

**Testimony of Dan Mauer, Director of Government Affairs,
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Before the Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Trade
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Good afternoon Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Sanchez. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dan Mauer and I am Director of Government Affairs for the Communications Workers of America (CWA).

CWA believes strongly that our trade policy should be structured to raise standards globally to help level the playing field for American workers, to empower and raise the living standards of exploited workers everywhere, and to create more good union jobs here in the United States. That should hold just as true for agreements governing the technologies of the future as for any other agreement.

CWA unfortunately has long experience combatting efforts by multinational corporate interests to pit workers in the service and technology sectors in the United States against workers globally in a race to the bottom. Call center customer service representatives have repeatedly seen their jobs offshored, generally to countries where workers are denied their fundamental human rights and are paid too little to make ends meet.

One of the countries where call center work is most frequently sent is the Philippines, where workers have long faced repression, poverty-level wages, and even government-sanctioned violence. In fact, under the Duterte administration, dozens of trade unionists were murdered with impunity, and the same trend has continued under President Marcos. I particularly want to highlight the 2023 murder of Alex Dolorosa, a union organizer with the BPO Industry Employee Network (BIEN), who had been a victim of repeated unlawful surveillance and harassment over the previous several years. CWA has worked closely with BIEN for a number of years to combat union busting in the call center industry, both in the U.S. and in the Philippines. Notwithstanding the inspiring efforts by Filipino call center workers to organize and improve their jobs, the ongoing repression of their rights means that they continue to be paid poverty-level wages. At the same time, this sort of low road offshoring hurts U.S. workers, as companies take advantage of the lower labor costs overseas, putting downward pressure on wages and working conditions here, all while putting sensitive consumer data at risk in countries with weak data protections.

Even when workers’ jobs are not, in fact, sent overseas, that does not necessarily mean that the *ability* of companies to offshore this work does not negatively impact their jobs, wages and working conditions. That is in large part because companies routinely use the threat of offshoring to intimidate workers seeking to improve their lives. A landmark study by Cornell University

Professor Kate Bronfenbrenner examining the responses of companies to union organizing drives found that companies were three times more likely to shut down their American facilities following a successful organizing drive after NAFTA went into effect compared to pre-NAFTA years, while companies explicitly threatened to move facilities to Mexico in more than 10 percent of the organizing drives that faced threats.¹

Another study analyzing the relationship between management practices and worker stress in call centers found that 79 percent of the workers surveyed worried that offshoring could lead to layoffs, contributing to difficult work environments in which 77 percent of workers characterized their jobs as high stress or very high stress.²

Yet, the impacts of recent proposals around digital trade and related issues on workers go far beyond solely the threat of offshoring to good American jobs.

Notably, these proposals could shape to a significant degree the deployment and use of artificial intelligence technologies. It is noteworthy in this context that the federal government has established almost no binding rules regarding the use of artificial intelligence (or, for that matter, protections related to data privacy, outside of the context of health care). President Trump's Executive Order last month attempting to block states from establishing rules governing artificial intelligence—and jeopardizing the successful rollout of broadband access to underserved areas in the process—is perverse given the near total lack of federal rules governing the industry. I can recall no other situation where the federal government has tried to preempt state and local rules on a policy matter while itself having no rules in place on that policy.

But I raise the issue in this context primarily because of USTR's longstanding position that it will not enter into trade agreements that force the U.S. to change our own laws.³ There's of course an understandable rationale to that position, but, in that context, how can the U.S. enter into trade agreements governing issues like artificial intelligence or data privacy that set high standards and ensure that workers and consumers are well protected when the federal government doesn't have anything even vaguely resembling high standards on those issues?

It is crucial that agreements covering artificial intelligence establish strong rules to ensure that strong consumer and worker protections are in place, given the numerous apparent risks if artificial intelligence deployment goes in the wrong direction. We have already seen in the incipient rollout of artificial intelligence technologies challenges ranging from job displacement and worsening of job quality to large language models encouraging users to take their own lives to the dissemination of extensive misinformation to an ongoing situation where child sexual abuse material is being disseminated online, and much more.

¹<https://ecommons.cornell.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/3fa9590c-91bd-40b4-85fd-7a70743f4625/content>

²https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/74307/Doellgast28_Making_call_center_jobs_better.pdf

³ Excepting, of course, tariff rates.

