

Mr. Chairman, all of us know that hardworking men and women in all of our districts are having a rough time these days. Many are paid low wages or wages that are not enough to meet their family's basic needs. Those problems are made even worse when workers are the victims of wage theft.

Billions of dollars are actually stolen from workers through wage theft, and wage theft occurs when workers are forced to work off the clock, denied earned overtime pay, or paid less than the minimum wage. Workers can lose pay because of illegal paycheck deductions, be denied their final paychecks, or not be paid at all.

Interfaith Worker Justice, based in Chicago, has been working to stop wage theft for years. In 2008, its executive director, Kim Bobo, wrote a book called ``Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Working Americans Are Not Getting Paid--And What We Can Do About It."

My amendment is one step we can take to do something about it. My amendment is simple. The idea is the same idea that has been offered on the House floor by my friend and colleague, Representative Keith Ellison, and is supported by the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

It says that Federal contractors have a duty to pay their workers their legally-earned wages and that corporations that don't pay their workers their legally-earned wages shouldn't benefit from Federal contracts. Similar language has successfully been added to the Energy and Water and Department of Defense Appropriations bills.

Wage theft has been documented. One study of workers in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City found that 26 percent were paid below legal minimum wage levels, 76 percent were denied earned overtime, and 70 percent were not paid for work outside of their regular shifts.

The North Carolina Justice Center found that workers in that State lost \$33 million in pay because of wage theft over the course of 5 years. The Economic Policy Institute found that, ``In total, the average low-wage worker loses a stunning \$2,634 per year in unpaid wages, representing 15 percent of their income."

This is a problem in many sectors, and that includes Federal contractors. A report by the Senate Health, Education, and Labor and Pensions Committee revealed that 32 percent of the largest Department of Labor penalties for wage theft were levied against Federal contractors.

National Employment Law Project found that 21 percent of Federal contract workers were not paid overtime and 11 percent had been forced to work off the clock.

Federal contract employees deserve to receive the dollars they have earned, the dollars that they need, the dollars they would spend in their communities, and the dollars that taxpayers awarded the contractors for those wages.

All workers should be safe from wage theft, but my amendment is much more modest. It just says that a contract under this FY 2015 Appropriations bill can't be awarded to a corporation found to be in violation of wage requirements under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

It says that corporations that cheat their employees out of hard-earned wages are not deserving of taxpayer-funded Federal contracts. It sends a clear message: obey the law, pay your workers the wages they have earned, or we won't give you the benefit of a taxpayer-financed Federal contract.

Allowing corporations to get away with violating the law is not just bad for their workers and taxpayers, it is unfair to the businesses that are competing for Federal contracts but won't engage in wage theft to get a competitive edge.

Do we really want to tell corporations that they can violate the law and steal wages from their workers and still get a Federal contract, or do we want to take a small stand by saying that only companies that play by the wage rules we have enacted will be eligible?

I hope we can agree that breaking the law in order to underpay workers is not acceptable, certainly should not be rewarded, and certainly not with taxpayer dollars. I urge my colleagues to help the workers who work for us. Support the Congressional Progressive Caucus amendment.