronted with the reality that the *way things are done* had cast aides into deepening poverty, the immediate response was not "let's see what we can do about that." It was "I don't see what we can do about that." It was "not every job can pay a living wage."

We did not just survive that first fight: we won it. In successive years, the Guild's relationship with legislative leadership has become significantly more productive. I am grateful for the many hours the House Speaker and Senate President have spent in discussions and negotiations with us, and the meaningful improvements we have come together to secure regarding pay, benefits, and hours. The underlying dynamic has remained, though: every eventual 'yes' has started as a 'no;' every concession has come after the possibility of escalation.

It never hurts to ask those in power for what you need – or to have a plan for how you will get it even without their permission.

4. There is Power in a Union

The most important thing I have learned in the past three years is that power does not have to be given: it can be taken, it can be built. The reason our union has been successful in challenging power is because we built power of our own.



Every worker has power – the power to provide their labor, and the power to withhold it. When exercised by a single worker, that power amounts to little: the worker’s boss has the power to fire them for withholding their labor, and most jurisdictions in this country give the worker no power to do anything about that. The power of a group of workers, though, is hard for management to match. Fire one worker and you have to replace one worker; fire your entire workforce and you lose time, productivity, institutional knowledge and – more likely than not – money in the process.

“They can’t fire us all,” was the mantra we repeated in the early days, and it was true. Our power came not from daring them to fire all of us, but from understanding what would happen if they did: the capitol would cease functioning, campaigns would stop running. The political reputations of elected officials dependent on union funds for reelection would have been threatened. We had learned our value.

By pooling our power together, we multiplied it. We made of ourselves an entity big enough to take a seat at the table. We put one foot down, then the other – and before we knew it, we were walking forwards into a future that we created for ourselves.

Next week, our growing union will hold its fourth annual leadership elections, the first in which I will not stand as a candidate. PWG will survive without me at its helm. Of that, I have no doubt. Passing the torch is an honor, not least because it means we created an organization, freestanding in its own right, which is more than a shadow cast by its founders.

With my departure from the union's leadership, PWG enters its second generation: an era in which none of the group's co-founders remain among its elected leaders. That excites me as well. We survived long enough to reach this point, and accomplished things along the way which we could not have dreamed of at the start. We did those things together; we did them by the fact of our togetherness.

Though we have accomplished much, there is plenty of work left to do: campaigns remain the Wild West of employment law, and legislative aide wages remain below the cost-of-living despite the more than 50% increase we secured. The next generation of union leadership will take up these fights, and the fights over the horizon not yet visible to us.

If history is any indication, they'll win.

Colorado legislative aides at odds with Capitol leadership over wage increase



By [Bente Birkeland](#)

· Mar. 12, 2024, 2:22 pm

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<p>(Nathaniel Minor/CPR News)</p><p>Senate President Kevin Grantham, R-Cañon City, stands at his lectern in the Colorado Senate chambers on Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2017.</p>

The organization that represents legislative aides at the state capitol is asking for a roughly 30 percent pay increase.

That's a big increase over the nearly 7 percent increase legislative leaders already signed off on; that's included in a funding bill currently working its way through the legislature.

The aides are seeking \$30 an hour, up from the current hourly wage of \$23. Their union, the Political Workers Guild of Colorado, says Democratic leaders have refused to engage with the group on its push for a living wage for staff, and that discussions have stalled. Democratic leaders dispute that assertion and say negotiations and conversations have been ongoing.

Legislative aides are a key part of life under Colorado's gold dome. Each lawmaker is designated one senior and one junior aide, whose responsibilities range from performing administrative duties and managing lawmakers' offices, to interacting with constituents and working on policy in an often high pressure environment.

In a letter to the guild, Democratic leaders said they are committed to working to ensure aides are supported and have professional development opportunities and a fruitful experience. But they declined to meet with the Political Workers Guild on the pay issue, saying that an hourly wage increase of 6.8 percent was sufficient.

"We feel that this increase is appropriate given the day-to-day duties and broad expectations from our members of the legislative aide position and is in alignment with comparable jobs in state government, namely administrative assistants," states the letter from Speaker of the House Julie McCluskie, Senate President Steve Fenberg, and Majority Leaders Monica Duran and Robert Rodriguez. It was sent March 8 and provided to CPR News by House staff.

Democratic leaders noted that pay for aides has increased 53.5 percent since 2021, and they now have benefits such as health insurance, paid holidays during the legislative session, an RTD EcoPass for each office, and professional name badges, among other things.

Legislative leaders said in the letter that they have been following a structured plan of annual increases over the last few years, in order to put the position on a sustainable path forward, "instead of continuing arbitrary one-off increases each year."

Fenberg told members of the media that aides have seen a pretty sizable increase in pay and benefits in the last few years. He pointed out that not long ago the position paid just \$12 an hour.

Currently aides can earn a maximum of \$41,400 each year. The pay bump they're seeking would push their salaries above what lawmakers are currently paid (although lawmakers often collect more thanks to the per diem for work on official business outside of session). Aides said the increase would lead to a more capable and experienced workforce with less turnover.

"Making this investment will be a sizable commitment towards continuing to build sustained expertise, experience and integrity within the Legislature," said the Political Workers Guild.

Twenty-five Democratic lawmakers signed a letter of support that was distributed by the guild, asking Democratic leadership to continue negotiations with aides, calling it a matter of equity.

"Legislative aides do not receive a living wage, creating an environment that benefits those with socioeconomic privilege (i.e., generational wealth, parental/familial, or partner funded support) and simultaneously exploits the labor of individuals without that privilege," states the letter of support from lawmakers.

But Fenberg said he's confused about the request from some of his Democratic colleagues since the pay structure is part of the legislative appropriation bill, which cleared the House with bipartisan support and had no Democratic opposition. It's still awaiting a final vote in the Senate.

Meanwhile Democratic Rep. David Ortiz of Littleton, who did not sign onto the aide letter, said it missed the mark in one key area: accessibility. He said it was more than disappointing that aides didn't include requests to try to expand access to the job to those living with disabilities.

"To my knowledge, my office is the ONLY office that has included team members that live life with a disability that requires the use of a mobility device that requires basic access. We have yet to include staff or interns that are deaf, blind, or require the use of a power chair," said Ortiz. He's the first state lawmaker to use a wheelchair.

"Adequate parking accommodations will be critical to ensure that all staff members can access the workplace efficiently and without barriers, namely by

providing ample accessible parking spots,” he added that he would be advocating in his own way for a living wage and basic access.