

## In this episode ...

We're diving into the world of advocacy and organizing, specifically, public health's roots in social change and how the field can reconnect. In the third episode of our four-part series, we're talking about embracing the political. How do we transition from organizing for change to enacting policy change? We're exploring the power of labor unions to protect workers' rights, health and wealth.

## Episode 3: Embracing the political: organizing for change

### Our guest, Dr. J. Paul Leigh:

- Bio: <https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/profile/j-paul-leigh>
- Include this image in doc: <https://health.ucdavis.edu/phs/team/498/j--paul-leigh---economics/>
- *Labor unions and health: A literature review of pathways and outcomes in the workplace:* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211335521001923?via%3Dihub>
- *Do Unions Improve the Health of Workers and their Families?* <https://publichealthpost.org/health-equity/unions-worker-health/>

### Our hosts:

- **Beth Silver:** <https://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/staff/silver-beth/>
- **Ericka Burroughs-Girardi:** <https://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/staff/burroughs-girardi-ericka/>

### Timestamps:

**0:20** – Ericka and Beth talk about the history of labor unions and how collective bargaining through unions leads to better health, working conditions and wages

**2:04** – Beth introduces Dr. Paul Leigh

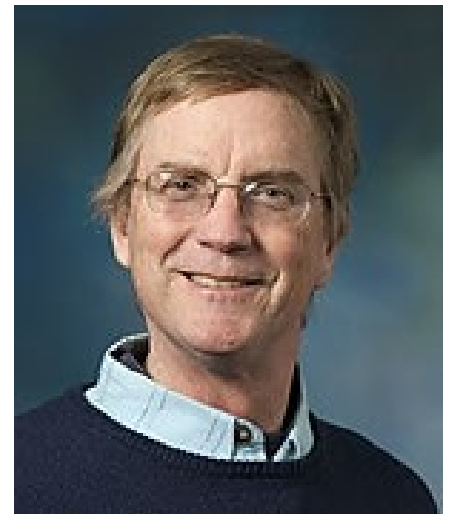
**2:31** – Interview with Dr. Paul Leigh

- **2:54** – Social solidarity and labor unions: People working together to achieve a common goal
- **4:09** – What history can teach us about the power of organizing
- **7:01** – Research on the connection between labor unions and health
- **10:39** – The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on labor unions
- **13:34** – Surging public support and interest in labor unions today; the PRO Act
- **16:51** – The link between minimum wage and health outcomes
- **21:44** – Getting political: How public health can support labor unions
- **24:45** – Is organizing inherently partisan?
- **26:04** – Labor union values shared by both Republican and Democratic parties

**27:43** – Ericka and Beth reflect on the interview with Dr. Leigh, and talk about the upcoming final episode in the series

### Links to topics mentioned during this episode:

- U.S. approval of labor unions at highest point since 1965, from Gallup: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/398303/approval-labor-unions-highest-point-1965.aspx>





- More in U.S. see unions strengthening and want it that way, from Gallup: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/510281/unions-strengthening.aspx>
- In 1935, FDR signed the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act), which spelled out the conditions under which workers were allowed to unionize: <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/wagner-act#:~:text=When%20FDR%20signed%20the%20National,high%20purpose%20of%20this%20Act.>
  - (FDR and the Wagner Act. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum National Archives.)
- Wisconsin was the first state to legalize public sector unions in 1959, with the passage of the Municipal Employment Relations Act: <https://schoolforworkers.wisc.edu/wisconsin-public-worker-unions-post-act-10/#:~:text=In%201959%20Wisconsin%20was%20the,in%20discussions%20with%20their%20employers.>
  - (Wisconsin Public Worker Unions Post Act 10. School for Workers News, September 19, 2019. University of Wisconsin-Madison School for Workers.)
- In 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act was passed by Congress — and with major support from unions — to create safe and healthy conditions for workers: <https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/oshact/completeoshact>
- Chris Smalls, who started the Amazon Labor Union in 2020 to protest working conditions at a warehouse in Staten Island, NY: <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/02/1090353185/amazon-union-chris-smalls-organizer-staten-island>
  - (Andrea Hsu, Alina Selyukh. He was fired by Amazon 2 years ago. Now he's the force behind the company's 1<sup>st</sup> union. April 2, 2022. NPR)
- Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act of 2021: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/842>
- Princeton University economist, Anne Case, and Nobel Prize winner Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*: <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691190785/deaths-of-despair-and-the-future-of-capitalism?srsId=AfmBOoodMo6pn9JSvCC56R63Cc5q80OCJLljbMHOHtZWmurJw6zlQBOr>
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on March 10, 1968, joined a “Salute to Freedom” celebration organized by the Local 1199 union in New York City, where he gave his “The Other America” speech and said: “No labor is menial, unless you’re not getting adequate wages” : <https://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2018/03/martin-luther-king-jrs-the-other-america-still-radical-50-years-later.html>
  - (Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “The Other America” Still Radical 50 Years Later. Beacon Broadside, March 10, 2018. Beacon Press).

### CHR&R Resources:

**National Findings Report** - Evidence shows that participating in our communities strengthens our social connections and sense of belonging, benefiting our physical and mental health. Learn more from our 2024 National Findings Report: <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/findings-and-insights/2024-national-findings-report>

**Data snapshots** - Explore the data in your community: <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data>

**What Works for Health** includes 400+ evidence-informed policies and programs to address your community’s priorities: <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies>

**Curated strategies** - Find a list of What Works for Health strategies that improve civic health:

[https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies?f%5B0%5D=curated-list%3ACivic%20Health&sort\\_by=search\\_api\\_relevance&preprocess\\_id=2732](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies?f%5B0%5D=curated-list%3ACivic%20Health&sort_by=search_api_relevance&preprocess_id=2732)



**Narrative change** - Change what's possible with Narratives for Health:

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/narratives-for-health>

**Webinars** - Check out our library of webinars that provide practitioners with strategies and examples that improve health and equity: <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/findings-and-insights/webinars>

**Structural determinants of health** – Read *Keeping It Political and Powerful: Defining the Structural Determinants of Health* to learn about the structural determinants of health: <https://www.milbank.org/quarterly/articles/keeping-it-political-and-powerful-defining-the-structural-determinants-of-health/>

- (Heller JC, Givens ML, Johnson SP, Kindig DA. *Keeping It Political and Powerful: Defining the Structural Determinants of Health*. *Milbank Q*. 2024;102(2):0227.)

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