Union Membership Drops to an All Time Low (Again)

Labor & Employment Law Update

By Jeffrey Risch on January 30, 2025

Despite head-turning decisions issued in recent years by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) designed to help labor unions in their organizing efforts, a concentrated government push towards union-only Project Labor Agreements—and many state legislatures passing laws intended to limit an employer's right to even discuss the good, bad, and ugly of union membership—the union membership rate dropped in 2024 to another all-time low. On January 28, 2025, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics released figures showing that the percentage of workers who were part of a labor union dropped to a new low of 9.9 percent in 2024 (down from the previous record low of 10 percent in 2023). Among private sector workers, that figure dropped to 5.9 percent (from 6 percent in 2023).

Highlights from the 2024 data include:

- The union membership rate of public sector workers (32.2 percent) continued to be higher than the rate of private sector workers (5.9 percent).
- The union membership rate continued to be highest in local government (38.2 percent), which employs many workers in heavily unionized occupations, such as police officers, firefighters, and teachers.
- Industries with the highest unionization rates included utilities (18.7 percent), transportation and warehousing (15.8 percent), and educational services (13.2 percent).
- Industries with the lowest unionization rates included banking/finance (0.8 percent), insurance (1.2 percent), and professional/technical services (1.2 percent).
- Among occupational groups, the highest union membership rates in were in education (32.3 percent), protective services (29.6 percent), and construction (15.4 percent).

Interestingly, union membership in the likes of California, Illinois, New York, Minnesota, and Massachusetts stayed relatively flat despite enacting laws designed to help labor unions.

As 2025 plays out and the Trump administration reshuffles the NLRB in what will be a less friendly Board to labor unions compared to the Biden administration, private sector employers need to continue to pay attention to local and state mandates designed to make it more difficult to not only operate union-free, but to also make managing the workforce more difficult. Regardless of what happens in D.C., employers of all shapes, sizes, industries, and geographic locations must remain vigilant in maintaining positive employee relations while becoming intimately familiar with the latest labor and employment legal developments.