Beyond just those issues, the workers who form the backbone of artificial intelligence systems in low-wage countries routinely face heinous pay and working conditions. These workers often face obviously unreasonable task deadlines, such as being forced to fact check 40 pieces of content per hour.⁴ One subcontractor in this field reportedly pays workers just one U.S. cent for completing each task, which can sometimes take hours.⁵

Troublingly, some of these same dynamics are likewise apparent in workplaces in the United States. A 2025 survey by Alphabet Workers Union-CWA and Tech Equity of workers facilitating the functioning of artificial intelligence, including data raters, fact checkers, analysts, and more, found that workers reported a median hourly wage of just \$15 per hour, with a majority of workers surveyed forced to work at least two jobs to make ends meet. The report also finds that workers face unclear evaluation metrics, inadequate training, intense employer pressure to handle violent and offensive content, and unsustainable time pressures. More generally, the workers generally have to work for vendors and subcontractors like Telus and GlobalLogic, not directly for the companies that are ultimately using their work product, and in many cases work as independent contractors who lack basic worker protections.⁶ It is outrageous that workers who play such a vital role in enabling the functioning of priority systems for massive tech companies are in such precarious, stressful and underpaid conditions.

Similar employment dynamics are likewise pervasive in fields such as content moderation and remote interpreting services. East Africa is a major hub for content moderation and the workers there face egregious conditions. Many work full days for just \$1 per day, while over half of Kenyan content moderators have faced wage theft in the past year, and they are forced to routinely watch videos of war and sexual violence.⁷

Workers in Colombia for the multinational business process outsourcing firm Teleperformance faced very similar conditions to those workers in Kenya, which, as many of you will recall, members of this Subcommittee helped work to address in 2022.⁸ Meanwhile, U.S. employees at Teleperformance's subsidiary LanguageLine Solutions are currently organizing to form a union and improve their working conditions after facing poverty level wages, wage theft, and being prevented from taking bathroom or meal breaks.⁹

⁴ <https://pulitzercenter.org/resource/how-we-investigated-human-labor-behind-ai>

⁵ <https://futurism.com/artificial-intelligence/ai-industry-traumatizing-contractors>

⁶ <https://cwa-union.org/ghost-workers-ai-machine>

⁷ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/11/03/there-is-a-dark-side-to-content-moderation-in-east-africa/>,

https://cued.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/219/2025/08/cued_kdfr_final-1.pdf

⁸ <https://time.com/6223340/tiktok-content-moderators-latin-america/>,

<https://democrats-waysandmeans.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/blumenauer-statement-congressional-delegation-s-productive-visit>

⁹ <https://cwa-union.org/languageline-interpreters-speak-out>

Moreover, the impacts of digital trade policies currently under debate go far beyond the workers in the service and technology sectors. In fact, the use of digital surveillance and other related tools creates risks for workers in almost any industry.

The last few years have seen an explosion in the use of digital workplace surveillance tools such as keystroke and camera monitoring, surveillance of workers' social media, and automated productivity metrics that create unsustainable workloads, while companies have also shifted increasing managerial tactics to automated software, including reassigning work tasks, hiring, firing, and discipline.¹⁰ As such, the rules of the road governing these tools will substantially impact workers in myriad different fields.

Meanwhile, the "gig economy" continues to expand, and with it come increasing risks to workers' rights. Numerous gig companies have opted to utilize the gig structure to dodge accountability for basic worker rights, including the right to organize, wage and hour standards, health and safety standards, and more. But the nature of their algorithmic management also inherently creates hazards for workers, including the digital surveillance problems mentioned above. Gig workers often are unable to learn any meaningful information about task assignment and pay algorithms, thus exposing workers to both discrimination and underpayment.¹¹

Furthermore, algorithmic management has been shown to undermine enforcement of a range of labor laws, including laws protecting workers from discrimination on the basis of race, gender, age, or union support.¹²

Given these possibilities, it has been alarming to see agreements that provide large multinational companies with robust protections for things like the source coding for their algorithms and the ability to transfer data anywhere at their discretion, but lack meaningful protections for workers, consumers or market transparency. Instead of leveling the playing field and raising the bar globally, these deals have simply repeated the same sorts of mistakes that have plagued our trade deals addressing manufactured goods for decades—facilitating a global race-to-the-bottom and empowering multinational corporations at the expense of working people.

Moving forward, I urge members of the Committee to utilize your roles to advocate for policies governing the digital economy that protect good jobs, worker and human rights, and transparent markets.

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/17/science/insider-threat-private-companies.html>,
<https://www.theverge.com/2020/2/27/21155254/automation-robots-unemployment-jobs-vs-human-google-amazon>,
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23780231251318389>

¹¹ <https://www.culawreview.org/journal/paid-by-ai-algorithmic-wage-discrimination-in-the-gig-economy>

¹² <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/28/tech/facebook-gender-discrimination-europe-ruling-asequals-intl>,
<https://www.propublica.org/article/facebook-ads-age-discrimination-targeting>,
<https://laborecenter.berkeley.edu/data-algorithms-at-work/>

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to any questions that you may have.